

MAKE YOUR FIRST PROFESSIONAL CONTACTS AT THE CAREER FAIR

Adapted from JobWeb.com - Career Development and Job Search Advice for New College Graduates

Career Fairs present an opportunity to make important contacts with potential employers. But you need to do more than press your business suit and print 30 copies of your resume to make the most of this opportunity. Here's what the experts recommend:

BE A GOOD SCOUT

Prepare to sell yourself. Remember: you are the product-employers are the customers.

Know your employers. Pick up a list of employers expected at the career fair from your college career center and focus your research on the three or four that interest you most. Go to the fair knowing something about each of these companies. Good research will make every other tip in this article easier to accomplish.

Know what you want. What position or department are you interested in? You can get this kind of information while doing your research. Saying, "I'll take anything," or "I don't know," to a recruiter shows a lack of interest.

Dress the part. Go dressed as if you were interviewing. This is your first impression on the employer-you want to look like a professional. Employers say a common mistake students make is not being dressed professionally.

Pack your credentials. Be able to supply potential employers with a simple one page resume. Consider making individually tailored resumes for each of your researched employers, labeling them carefully in advance so you give the right resume to each employer. Bring 20-30 extra resumes for any other opportunities you might discover on the day of the fair.

MIND YOUR MANNERS

Carry your credentials in a professional way. A neat folder is fine. A small briefcase works well too. Stow your coat, backpack and other gear in a cloakroom.

Come early. Don't arrive 30 minutes before the end of the day and expect to talk to employers. Some will have planes to catch; others will be tired and ready to wind up a long day of chatting with students. Come early while employers are fresh-and hit the booths of employers you are most interested in working for first.

Give them a strong handshake and a positive attitude. Greet each employer with a smile and an enthusiastic 30-second sales pitch-your name, your major and your career interests as they relate to the target company.

Pick up the cards. Collect business cards from recruiters you speak to. Jot notes on the recruiter and the company on the back of the card. Use those notes-and the information on the front of the card-to personalize your thank-you notes.

Ask for the next step. At the end of a conversation with a recruiter, ask what the next step is in the hiring process.

FOLLOW UP

Write a thank-you note. Send a thank-you note to every employer you speak to at the career fair. Some employers prefer notes by mail; some are happy for an e-mailed thank you-check with your career center for advice on which type of note to send.

Complete any online applications requested. Even if you've left a resume behind, filling out an online application ensures that your data is in the employer's data base quickly and with the information you prefer.



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SELL YOURSELF AT THE CAREER FAIR

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A career fair is a great place to gather information about potential employers and make contacts that can lead to your first job. Here's some advice on how to make the most of your time.

5 Things to Take to the Career Fair

1. Copies of your resume (25 to 40 depending on the size of the event). Be sure it represents your knowledge, skills, and abilities effectively. It needs to look professional-easy to read format on plain white or cream colored paper-and be free of typos. If you are looking at several career options, you may want to have two or more targeted resumes with different career objectives!
2. A smile, a strong handshake, and a positive attitude. First impressions are important. Approach an employer, smile and offer your hand when you introduce yourself.
3. A 30-second "sales pitch." Hand the recruiter a copy of your resume and be prepared to expand on it quickly! Share basic information about yourself and your career interests like this: "Hello, I'm Carrie Jones. I'm a senior here at Wonderful University and I'm majoring in English. I'm very interested in a marketing career. As you can see on my resume, I just completed an internship in the Marketing Division of the ABC company in Boston. I've also taken some courses in business marketing. I'm very interested in talking with you about marketing opportunities with your organization."
4. Information about the organizations which will be attending. Gather information as you would for a job interview. To maximize the brief time you have with each employer, you need to know how your skills and interests match their needs. And don't just concentrate on the "big names." There are often great opportunities with companies with which you are not familiar.
5. Energy! Career fairs require you to be on your feet moving from table to table for an hour or so. Each time you meet someone, be at your best, as refreshed as possible!

5 Things Not to Do at the Career Fair

1. Don't cruise the booths with a group of friends. Interact with the recruiters on your own. Make your own positive impression!
2. Don't carry your backpack, large purse, or other paraphernalia with you. Carry your resume in a professional-looking portfolio or small briefcase. It will keep your resume neat and handy, and gives you a place to file business cards of recruiters that you meet. Usually you can stow your coat, backpack or other gear in a coatroom.
3. Don't come dressed for rugby practice (or any other extremely casual activity). A career fair is a professional activity-perhaps your first contact with a future employer.
4. Don't "wing it" with employers. Do your homework! Research the companies just as you would for an interview. You'll be able to focus on why you want to work for the organization and what you can do for them.
5. Don't come during the last half hour of the event. Many employers come a long distance to attend the fair and may need to leave early. If you come late, you may miss the organizations you wanted to contact .

Things to Take Home from the Career Fair

1. Business cards from the recruiters you have met. Use the cards to write follow-up notes to those organizations in which you are most interested.
2. Notes about contacts you made. Take paper and pen with you to write down important details about particular organizations, including names of people who may not have had business cards. Take a few minutes after you leave each table to jot down these notes!
3. Information about organizations you have contacted. Most recruiters will have information for you to pick up, including company brochures, computer diskettes or CD's, position descriptions and other data. You won't have time to deal with these at the fair!
4. A better sense of your career options. If you have used the event correctly, you will have made contact with several organizations that hire people with your skills and interests. In thinking about their needs and your background, evaluate whether each company might be a match for you.
5. Self-confidence in interacting with employer representatives. A career fair gives you the opportunity to practice your interview skills in a less formidable environment than a formal interview. Use this experience to practice talking about what you have done, what you know and what your interests are.

FROM THE EMPLOYERS PERSPECTIVE

Adapted from www.graduatingengineer.com, Navigating a Career Fair, By Roseanne R. Bensley and Career Services Virginia Tech
www.career.vt.edu/JobSearchGuide/JobCareerFairPrep.html

UNDERSTANDING THE RECRUITERS

Exactly who are those people working the booths at career fairs? Recruiters have a unique position within their company. They are seldom the actual hiring managers, instead their job is to review candidates and find those who meet the company's basic qualifications. Those qualified candidates are then referred to hiring managers for further consideration.

Be prepared that **some employers cannot accept hard copy resumes** and will ask you to apply online. This is to comply with federal regulations about the way employers keep data on applicants. This does not mean the employer is giving you the brush-off, and it does not mean the employer is wasting time by attending the fair and talking with you. The employer reps may well be taking note of candidates — you and others — in whom they are interested, but they have to follow certain procedures to comply with law.

CAREER FAIR ADVICE FROM EMPLOYERS

"The biggest turn off is the students that zoom by just grabbing the giveaways! And students don't need a suit, but they should dress nicely. Get a list of the companies attending and do some research in advance. If [a student] knows something about the company it says that they are genuinely interested. A lot of students ask the same questions. The ones with good eye contact who speak about something specific are noticed."

-Laurie J. Motz, senior personnel representative, Eastman Chemical

"I don't like students who are seeking a job unrelated to anything we hire for, are disorganized, or have typographical errors in resumes or resumes without key information. We don't have the same expectations for freshman and sophomores, but juniors and seniors are expected to be more polished and know what type of jobs they are interested in. Students also need to follow directions. If procedures are provided to the student and they don't follow them exactly that can be a problem in the hiring process. On the other hand I am impressed when students show enthusiasm and preparedness, are neatly dressed and articulate."

-Dr. Patricia D. Lopez, imaging scientist at Hewlett-Packard Co., Greeley, Colo.

"Career Fairs are an important part of the recruiting process. They allow employers to talk about their companies and employment opportunities and also give us a chance to gather information from the resumes of the students. Most employers have quite a bit of information on their Web site, so students should do their homework and make sure their resumes are relevant to the job they are seeking. Younger students should take advantage of career fairs so they know what to expect down the road. There are several key attributes that I look for in making a recommendation of a student: interest in my company, good grades, work experience, leadership skills and ability to communicate."

-Jeff Ray, TAPS coordinator with ExxonMobil Pipeline Company

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

The recruiter may ask you, "Do you have any questions?" Don't let this golden opportunity slip past you. Here's your chance to show you're interested in the company and are serious about your career plans. Here are some examples of questions that help you stay focused on the position you are seeking.

- What kinds of people do you hire to fill your entry-level positions?
- What skills, work experience or educational background do you look for when you recruit for these jobs, internships, co-ops or summer positions?
- What are the primary results a person in this position would be expected to achieve?
- What is the typical career path in this area of specialization?
- How do you see the jobs in this field changing over the next five years? What can I do to prepare myself for such changes?
- Your questions should be related to your career interests and goals. Show that you have done your homework and now need to learn more about the career opportunities available.

REASONS TO ATTEND A CAREER FAIR

Freshman through alumni can benefit from attending by gathering career information to looking for co-ops, internships, summer or permanent full-time employment.

Gain insight into what employers will expect of them upon graduation. Many times the career fair tables are staffed by recent grads offering insights like, "If I knew then what I know now, I would have done things differently my freshman and sophomore years."

Eavesdrop, if you are not ready to get a job or internship. Listen to the conversations between students and employers and get the idea of how things go.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU FIRST ARRIVE

1. Pick up a map of the booths.
2. Identify the location of the booths you wish to visit.
3. Walk around the room to become comfortable with each of the booths and their locations.
4. Gather information on the employers prior to talking with a recruiter. This can be achieved by viewing their Web site in advance or by walking by a booth that may be busy and picking up their literature. If the booths are quiet you may want to work the room with a friend. Have the friend pick up information for you so you won't be caught off guard and unprepared to respond to the recruiter's questions. Listen to what the recruiters are asking the other candidates; these same questions may be asked of you.
5. Start by going to a few tables that are not at the top of your list so you can get used to talking with the recruiters. When you are ready, head over to one of the employers scheduling campus interviews. If you have done your homework, you'll be able to determine what employers' needs are and what you can offer to fill those needs.
6. The amount of time you will have with the recruiter can vary from mere seconds to minutes. Use the short time you have to provide the employer with a clear and succinct description of exactly what you are looking for and what you can offer their organization. Establish common interests based on the information you have read in advance.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE

1. Ask, "What is the next step?"
2. Request the recruiter's business card for future correspondence.
3. In closing, shake hands and thank them for their time. Tell the recruiter that you look forward to hearing from them in the near future. If they are one of your top choices, let them know you have a strong interest in their company and hope to be part of their team.

FOLLOW-UP

Stay in touch with the employers that interest you most. It's extremely important to keep the lines of communication open. Send a thank you letter to the recruiter within a week of meeting them to ensure they will remember you.

In the letter:

- Thank them for taking the time to meet with you.
- Review key points that were discussed during your conversation.
- Explain how you would be an asset to the employer (address the keys points discussed in your conversation or from employer literature).
- Add new information that may not have been addressed during your quick meeting.
- Send a resume that reflects the skills you have that meet the needs of the employer.
- Check back after a few weeks to see if opportunities are available for you with their organization.