

Which Resume Format Is Best for You?

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By Kelly Eggers



When it comes to resumes, there's one question that has everybody disagreeing: PDF or Word?

About a month ago, we published an article on FINS.com called [The Ten Worst Things to Put on Your Resume](#). Among the 200 or so comments it generated, about a quarter of them debated which was the right format that job applicants should use when submitting resumes.

To help settle the issue, we asked experts to weigh in on the subject and share what they consider to be the top pros and cons of sending resumes in each format. In order to understand their reasoning, it helps to understand how resumes are processed online.

Most resumes are processed through software called applicant tracking systems (ATS) which organize, parse and serve as a database for resumes and job applications.

About 61% of North American companies surveyed have some sort of applicant tracking software in place, and small-to-midsized businesses are rapidly adopting them, according to Sarah White, the principal analyst for talent acquisition at Oakland, Calif.-based HR research firm Bersin and Associates. "More and more job seekers are going to start finding these systems in workplaces," said White.

There are about 55 different ATS vendors on the market, according to Bersin, which works with some of the largest ATS software providers, like Taleo, SilkRoad, Oracle, iCIMS, Lumesse (formerly StepStone) and Kenexa. White says that the industry's biggest players are the providers used by approximately 55% of the companies that have adopted ATS software, according to Bersin's 2011 Talent Acquisition Systems report.

While a few of these systems are beginning to add PDF-translating capability, and some have even moved to accept LinkedIn profile formatting, the standard among them is still Microsoft Word, White said. "I think you're always safer using a Word document than a PDF, as well as sticking to .doc instead of .docx extensions," she says. "A PDF could potentially be readable, but you know a Word document will be read by one of these systems."

If you're applying to a job with a large company, chances are, your resume will be uploaded to one of these systems, according to Greg Faherty, a certified professional resume writer based in New York. "If you want a storage or search system to read your document correctly," said

Faherty. "Always use Microsoft Word (.doc) or Rich Text Format (.rtf) files. Never use PDF files. These cannot be read by more than 90% of parsing systems used by HR offices and recruiters."

Word document resumes, however, aren't without their drawbacks. If your resume isn't being parsed by an ATS, Word resumes with "tracked changes" [could expose mistakes on earlier drafts to recruiters, writes Annik Stahl on the Microsoft Office blog](#) -- a forgivable but amateurish mistake. And [computer viruses can sometimes be hidden within Word documents, according to Microsoft Support](#), a problem not typically found with PDFs.

PDFs give job seekers more than just added security from viruses.

"You can lock a PDF with a password so it cannot be changed," which can give job seekers wary of Word documents and their ability to be intentionally or unintentionally edited a bit of confidence said Mark Emery Bolles, author of *Job Hunting Online*.

Those in the pro-PDF camp also champion its cross-platform consistency. "You can save a Word document as a PDF file, so that it always looks the same whether it's going to a Mac or a PC, or someone with different screen settings than you," says Bolles. Job hunters who spend hours formatting the fonts, styles and spacing throughout their resume can rest assured that their hard work won't be essentially erased when their resume is opened on someone else's computer.

However, PDFs also require extra effort on the recruiter's end, said Faherty. "Receiving a PDF is often an annoyance to a recruiter or HR representative or hiring manager because it means they have to open a separate software program just to read that one resume."