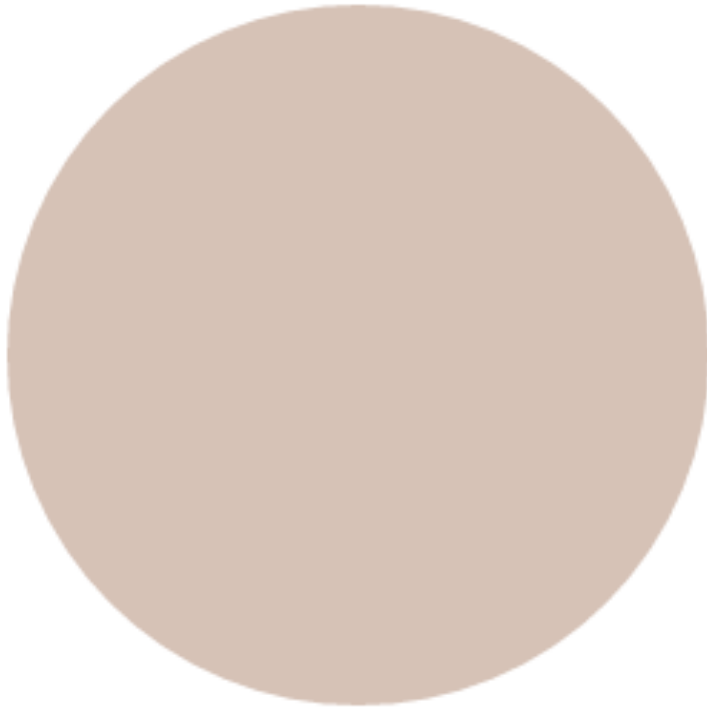




**THE HOW-TO GUIDE TO  
GETTING YOUR CV THROUGH  
APPLICANT TRACKING  
SYSTEMS**



# THE HOW-TO GUIDE TO GETTING YOUR CV THROUGH APPLICANT TRACKING SYSTEMS

Have you ever sent in a CV through an online job portal or company's website only to hear nothing back? This has become all too common as companies move toward applicant tracking systems (ATS) to help screen candidates.

These systems aren't going anywhere, so it's time to learn how to work with them. The best rule of thumb is that when it comes to your online CV, stick with as simple as possible.

## What is an Applicant Tracking System (ATS)?

An applicant tracking system (ATS) is software that works like a CV database to help companies streamline their hiring process and review applications more quickly.

With paper applications becoming obsolete and the volume of applicants increasing, the majority of companies are moving toward digital systems to track applicants make sure their recruitment process complies with labour laws. Not only do these systems organise and sort applications, they can also be programmed to screen candidates based on what content you include in your CV.

Commons applicant tracking systems include iCIMS, Bullhorn and Ascendify that digest uploaded CV's submitted via job postings.

## How does an ATS work?

At a basic level, an ATS consists of opening new positions and posting them online via the company's corporate homepage or job boards. Once the position is open, all submitted applications are stored in a database. At this point, recruiters can search submissions using keywords and phrases to identify candidates to advance through the hiring process.

Many ATSS score applications based on parameters of the open position. Applicants are then ranked and sorted based on their score. You can think of it as the ATS doing the first screening instead of the recruiter.

It is important to note that not all ATSS are alike. Some systems can handle small graphics, while others can't. Some prefer pdfs while others require Word files. It's no surprise that your CV is at risk of getting lost in the shuffle.

While no process is foolproof, use this guide to better prepare your CV for an online application. You can find an example of an ATS-optimised CV in our [Career Relaunch CV Workbook](#).

### Step 1: Answer filter questions completely and properly

A staggering 75 per cent of CV's are never seen by employers, so it is important to start the process correctly. An ATS typically screens candidates based on information provided in the application such as location and level of experience. Make sure to answer all the questions on the application, because when a question is left blank, the ATS may discard your CV. Completing all the information asked in an online application will improve your chances of your CV being seen by a person.

### Step 2: Format your CV in an ATS-friendly manner

When applying online, the key is to avoid templates and keep the format of your CV simple.

- Title your CV with your name and targeted title - something like "Your NameCV\_Marketing Director."
- Stick to common CV headings like Summary, Skills, Work Experience and Education.
- Remove images, columns, tables, fields, text boxes and graphics so the ATS can quickly scan your text for keywords and phrases. The ATS may not be able to read data placed in images, tables, and text boxes, so it's best to avoid them altogether. Also, avoid page numbers.
- Remove special characters and avoid creative or fancy bullets that are often illegible to an ATS scanner.
- Avoid special fonts, font treatments and colours. Stick to fonts such as Arial, Georgia, Impact, Courier, Lucinda, Tahoma or Trebuchet, and only use black colour. Avoid underlining words, which can mess up the legibility of lower case letters such as g, j or y.
- Avoid spelling errors, since an ATS doesn't know what you 'meant' to write.
- Include contact information in the body of your CV, not in the header or footer.
- When writing your employment history, present the information for each employer in the same order, i.e., company name, title, city, country and date, and in reverse chronological order.
- Save your CV as a basic word doc (.doc) or .txt file. Don't convert it into a PDF file unless you are instructed to do so

### Step 3: Focus on your CV's content

Now that you've got the formatting buttoned down, let's take a look at the actual content of the CV and make sure it is compatible with an ATS.

#### 1. Beef up your skills section

To improve your chances of being discovered by the ATS, make sure to include any certifications you've received and mention any industry-specific terminology (ie. Salesforce for sales professionals or Oncology for healthcare professionals). Include both the spelled-out version and abbreviations of the same word.

#### 2. Customise your CV

Recruiters also use keywords to identify candidates with desired skills and qualifications. The ATS tries to find these keywords in candidate CVs. This is why the keywords you use can make or break your job search.

Find and note the keywords used in the job overview and candidate specifications. Focus on both the role and industry in which you want to work.

Then, find a natural way to include those keywords and phrases in your summary and throughout your CV.

You can also optimise your headers and titles based on the job description. Let's say you see the term "communication skills" sprinkled throughout the job description. In your CV, make sure you mention you "communication skills" as an exact phrase.

TOP TIP: It's important for an overall job strategy that your CV and LinkedIn profile use similar keywords. This will help you maximise the effectiveness of your job search. It also signals consistency and attention to detail for recruiters.

#### 3. Don't overuse keywords

Do you need keywords? Absolutely. But stuffing keywords throughout your CV won't get you anywhere.

At the end of the day, make sure your ATS-optimised CV is simple, straightforward, and works for both a machine and human reader. And by all means, feel free to use a more designed version of your CV if you are sending it directly to your target hiring manager or a warm internal lead, or once you've landed the job interview!

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*Work Happy Mums is the go-to resource for return-to-work professional women and career advancers. We help women get clarity on what they really want from their career after having children, enhance their skills, rebuild their professional confidence, and successfully navigate career and family to be the best they can be at work and at home.*

*Visit [Work Happy Mums](#) to find out more about us, and [get in touch](#) today to schedule your complimentary Career Assessment to see how we can support you on your back-to-work journey and beyond. We're with you every step of the way!*

*Best wishes,  
Melanie Fieseler*

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