



Recruiter's Corner

with Vicky Ayers



Should I include a photograph with my resume?

Opinions on the issue of including a photograph with a resume are disparate and confusing, and change over time. What seemed like a great idea in 2008 can seem outdated and irrelevant today. Let's sort through some of the primary arguments for and against.

There are those who will argue that, in a pile of resumes a foot tall, the one with a picture of the individual will stand out and be more likely to be read than those that all look alike. This may, in fact, be true. So, what is the downside?

First, consider the organization to which you are applying. If it is a large company, or one that is likely to generate huge numbers of applicants for a given position, they may use technological screening methods that rely on key words to reduce the number of candidates to a manageable group, which is then reviewed by hiring personnel. If this is the case, photos or other elaborate formatting can cause your resume to be rejected during the technological screening. If this happens, it will never make it into the hands of a human being. If the company doesn't use technological screening, but does ask for electronic submission, graphics like photos or fancy fonts or unique formatting elements can cause your materials to be filtered out as "junk" and discarded before anyone has a chance to see them.

On the other hand, suppose the position is one for which a much smaller applicant pool is likely. For example, let's say you are applying for a position as a junior member of a law firm. In this case, it is much more likely that every resume will be reviewed by an actual person rather than screened by a computer. The good news is that a well-produced, professional photograph of you in conservative business attire could be a plus. The bad news is that in an era of sensitivity to issues of discrimination, employers are hyper-vigilant, avoiding anything that may

smack of prejudging candidates on the basis of race, gender, age, or ethnicity. This may be of special concern if the organization to which you are applying is one that serves the general public, such as a bank or retail chain operation. Of

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course, it is of extreme concern when the employer is an institution that is publicly funded, such as a federal, state, county, or municipal office. In a worst-case scenario, some employers reject outright any application that contains a photograph.

There is some interesting research on the effectiveness of including a photo with a resume, although it's neither extensive nor well validated. It was conducted by sending three resumes that were identical in almost all respects to hiring managers, and determining which ones were most likely to result in interest in the applicant on the part of the employer. The differences in the resumes were: one had no picture attached, one had a picture of a presentable but not particularly attractive individual, and one had a picture of an attractive person. Resumes for both men and women were included. The results raise more questions than they answer. For men, employer interest was higher if there was a picture of an attractive person included. For women, interest was higher if no picture was included. The study did not explore the reasoning behind these choices with the hiring managers, and

so there is no real way to understand the results, but it is interesting, nonetheless.

There are times when a photo makes sense. If the position for which you are applying is one for which appearance is relevant to the actual performance of the job, including a picture, or even more than one, could be critical. Models, actors, newsreaders and other on-air talent, some sales representatives, and others whose appearance is critical to fulfilling the responsibilities of the position may need to include photos with their application materials. Artists, architects, designers, and those whose work is similar may need to include photos of projects they have completed previously. If this is the case, however, the instructions for applying for the job will generally tell you what to include, and even the format to use for submission. When a photo is requested, be sure to follow the instructions to the letter.

A good general rule of thumb is to include a photograph if the requirements of the position include a particular personal appearance or image. You can think of a picture in the same way you think of your religion, political inclination, age, ethnicity or gender, disability, or any other characteristic that could possibly cause you to be singled out for disparate treatment as a potential employee. You wouldn't put your age or race in your resume; likewise, there is usually no reason to include your photograph.

Vicky Ayers is senior director for Executive Recruitment at RPA Inc., Williamsport, PA, a private national firm serving the recruiting needs of higher education and nonprofits. Vicky is a member of the INSIGHT Into Diversity Editorial Board. If you have a question for Vicky you can email her at vayers@rpainc.org.