

## Origin Legal: “15 Steps to CV Success”

Bringing your CV up to date should be easy shouldn't it? Dust off an old copy and paste in a paragraph or two of recent experience, and you'll be ready to go in ten minutes flat. In reality, it's rarely that easy, and if it is then there's a good chance you're missing something. With every additional year of experience, the emphasis of your CV is likely to change; more focus on specialist experience, client development and supervisory skills; less on academics, training contracts, or standard deals/cases.

It's worth getting it right. Pre-Lehman, firms were forgiving of poorly formatted CV's as long as the background was decent. If you came from the right firm, you might barely need a CV at all. This is no longer the case, and even those with an illustrious track record are well advised to make sure that their CV represents them as strongly as possible

Good CV's, and bad, come in all shapes and sizes, and if you ask ten people for advice they will likely give you ten different answers. One thing is certain though, having a great CV can make the difference in a competitive market, whilst getting it wrong may mean you never have the opportunity to dazzle in person.

Below we list some of our key pointers to follow and mistakes to avoid:

### Format

- 1. Use a standard font.** The legal world is not noted for being at the cutting edge of graphic design so keep it simple and use a clear font that doesn't stand out in its own right. Arial, Times New Roman, Verdana...the choice is yours, but avoid the temptation to display your lighter side with Comic Sans!
- 2. Keep it consistent.** Font, font size, paragraph spacing, use of bolds, underlines and italics, bullet points should all be used consistently throughout your CV. After all, attention to detail might be deemed vital by some firms when considering hiring a lawyer...
- 3. Size doesn't matter.** We're of the opinion that detail is good in a lawyer's CV and so one page is unlikely to suffice. Equally, if you are stretching beyond four or five pages, we would suggest you think hard about whether there is room for some editing. Anywhere in between is fine as long as the content is subject to some quality control.
- 4. Protect the white space.** Linked to point three, there can be a temptation to 'shorten' a CV by reducing the font size or spaces between paragraphs, points or sections. However, 'readability' is vitally important for people involved in hiring who may well be viewing many other applications alongside yours.
- 5. Structure.** There is no right and wrong structure for a CV as long as the format is logical, chronologically in order and follows a consistent pattern. Some like to list their employment simply and then list skills and sample work from their entire career in one block, whilst others prefer to list details on a job by job basis. Use what works best for you and whatever gives maximum exposure to your strengths.

## Details

6. Make sure your **mobile number** and **email address** are included on your CV as well as on any email correspondence. It can be a fine line when sifting multiple applications and the need to go back through a full inbox of messages to find your contact details could just count against you.
7. **Key qualifications.** Dates, institutions, course and results should be included but there is no need to go into detail regarding individual modules unless one is of particular relevance (or you are very junior). Go back at least as far as A-levels (or equivalent) and always 'translate' any results from international institutions into a format that will be familiar with your target firms. Don't forget to include the month, year and jurisdiction(s) where you are admitted.
8. **Employment.** Dates (month/year), firm/company, job title, location should all be included. Internal promotions, secondments etc. likewise. If you are working/have worked with a less well-known firm, take a couple of lines to describe the organisation and your role in it. Always check the dates and make sure you fill in any significant gaps in employment.
9. List some **sample transactions/cases** including a brief summary of your role in the team. It is worth naming clients if you can, but if you can't, at least give a general description. Remember, this should be a sample and should represent the highlights of your career so no need to list every matter, or every document you handled.
10. Include **other information** such as non-legal jobs, positions of responsibility, academic achievements or voluntary work, but keep it relevant and to the point. Part-time jobs whilst studying, unless making a material difference, need not go in. Details of summer internships should be kept short.

## Stand out from the crowd

11. Including skills, achievements and successes will greatly enhance your CV but focus on those which are **measurable and demonstrable** rather than general statements. For example, instead of 'hard working', perhaps comment on billable hours versus target; if claiming to have strong business development skills, include reference to client successes.
12. Remain focused on your **core areas of expertise** as too much variety can create a 'jack of all trades' impression (unless of course the role you are applying for puts a premium on a diverse range of experience as can be the case in-house for example).
13. **Include a profile but get it right.** This is an opportunity to highlight your core legal and commercial skills, your achievements and your goals. Think of what sets you apart from others. Business development experience, international exposure, language skills, sector expertise, unusual levels of responsibility for your PQE are all factors that could swing it your way in a competitive market.
14. **Tailor your CV to the role.** With the decline in detailed job specifications this is arguably harder to do but it is nonetheless worth considering whether a particular opportunity merits a slight change of emphasis in your CV. Look at the firm's international profile and see if you have geographical expertise that is worth highlighting, likewise its sector specialisms.
15. **This is no time for modesty.** Remember that some things you take as being normal might actually be rarer talents than you imagine. If you are struggling to see what sets you apart from the field, speak to your consultant. It

is their job to bring out your strengths and it is rare that we meet a candidate who has reached any level with any decent firm without having had some impressive achievements.

## Contact us

If you would like any advice on the recruitment market, your options, or simply want to know what is going on out there, please do get in touch. Please contact: Origin Legal on +44 (0)1206 233500 or for Origin Legal International contact us on +44 (0)20 7096 1681 or email [jason.horobin@originlegal.co.uk](mailto:jason.horobin@originlegal.co.uk) for more advice. For more information about Origin Legal please visit our website [www.originlegal.co.uk](http://www.originlegal.co.uk).

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