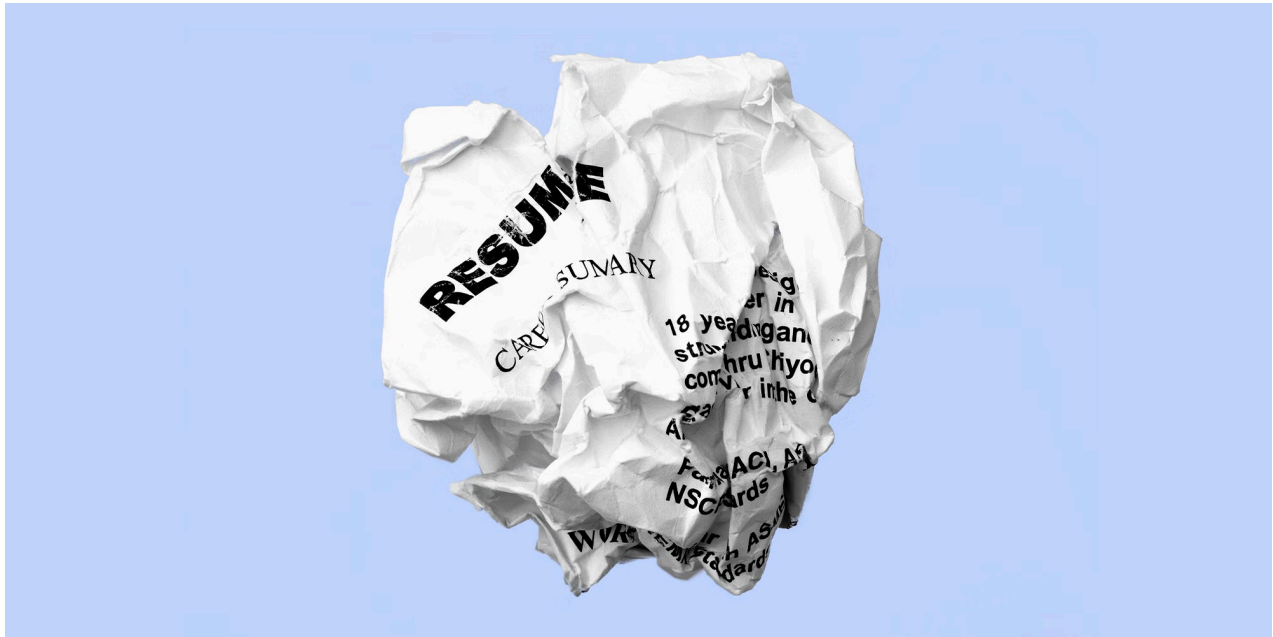


DISCOURSE CAREERS

RIP résumés

Slop is killing the résumé. Job hunters are scrambling for new ways to stand out



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By [Amanda Hoover](#) [+ Follow](#)

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A decade ago, I walked into an office to interview for my first newsroom internship. Wearing a millennial-core business casual H&M pencil skirt and Steve Madden flats, I handed my résumé — neatly spaced Arial font, carefully considered, and kept crisp in its designated folder — to the editor. Without looking up from her computer, she said, "I don't read résumés," and flicked the paper to the floor.



If you've ever assumed an automated applicant tracking system has thrown out your résumé, I can tell you it feels just as demoralizing to watch it happen IRL. Today, more hiring managers and recruiters are following that approach. Now that anyone can spin up a buzzword-filled résumé and cover letter in seconds with ChatGPT, doctor a flawless headshot, or cheat a coding test, faked or embellished applications have become indiscernible from quality candidates.

The résumé has been relegated.

"Resume not your thing? That's great, we don't really read them anyway!" reads a job post for an engineer at Expensify. "While we know you're awesome, it's actually really hard and time consuming to find you in the midst of literally hundreds of other applications we get from everyone else." The post goes on to list five questions applications should answer to be considered. "We don't require a résumé, and we don't expect one," notes a software engineering job at Automattic, which owns WordPress.com and Tumblr.

Some employers are focusing more on a person's enthusiasm and skills than shiny credentials. E-commerce platform Gumroad asks prospective software engineers to send an email detailing why they want to work there, what they've built, and, if selected, to participate in a paid four-to-six-week work trial.

Research has long shown that résumés alone with impressive companies and years of experience aren't great predictors of success in a new job. Now, in the age of Gen AI slop, "the résumé is almost worthless because they all read the same," says Michelle Volberg, founder and CEO of Twill, a recruiting software company. She compares AI-edited résumés to going to a restaurant where "the menu looked really beautiful and had all these amazing ingredients and dishes, but there was no one there actually making the food."



Volberg tells me she's seen a shift just in the past three months: some companies she works with are opting to extend paid work trials for as long as a month to evaluate a candidate. Some are focused more on workers' real-time abilities than if they've worked at a Big Tech company or went to an Ivy League school. A new survey from the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that 70% of employers say they're using skills-based hiring, which prioritizes practical abilities and aptitudes over credentials like degrees and years of experience. A résumé might still be used to identify and track a candidate, Volberg says, but AI résumés aren't wowing recruiters.

In a callous job market where it can feel like everyone's hungry and nobody's making it to the table, recruiters and job seekers alike are looking for a shakeup. But anytime the rules of the game change, there's bound to be new winners and losers.

For more than a decade, AI tools that evaluate résumés and cover letters have made biased choices, preferring male candidates or the applicants seen earlier in the process. Recruiters and job seekers have complained to me about AI-generated and cover letters hitting AI résumé readers — overwhelming recruiters with unqualified applicants and demoralizing job seekers who had been looking for work for months. As the labor market tightened after 2022, the problem worsened. Mass layoffs in the tech industry shifted the power from a worker market to an employer one, and it wasn't feasible for many human recruiters to review all the inbound applications they received, says Stephanie Alston, CEO of staffing firm BGG Enterprises. Software engineers started using AI to cheat their way through coding tests, leaving hiring managers to come up with novel ways to evaluate candidates. Realizing how easy it had become to apply for a role and how that had become a problem rather than an asset always, LinkedIn started using AI to compare profiles and job descriptions, encouraging people to apply for jobs they might be a better fit for, rather than following the age-old career advice of just throwing an application in the ring.



"We don't require a résumé, and we don't expect one," reads a software engineer job opening at Automattic.

Recruiters have increasingly moved away from relying on application portals to instead actively source candidates from LinkedIn or their own networks. "There's a lot of frustration on both ends, and I'm just wondering at what point will it all just come to a crash," Alston says.

Résumé fluffing and editing has broken down trust between employers and job seekers. Bolun Li tells me he ran into this disconnect when he was working on his first fintech startup in college. He would hire engineers with the "perfect résumé" from Duke University, where he was also enrolled, but found his hires "couldn't build anything," he tells me. "You can't look at people's résumés to know if they're good at what they do. I always had this notion that I need to look at people's work to hire someone, versus looking at what they say they've done."



That frustration inspired his new startup, Vamo, which searches GitHub to find software developers who have completed projects similar to what a company needs. Li, now 27, launched it last month, after using an early model of the concept to make his own hires. Among them is Alex Vasquez, 23, who became the company's founding engineer after Li found a past project he made on GitHub. Vasquez, who attended the University of Massachusetts Lowell, applied to plenty of jobs, but felt he was lost in automated applicant systems. He kept tinkering and building projects that interested him on his own, and that's how Li found him. "I definitely didn't stand a chance, even if I was very capable," Vasquez tells me of other jobs for which he applied. Li tells me never even saw Vasquez's résumé.

Showing skills rather than listing them could become the new normal, even outside of technical fields, J.T. O'Donnell, founder of Work It Daily, a career coaching platform, tells me. Companies are shifting away from posting jobs on career sites, and instead opting for internal promotions or having recruiters do cold outreach in fields where the number of applicants far surpasses the open jobs. It's a trend O'Donnell calls "quiet hiring," and to succeed, she says, job seekers have to market themselves by posting about their projects and thoughts on LinkedIn. O'Donnell thinks posting videos will become crucial ways for people to showcase their knowledge, personality, and signal that they're human. "When you're talking about your industry and your skill sets, you're actually feeding the database so that recruiters can find you in the quiet hiring era, and that's where you're gonna see a big shift in how people get hired," she says.



LinkedIn has also noticed the change. The company announced a new feature for job seekers to verify skills listed on their profiles. The site partnered with AI tools like Descript, Lovable, and Replit to confirm a person's proficiency based on how they actually use the tools, using AI to assess how well the person can use them. "There is a shift happening from surface level signals like titles or keywords to this deeper evidence of capability," Pat Whelan, product manager at LinkedIn. A résumé is "still a helpful signal, but it's just one. Employers want to know the next level of detail, like the projects you've worked on, the skills you've gained, the context and scale of your experience."

For six months, Indeed has been running a beta program that speeds up the interview process, allowing people to apply for entry-level roles in fields like retail and hospitality and immediately interview if a recruiter is online. It's a model that harkens back to the old days of walking into a business and submitting an application face-to-face. The job site found candidates were waiting longer to hear back from recruiters and falling into the "the black hole problem," says Connie Cheng, a senior product manager at Indeed, tells me. The goal was to compress the time between submitting applications and scheduling calls, but the virtual interview process also allows job seekers "to be able to put their best foot forward and for them to be able to stand out beyond just their typical application," Cheng says.



Not everyone has a star résumé. Basing hiring decisions on skills might open doors to candidates previously overlooked, but perhaps the best workers aren't publishing their work online, and the most creative problem solvers might not post regularly on LinkedIn or feel comfortable spilling their thoughts on camera. Not everyone has access to robust networking events where they live or time to attend if they're balancing work with other responsibilities like school or caregiving. Paid work trials might be great for candidates and employers to see if there's a good fit, but companies won't offer them to many prospective workers. The new ways of hiring could exclude people just as biased résumé reading has, but it will take time for us to see the effects.

"We've seen innocent looking or innocuous proxies that actually turn out to be very biased, and you only know that because somebody checked, and unfortunately often nobody checks," says Hilke Schellmann, author of "The Algorithm," a book that examines the decisions AI makes about who gets hired, promoted, or fired. The technology behind candidate evaluations isn't necessarily a problem when paired with a sharp human recruiter, but it can't be made strictly in the name of efficiency for the hiring process. "There needs to be a technological solution, but I actually think what it might be is not one technological solution, but a much more holistic assessment of candidates." For now, jobs might not make you upload a résumé, but that doesn't mean landing a job will get easier overnight.



Amanda Hoover is a senior correspondent at Business Insider covering the tech industry. She writes about the biggest tech companies and trends.

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