

# Your Numbers Don't Add Up

**Misrepresenting facts is a key cause for losing a job opportunity.  
It's all about the numbers when selling yourself on the resume.**

By Robert Meier

Competition for that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity often tempts job seekers to inflate their results, but beware: One of the most damaging decisions you can make is misusing numbers in your resume. In fact, it's become so common for job seekers to use inflated statistics that hiring managers have become skeptical. If they're not totally convinced of those results, they will likely dismiss your accomplishments and eliminate you as a candidate. In fact, embellishing your accomplishments may be an equal or greater threat to winning a job offer than a typo in your resume.

## Big Numbers Can Lead to Bigger Problems

Statistical claims are important to defining value, and often build a positive impression. It is important to include detailed descriptions of your projects and results, so long as they convey an accurate portrait of your experience and abilities.

First, avoid being a victim of the *benign accident*. This is where a candidate reports he or she grew revenues by 1,000% in 30 days. Secondly, beware of adapting the belief that because your former company recently folded, you can state anything you like because they can't confirm the facts. It is actually quite obvious to identify someone misrepresenting facts or accomplishments. Either validate your numbers or avoid using them altogether. The secret to using numbers properly is to be conservative enough that you can look an interviewer in the eye with complete confidence and state that your statistics are valid. That display of confidence will help the reviewer to trust you.

**Example:** Joe was a Director of Marketing for a small, privately-held communications company. His most prized accomplishment was increasing brand awareness by 376% in a year. Sounds great, right? Defining brand awareness through the use of statistics is difficult even for major corporations with large marketing departments. The statement is compelling, but difficult to prove. When the senior vice president of marketing asked Joe what he did to expand his company's brand awareness, he learned that Joe was able to get eight articles published in trade journals and newspapers—an increase from the company's two previous press mentions. Joe didn't mean to confuse brand awareness and press mentions—which he did quadruple—he just didn't know how to describe his marketing success. Joe made a classic mistake by using exaggerated numbers to define an accomplishment.

## What You Can Do To Ensure Accuracy

1. Provide enough content in the resume to explain your accomplishments clearly. 2. Have someone read the resume and confirm that it is perfectly clear. Don't assume you will be speaking to a knowledgeable audience that understands what you mean.
3. Avoid using jargon that may be exclusive to your previous professional field.
4. Use honest numbers and validate your claims with substantial information.

At the end of the day, your numbers will either sell or sink your chances of winning the job offer. Don't be afraid to use them liberally, so long as you avoid fabrications or vague generalizations. A valid demonstration of how you achieved results will make you an attractive candidate and help you to win the job.