

How To Make Your Video Cover Letter More Like A Movie Trailer

✘ By [Carol Kinsey Goman](#), Ph.D

We are witnessing the death (or at least the ineffectiveness) of the traditional cover letter for job applicants. If you want to stand out in the crowd, [hiring managers](#) today prefer something a little more interesting and efficient. “Try a video cover letter,” says Chris Brown, vice president of human resources at telecommunications and collaboration solutions company West Corporation. “If done correctly, it is personal and engaging – and could very well be the difference between being ignored or getting the interview.”

After comparing notes with Brown during a recent conversation, I compiled a list of do’s and don’ts to keep in mind if you decide to produce your own video cover letter:

Do keep it short. Remember that people have very short attention spans. Aim to tell your story in a concise and engaging way. While some companies allow a two-minute video, Brown prefers a 60-second version.

Don’t read your resume. Don’t make the mistake of simply reciting a list of past accomplishments. Instead, think of your video cover letter as a “movie trailer.” Make it engaging, inviting and filled with just enough information about your skills (Brown thinks that three key points is good) that the recruiter will want to know more. An effective video cover letter has new content that adds a unique dimension to your resume by showcasing the intangibles: your personality, your energy, your confidence.

Do it yourself – but take a few tips from the pros: Wear solid

colors – pastel or bright colors are best. (White catches too much light, patterns zig-zag on the screen.) Remove flashy jewelry and long dangling earrings.

Don't use a script. Instead, write out a few bullet points and have those in front of you as a reminder of the most important things you want to cover.

Do find your hook. Brown calls this “your opportunity to brand yourself.” So give the recruiter something unique to remember you by. There may be hundreds (or thousands) of other applicants with similar skill sets and work backgrounds, but only one (you!) who is an Ironman triathlete, or who volunteers at an animal shelter, or who is the eldest of fourteen siblings, or who is trained in improvisational comedy. Think of this as a personalized ice-breaker – something a hiring manager could use to open a conversation when the two of you meet.

Don't let your energy level drop. Several times during our conversation Brown reinforced the importance of keeping a high level of positive energy during your presentation. People are judging your enthusiasm and passion for whatever motivates you: your hobby, this industry, your community, the job opportunity, etc., and physical energy is key to projecting that passion.

Do your homework. Unless you are making a generic video, research the company you are approaching and tailor your pitch (yes, you are in “sales”) to show that you understand the culture, the goals and the value proposition of the organization so that you can explain why you consider yourself a good fit. Of course, just as you would in a written cover letter or resume, use the same words and phrases found in the job description in order to emphasize that you'd be perfect for the role. Using industry jargon, referring to competitive challenges or commenting on recent news stories about the company all helps the hiring manager know that you are an

“insider.”

Don't try to be perfect. No one is without flaws, and when you try to present yourself as perfect, you are bound to appear inauthentic. It is much better to be genuine by allowing the video cover letter to be as real and human as possible. That's why a few minor “ums” or “uhs” are acceptable – preferable even – to an overly-scripted, overly-polished approach. (This is an invaluable tip as many hires are determined in large part by passing the “would I want to sit next to this person during a six-hour flight?” test. And few people would choose to be with Mr. or Ms. Perfect for that length of time.)

Do watch your body language. It takes just seven seconds for people to make judgments about your confidence, competence, professional status and warmth. While a face-to-face meeting gives you added opportunities (entering the meeting room, shaking hands, etc.), your visual presence sets that impression on the screen. So smile, maintain good posture, use natural hand gestures, maintain positive eye contact, and check that your grooming and wardrobe send a positive and professional message.

Don't neglect your voice. The quality of your voice can be a deciding factor in how you are perceived. Speakers with higher-pitched voices are judged to be less powerful and more nervous than speakers with lower pitched voices. (One easy technique to do before recording is to put your lips together and say, “Um hum, um hum, um hum.” Doing so relaxes your voice into its optimal pitch.) Brown advises applicants to vary their vocal tone. When people speak in a monotone, they can come across as lethargic or boring.

Do stay relaxed, but also stay professional. Decrease your use of slang or informal wording. (Brown, for example, would like all candidates to eliminate the word “hey” from their videos.)

Don't forget to close. Keep it simple – but ask for what you

want. “Thank you. Let’s get together,” or “I look forward to meeting you soon at an interview,” or “I know I could add value and I really want this job.” Ending with an assertive closing statement shows guts and confidence.

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