



THE 21ST CENTURY COVER LETTER: THE VALUE PROPOSITION LETTER

Cover letters are so critically important to making the right first impression; you just can't afford to go wrong here. Oftentimes I see jobseekers putting all the emphasis on creating a great resume while skimping on the cover letter.

Over the years my cover letters have gotten MUCH shorter and, with the guidance of my mentor, Mark Hovind, President of Jobbait.com, have evolved into what Mark has coined as "The Value Proposition Letter."

The value proposition letter (VPL) has some very specific traits which I have outlined below. For 3 years now, I have only exclusively written VPLs for my clients and I have watched clients secure interviews time and time again by JUST sending a VPL as a standalone document! So now, I teach my clients how to use the VPL in their job search to tap into the hidden job market. If you want to learn a step-by-step system to do this, please check out my other e-book in this same series: *The Career Artisan Series—Tap the Hidden Job Market: Guide for the Perplexed*.

Traits of a Value Proposition Letter

A statement of value. Briefly answers the question: what good are you to me and my company?

Briefly describes your quantifiable results. Speaks directly to the \$\$ %% results you bring.

Less than 150 words. Short and powerful—shorter letters get read. Long letters get skimmed or not read at all.

Directed to a key decision maker. Traditional letters get sent to internal recruiters, HR, or the "hiring manager" with very limited results. VPLs are sent to the CEO, COO, or division president.

Why does it work?

VPLs are results-focused. Again, a VPL is solely focused on your quantifiable results, not your soft skills or “what you do.” In a VPL every single word counts. For this reason, although they are shorter, they are often more difficult to write.

VPLs are short. They get read, from top to bottom, period.

VPLs demonstrate to the reader that “you get it.” Key executives are focused on the big picture and bottom-line results. They are naturally wired to find interest in a short and sweet letter describing what happens when you do what you do. HR, internal recruiters, and hiring managers are more hard-wired to focus on matching up tasks and qualifications.

How do VPLs differ from a standard cover letter?

Cover letters are long and are “skimmed” just like a resume. Shorter resumes with specific words and phrases bolded, tables, charts, and call out boxes with testimonials and sections that are highly organized and readable like a “framed story” have proven to get more results. VPLs that are much shorter and more direct have a similar, powerful effect.

Cover letters are packed with soft skills like “team player” and words like “driven.” VPLs have none of this language or “filler.”

Multiple ways to use VPLs in your job search

Send to a company for a posted job.

Send with or without a resume.

Use for going direct when tapping into the hidden job market.

Use for sending to recruiters.

Additional VPL Tips

Tip #1: Shorter is Better

Write your letter, then come back in a couple of hours and take out all the superfluous words and phrases you find. Next, highlight all your BEST words and phrases (you will probably have a couple to add or reword at this point). Finally, revisit your letter in another hour and edit any erroneous words just one more time. Now you are left with a tight, crystal-clear letter, brimming with power-hitting terminology!

You won't have to do this with every cover letter you write. After you practice this technique a few times you will quickly learn to get it right the first time!

Tip #2: Simplify Your Language

Want to know the mark of a really good VPL? An interview of course, yes . . . but aside from that, give it to someone to read who is in another industry. If they are impressed by your accomplishments and can understand what you are communicating, this is a really good sign you have an effective letter.

Specifically, your letter should be understandable by someone not directly linked to your position of interest. It should be simple and clearly outline your accomplishments.

A big mistake I often see in executive level cover letters is a string of hundred-dollar words in a sentence. Check your letter and remove any strings of “eye-glazers,” as I like to call them. You will be amazed how this will lighten and brighten up your letter instantly.

Tip #3: Be Focused—Be Clear

You must know why you are writing what you are writing. Either you are writing a general value proposition about your strengths and achievements in a particular role (CEO/COO/VP of Operations) or you are responding to a job opening.

In either case, you want to be completely focused on communicating your maximum value. If you shine in two key areas, write about them and remember to finish your statements with examples of results you have obtained. If you can add a % or \$ to those results, that is preferable.

If you are responding to an actual job description, the most important thing you can do is highlight all the keywords and phrases in that job description that you match and parrot those key words and phrases back in your cover letter. If you have ever written a job description, you know how maddening it is to read through a stack of cover letters that mention little, if anything, that matches what you are looking for! A resume attached to a cover letter like this rarely gets read.

Tip #4: Create a PS

Post scripts get read.

Say something important to the position.

Keep it short and simple.

Keep it focused on one subject.

Value Proposition Letter 15 Point Checklist

Here are some tips you can use as a checklist against your value proposition letter draft. I am deeply appreciative to Mark Hovind, President of Jobbait.com, who is the originator of the Value Proposition Letter and this checklist. Again, Mark has been gracious enough to mentor me on the finer points of the value proposition letter for the last several years.

Use the letter examples listed below as your template. When you have your draft, simply check it against the following 15 points for a fast, easy model you can use effectively again and again!

Your opening line begins with a question: “Do you need . . .” or “Would you like . . .”

Your opening statement describes a problem they might be having (Have your revenues dipped due to the economic downturn?).

You list three bullets that present the “proof” of what you are stating, starting with the strongest benefit.

You use "you" twice as often as "I" in your letter.

Your letter is easy to read, using short sentences and paragraphs.

You use power words and write with the goal of keeping your reader's interest.

You have used specific numbers and facts in your letter to build instant credibility.

Your strong words and phrases are highlighted or bolded to draw attention and keep the reader focused.

Your letter is written in a friendly, active, conversational, "me to you" tone of voice.

You have used specific numbers and facts in your copy to build instant credibility.

You have eliminated any three-dollar words and fancy or overly technical phrases. Your letter is crisp, clear, concise and easy to read.

Your TOTAL word count is under 150 words.

Use Times New Roman 12 point. Top executives are generally older and appreciate this.

Your heading (name and title up at the top should be appropriately sized and in upper and lower case—no larger than 16 point).

Don't use fancy bullets—just use bullets (●). Keep bulleted lines to 2 lines max.