

Interns, think before you send

By [Deirdre van Zyl Smit](#) 17 May 2011

We get bombarded daily with internship requests and job applications - not that we mind; it's good that tertiary institutions force their students to work a number of hours in order to get practical experience.



What does concern me, however, is the number of spelling errors, the improper use of abbreviations in emails and the poor state of CVs in general, with large images and inappropriate fonts. Thus, I've decided to put together a few pointers for prospective interns:

- **Read up and prepare:**

It is annoying when we receive a note on how much you love the consumer-industry but, in actual fact, we specialise in technology. So, read up on the company you are applying to. If they specialise in a specific field, make sure you understand it and are genuinely interested.

- **Ever heard of spell check?**

It is alarming to see how many silly spelling errors occur in the cover letter and in the CV - most email and Office programmes come with spell check as a standard tool. Make sure your document is 100% error-free and ask someone to read it before you apply.

On that same note - if you can spell the recipient's name correctly in the address-bar, you can certainly get it right at the top of your intro.

Lastly, you are applying by email with an unlimited number of characters - don't use 'text speak' or abbreviations - it is unprofessional and doesn't reflect well on you as an individual.

- **Avoid altogether:**

It is considered rude to use excessive exclamation marks in emails - it looks like you're shouting!! Do NEVER put words or sentences in only capital letters and avoid any form of emoticons - there is a time and place for everything and a job application is neither the right time nor place.

- **Delete, delete, delete:**

We're well aware that students apply to many agencies at the same time and, although it sometimes is really interesting to see all the other agencies you've applied to, I strongly advise you to personalise your application and to only send it to one agency at a time. Please delete any trail left when you forward

the application to the next agency.

Be human: It makes a huge impression if you write an introduction letter with a high level summary of your CV and a little bit of an idea as to why you studied PR, specific areas you enjoy and activities you do for fun.

- **Don't play the sympathy card - ever:**

It is easy to sit on the safe side of the fence, already comfortable in a job but playing the sympathy-card and telling me how desperately you want to work at our company. Telling me how much you need this order to graduate does not win me over either.

Tips for newly appointed interns and first-time workers

- **Really listen:**

You don't know as much about PR as you think you do - you build this skill by doing it, not reading from a text book. Listen much more than you talk, and you'll gain valuable knowledge during your internship

- **Ask questions:**

If you're not sure about something, or you've missed something in a meeting, ask the account manager or your senior after the meeting to explain how it all fits together. No one will think any less of you or see it as a burden to explain reasons behind certain actions - in fact, it is the best way to pick up some tricks of the trade.

- **Be there and be on time:**

To make a good impression during your internship and hopefully land a full time job afterwards, is to show up... on time. Be ready and be prepared - if you know you are seeing a client tomorrow, ask for reading material, old press releases and current activities and prepare yourself with a fresh attitude and a clear mind.

- **Dress appropriately:**

Remember that the workplace is a different set-up and apart from adapting your language and tone, you also have to adapt your choice of clothing to the appropriate dress code of the company and clients.

- **Stay humble:**

There's nothing wrong with carrying yourself with confidence, but always remain humble. You might be right sometimes, but you will also be wrong sometimes too.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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