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:

**MAKE YOUR FIRST PROFESSIONAL CONTACTS AT THE CAREER FAIR**

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

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 reach 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.
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.