

# 8 Things You Need To Know About Applicant Tracking Systems

## How much do you know about applicant tracking systems?

You may have heard that the first step to getting a job interview is making it past the stage where a recruiter glances at your resume and makes a split-second decision about whether to chuck your resume into the discard pile. But 90% of Fortune 500 companies filter job applicants and resumes through an applicant tracking system (ATS) before a live person reads through job applications. Find out below how to get your resume ranked highly within applicant tracking systems, so that it can then go on to the real human beings who will call you for interviews.

## 1. What is an applicant tracking system?

An ATS is a type of software application that handles the recruitment process, namely by sorting through thousands of resumes, to determine which ones are the best fit for the positions for which they were submitted. Applicant tracking systems do not process your resume so differently from recruiters glancing at your resume, as both are looking for certain criteria for inclusion. Whereas human recruiters are often looking for grounds for automatic rejection, such as spelling errors or lack of relevant skills, applicant tracking systems operate by searching resumes for keywords.

## 2. Why do employers use applicant tracking systems?

Applicant tracking systems help employers save time and paper and help them stay organized. With applicant tracking systems, there is no risk of an employer accidentally deleting the email containing the resume of the applicant the company wants to hire or misplacing a file. An ATS also makes it easy for employers to keep tabs on the hiring process and to communicate with applicants directly. Applicant tracking systems were first used by large corporations that receive thousands of applications, but smaller businesses are now using them just as frequently. Just as companies use software applications to keep track of relevant information on their customers, using similar software to organize information on prospective employees makes sense for employers.

## 3. How do applicant tracking systems work?

Applicant tracking systems process resumes submitted by applicants and sometimes even use social media to actively recruit prospective employees. When you submit your resume through an ATS, it stores your resume and an entry in the database. The recruiters then search for keywords for the particular job opening.

If your resume contains the keywords the employer wants, then the ATS will rank you higher in the search results. The keyword searches by recruiters include the skills and experiences specific to the particular job opening. The employer can even command the ATS to search the company's entire database of resumes to look for candidates with certain qualifications. This means that even if you submitted your resume a long time ago and never got a response, the company may have kept it on file in its database, and the ATS might identify you as a good candidate for a different position long after you originally submitted your resume.

## 4. What about social media?

Networking has always been an important part of the job seeking process, and now social media plays an increasingly important role. The prevailing sentiment is that having a social media presence helps more than it hurts when it comes to looking for a job, and most job seekers already understand the importance of presenting a professional image on social media. Of course, when it

comes to attracting recruiters, it is more than just a matter of not posting pictures of your drunken exploits on Facebook. There is social recruiting software that crawls the web for specific keywords, and the best way to get noticed is to have a social media profile that includes basic details about your education, work experience, and skills. Some ATS actually show your profile directly within your application, so it is readily available to recruiters and HR. Letting the ATS find your social profile can be beneficial and the best site for this is, of course, LinkedIn.

## 5. Search engine optimization

The process by which job candidates tailor their resumes to get them noticed by ATS is similar to the process of search engine optimization, or SEO. This is when companies tailor their web content to make search engines notice them and rank them high on the list of search results. Matching keywords is an important part of how search engine optimization works; if your website contains the words the user typed into the search engine, then it will appear in the search results. The best way to get an ATS to notice your resume is to anticipate which keywords the ATS and recruiters will be trying to find.

## 6. Research is key

You may have heard the advice that you should tailor your resume specifically for each job application you submit. Whether this means making major or minor changes, your resume should make clear why you are a good candidate for that specific job. Every employer is looking for certain qualifications, whether resumes will first be scanned by a recruiter or by keyword-seeking ATS. You should find out as much as possible about the organization to which you are applying. If current employees of the company have social media profiles, especially on LinkedIn, see if you have similar qualifications or keywords.

## 7. No fluff

When recruiters search for keywords in applicant tracking systems, they are usually looking for certain concrete skills in your resume. If you are applying for a job as the manager of a hotel restaurant, for example, a recruiter may search for phrases such as “restaurant manager” and “hotel restaurant” or for the word “hospitality.” Recruiters will probably not look for words and phrases such as “outgoing” and “team player.” One of the main purposes of the ATS is to ease recruiters’ search process for candidates whose resumes are most closely in line with a particular job. An applicant tracking system’s decision about how your resume ranks among other candidates is based heavily on keywords, whereas recruiters base their decision not only on keywords but also, to some degree, on at least a little bit of arbitrary human judgment. If you’re starting your resume from scratch, try our Resume Writing Guide which can help you eliminate the fluff right off the bat.

## 8. Applicant tracking systems: friend or foe?

Applicant tracking systems make the recruitment process much more streamlined for recruiters, shortening the time it takes before a hiring manager contacts applicants who seem like good candidates for the job. For most jobs, it is not possible for the hiring process to be entirely automated.

If you think your best qualities only show once you meet your potential employers face to face, you can boost your chances if you can rank highly in the ATS. Researching jobs and optimizing your resume with keywords before you apply is the best way to get interviews.

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