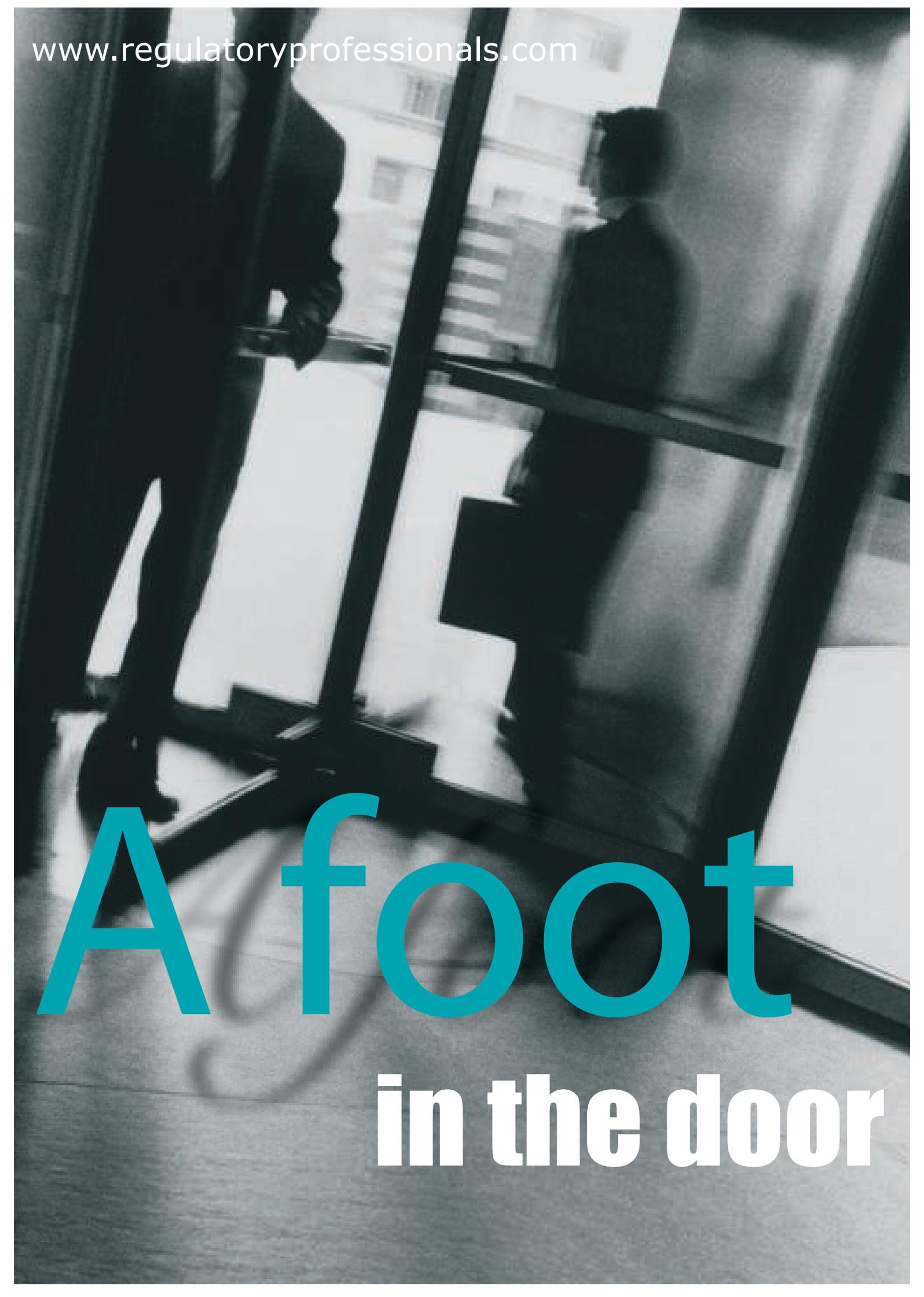


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A foot in the door

Like a good book, a CV needs to grab attention, otherwise it won't get you a foot through the door. Getting your CV right is vital. It's your shop window and must be dressed appropriately.

First impressions

Focus on achievements – on what you've delivered, rather than how you have spent your time. Use bold headings, generous margins, one clear, business-style font and adequate spacing. Two pages of size eight type, multiple, coloured or ornate fonts are irritating. Avoid CV templates and compose in MS Word using tables without borders to align text.

Avoid the first person singular – a common mistake. Using 'I' throughout your CV, particularly at the start of sentences, makes you appear self-centered. Write as if you were composing an advert for yourself, for example: 'Accomplished sales professional with a track record of year-on-year delivery exceeding targets.'

A significant number of CVs contain careless errors, so check spelling and grammar to ensure you don't miss out on an opportunity needlessly. If you email a CV, check your layout hasn't been turned into a page of hieroglyphics by

some IT gremlin! A quick phone call to confirm it's been received OK is best.

It's all in the preparation

What should the CV comprise? Start with your personal details, full name, home postal and personal email addresses, home telephone and mobile numbers, job-related membership numbers (e.g. GMC registration) and driving licence details. Follow this with a brief profile of yourself - an outline of your skills, experience and immediate career goals – to capture the reader's interest.

Now list your employment history, starting with the most recent first. If you've had several positions, provide more detail for roles in the last five years. If your work experience is extensive, select that which is relevant and mention other jobs briefly. Give dates in full, including months, to avoid ambiguity and ensure there are no gaps or overlaps. Say what you've achieved. Quantify your successes and give a little background on how you achieved them. Indicate skills and knowledge gained in all positions. And, if you've worked in a small company or out of the sector, it's useful to describe the group's size, market and product(s).

Educational details come next, with dates and qualifications from secondary education onwards. Again, describe the most recent first. Place emphasis on degrees, diplomas and professional qualifications, as well as subjects studied, areas of speciality and brief details of relevant projects or dissertations and be prepared to answer questions about them.

Finally, list other skills, for example, languages and IT competencies. Include hobbies and interests regularly undertaken. Common ground with a shared interest can have a hugely positive effect on building rapport with an interviewer. (I've shared recipes and swapped details of unusual jazz and baroque CDs with candidates I've interviewed!). Include information about any official or unofficial organisational roles you've undertaken – they also help tell someone who you are.

Don't include references or pages of publications at this stage. Simply

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>> say references are available on request and list the titles of any published papers to your name. Now show your CV to someone you trust, listen to what they have to say about it and make any constructive changes.

Consider the qualities or experience an employer is looking for and present this key information in a covering letter. Failing to send one is a missed opportunity to make an application stand out. Include your contact details, the job applied for, a brief précis of why you feel you should be considered for the role and why you want to work with the company. Show initiative and describe your availability for interview, for example, conference and holiday dates.

An adrenaline trip?

Let's assume you've been successful and someone wants to interview you. Are you filled with adrenaline and a sense of challenge, or nausea and trepidation? Here's the most important tip I can give – the key to a successful interview is planning. Fail to prepare...prepare to fail.

What do you know about the company? Research the organisation as much as possible: its website will provide useful information and many companies will happily send you a copy of their most recent annual report on request. Alternatively, you can write to or telephone the public relations department and ask for a copy of the organisation's promotional materials to familiarise yourself with its offerings.

What are its major products and what's in the pipeline? Details of currently marketed products can be obtained from an up-to-date copy of the British National Formulary or Mimms. Pharmaceutical industry newswires and periodicals will also give you an insight into product pipelines.

The purpose of an interview is to enable a prospective employer to assess your suitability for the role and for you to assess whether you want to join them. The interviewer will seek evidence of your experience and skills to match those required, as well as assess your personality and behavioural fit with the culture of the existing team and organisation.

Be prepared to give real world examples of when you've used the skills you claim to have. If you have no experience of the role, show an example of transferable skills in your



'Remember, nobody is perfect, so be prepared to own up to your weaknesses, but think how you can turn a perceived negative into a positive. For example: "I know I can be impatient but I like to get things moving and I never miss a deadline."'

career to date. It's common for this type of competency-based interview to be used in the pharmaceutical industry, so prepare your key achievements in advance.

Interviewers will also explore your drive, motivation and ambition. Are you a team player or autonomous? Do you have get up and go, or does it appear to have got up and gone!? Personality styles can be assessed from answers to questions about your reactions to and feelings about past events. So, think about any feedback you've had in different behavioural situations.

There's a good chance you'll be asked to describe your strengths and weaknesses, or how others see you. Remember, nobody is perfect, so be prepared to own up to them, but think how you can turn a perceived negative into a positive. For example: "I know I can be impatient but I like to get things moving and I never miss a deadline."

There will always be practical issues discussed at interview – relocation, salary, availability etc. Decide on your requirements beforehand, rather than appear vague or ambiguous when asked questions. Ensure you've located any documents you've been asked to bring, such as educational certificates and a driving licence. It's useful to take a spare copy of your CV and a notebook so you can jot down information during the interview and remember to take all the contact details you need – the address, telephone numbers and the names of the interviewer(s) will be important!

Spick and span

A week before your interview, have your suit dry-cleaned and, if it's winter, check your overcoat is looking presentable. Plan your route, ensuring that you'll have plenty of time to get there, and work out alternative routes in case there are unforeseen delays. Never be late. The night before the interview prepare the clothes you intend to wear. Iron shirts or blouses and polish shoes. And try to get a good night's sleep!

Like it or loathe it, first impressions count.