

Research Position, Organization, and Industry

Researching the company is arguably the most important step in preparing for an interview. Knowledge is power and any amount of power and control that you can exercise during an interview will be to your advantage. During the course of an interview, the interviewer will most likely ask what you know about the organization and why you want to work for them. If you do your homework, you will be able to impress the interviewer with your extensive knowledge of the company. If you fail to research the company, you might eliminate yourself from consideration. Most importantly, you want to communicate how your research has led to your desire to work for the organization.

Find Out:

- All names of the company - mergers and acquisitions are common in some industries today.
- How long has it been in business?
- Who are its major competitors?
- What are the company's goods and services?
- Has the company grown? Will it grow in the future?
- Who are its major customers/clients?
- What are the company's profit/sales trends?
- What challenges does the company face?
- What are the company's plans for the future?
- Who are the leaders of the company? Where did they go to college? What is their vision for the company?
- Does the organization have a mission statement? What is it? Do you agree with it? Why do you agree with it?



Sources of Information

1. **Contact the organization.** Call or visit the receptionist or public relations department and ask for information on the company. If you don't know the Web address, ask for it. Most organizations are on the Web and websites can be a wealth of information. If you are prepared, request and conduct an informational interview.
2. **The local Chamber of Commerce** is a good resource for small businesses. They will have information about the company if it is a member.
3. **Financial websites** (like Finance.Yahoo.com and Hoovers.com) can provide abundant information, including the company's annual report and information of interest to savvy investors. Guidestar.org provides similar information on non-profit organizations.
4. **Library.** Check library databases for articles pertaining to your chosen company and their competition. Research the company's website. Look for a job description, the mission statement and learn any names in the hierarchy that you might want to know. Salary ranges may be found on the website.

Now that you've done your homework, you should know where the company is headed and what type of employees they desire. Think about how your skills, training, experience, accomplishments and activities can fit with the company and the position.

What will set you apart from the competition?

Job Searching Techniques

Searching for a job is a job in itself. Experts say that most people will have not only numerous jobs but multiple careers during the course of their working lives. In order to travel the road leading to new opportunities, you will need to prepare for your journey. It is important that you map out a course and plan for your future. At minimum, you should know the following information before you start your search:

- ◆ Desired Occupation
- ◆ Preferred Industry
- ◆ Work Environment
- ◆ Salary Range
- ◆ Work Location
- ◆ Desired Working Hours



Keys to a Successful Job Search

- ◆ Develop a list of prospective employers.
- ◆ Concentrate your efforts on job openings that are of interest and for which you are qualified.
- ◆ Apply good time management and devote a certain number of hours per week to your search.
- ◆ Ensure your voicemail or answering machine has a professional sounding message.
- ◆ Don't take rejection personally. Move on to the next opportunity.
- ◆ Read books/articles on the job search process-- check with Student Employment Services at your college, the local library and the Web.
- ◆ Use non-traditional job search strategies to make your job-hunt more successful (i.e. design a product for their company, volunteer, etc...).
- ◆ Develop a list of places that you might like to work using information from local Chambers of Commerce membership lists, professional trade organization lists and by reading articles of interest in the business section of newspaper.
- ◆ Network, Network, Network! Connect with those you know to help you open doors.
- ◆ Follow-up and be persistent!

Learning how to find a job will greatly increase your chances of success. This handbook contains information on a wide variety of job search avenues and will help you organize and implement an effective job search. You will learn how to network, where to locate jobs and which organizations may be able to help you in your search.

Finding a job can be very hard work. Getting discouraged and developing a negative attitude only makes things more difficult. Stay positive and leave no stone unturned.

Networking

Networking is one way to obtain employment. Simply put, "networking" means telling people that you are looking for work and asking them if they know of anyone who is hiring. The rationale is that your circle of acquaintances has a circle of acquaintances and so on. This way, scores of people are helping you in your job search. There are many ways to network including informational interviewing and joining associations.



Informational Interviewing

People like to talk about themselves. Most enjoy sharing their passion for their work with others. Why not tap into this resource in preparation for your job search? By meeting with a variety of potential employers you can create a framework for future networking and determine if you have a preference when it comes to potential employers' corporate culture and working styles.

There are times that you would like to get to know more about an organization but there are no advertised job openings. Does that mean that no opportunities exist? NO! This is the perfect opportunity to request an informational interview. In an informational interview **you** are interviewing the company, not the typical, traditional "company is interviewing potential employee" scenario. You are strictly researching industries and specific companies in these industries to determine if this would be a good fit for your career path. Your goals are information, advice and referrals. There is no pressure for the employer to hire you; therefore this type of meeting is much easier to arrange than one in which you are asking for a job. Of course, if you do impress the person you are interviewing, then he/she may indeed want to interview you for a job. What better preparation exists than previous meetings where you are told much of what you need to know for the "real" interview?

Of course, as with any other job search strategy, there are variations in the successfulness of this strategy.

- Narrow your search to a particular department within a given company. For example, interviewing the accounting manager is preferable to the marketing manager if you are hoping to land an accounting position.
- Knowing who to contact is critical, because a traditional gatekeeper may not understand why you want to speak with the manager. Company directories are wonderful tools for finding the right contact person – but confirm if the directory is indeed up to date. Asking to meet with someone that has been retired for years isn't very effective!
- Briefly describe the purpose of your requested meeting and reassure the manager that you are **not** asking for a job interview. You want information!
- Promise to make the meeting as brief as possible – and keep your promise. Typically you should request no more than 30 minutes. If this is not possible request a 15 minute meeting – but know that you won't be able to get very far in 15 minutes unless you are very organized and focused.
- Have your list of questions prioritized and prepared. This person is busy and will not have time for you to improvise.
- If you think it is appropriate, you can ask the person you are interviewing if they know of anyone else with whom you should speak. Sometimes during the process you may discover that your contact person might know of others within his/her company or beyond that also might be able to help you as you prepare to enter the industry.
- If you find that you are indeed interested in working with this company, indicate it at the end of your meeting. **Do not** ask for a job. Never. Ever. However it is appropriate to inquire how most positions are filled and for any advice on how to go about applying in the future.

Associations/Organizations

Joining civic or professional associations is another great way to network. It is particularly advantageous for you to join associations that are related to your area of expertise and interest. Search the Web for associations in your field. Write or call the association(s) and inquire about membership information and contact person(s) for the local or state chapter. Before you commit to a membership fee, you may be able to attend the next meeting as a guest for free or a small fee. After joining, you will be given a membership directory that provides you with networking contacts. Conferences and monthly meetings offer opportunities to get involved in activities and obtain "visibility" among members. In addition, many associations send out newsletters that list job openings. Finally, associations quite often hold seminars or workshops that can enhance your skills.

Civic organizations for different groups such as veterans, minorities, women, etc. may have services to help you network. You might also want to contact or join organizations such as the Rotary Club, Lions Club, etc. They may offer services that can help you find employment. Check the Internet or look in the yellow pages under "organizations" for listings in your area.

Volunteering for organizations may be beneficial in developing your network, especially if you volunteer in an area that is closely related to the type of work you are seeking. And, since employers frown on long gaps between employment, volunteering also shows that you are working. Remember your volunteer job could develop into a paying job.

Social Networking Could Lead to NOT Working

Researching an organization is necessary in order to make a good impression during an interview. Asking the right questions is as important as knowing how to answer the employer's questions. To do research on an organization you may visit their website, use Internet search engines like Google, read literature published by the company or ask others what they think of the company in general terms. All of this is perfectly acceptable. But what if the employer researches YOU?

According to a recent NACE (National Association for Colleges & Employers) survey, nearly 27% of employers visit social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook or simply "Google" potential candidates to learn about the candidate. Many people never consider the professional implications of what is posted on personal sites. If it is in the public domain, then it is NO longer private!

While we know that work and personal lives are intertwined, we would like to think that each aspect has its own time and place. What you do away from work shouldn't necessarily matter to an employer. But it does. Employers want a candidate that will fit with the organization's culture.

If a potential employer finds explicit photos, racist jokes, political rants or other postings that are generally in poor taste, it is likely that you may never get that first interview. But you can protect your image by using some practical and easy steps to ward off "digital dirt"

- Search your name on the Internet, using a common search engine. If your name pops up on a site and you wish it didn't, contact the webmaster of that site and ask that it be removed.
- Make your social networking website profile as private as possible. Some sites will limit access to your profile for only those people that you grant "permission." This adds a layer of protection from all kinds of searches, including employers. Be aware that this will not necessarily keep everything you post private. Others can still share your information.
- If you keep a public profile, keep it clean. Would you want your grandmother to see your site? Anything you consider questionable should be avoided or restricted to private communications.

Beware! Be Positive! Be Professional!

Advertising

Newspapers

Limiting your job search solely to answering newspaper advertisements is not recommended. Your resume could be one among hundreds received. The key is to respond within 24 hours by sending a cover letter and a resume. It is important to read the help-wanted sections in all of the newspapers in your area so you don't miss any job opportunities. If you are seeking work in a new city, check the Internet for online newspapers as well as job boards.



Keep track of who you have contacted while researching, sending resumes or completing applications. Use a simple file card system or spreadsheet listing: company, phone number, contact name and title, referred by, method of contact, result and follow-up date.

Newspapers provide "hidden" job opportunities so you should always be on the lookout. For instance, read business sections to see if companies are expanding, moving, etc. Also, listen to the news to find out if new businesses are opening. While driving, you may see new businesses being built. Don't wait for the ads to hit the newspapers. Check corporate websites, as the listings for new positions may appear there before they are advertised locally. Send corporate headquarters your resume!

The Internet

Using the Internet for job seeking is a popular method for both job seekers and employers. Use search engines (like Google, AltaVista, Yahoo, etc.) to help you locate job sites. It is important to narrow your search to a specific geographic location and/or employment category, such as accounting/finance. If you don't have access to the Internet at home, you can often access the Internet at a public or college library or the Career Resource Center at your local college.

Web-based job listings are easy to find and respond to. However this easy format should not catch you off guard and allow careless communication. Your online job application or e-mailed resume (attached as a Microsoft Word document) should receive the same care and attention as more traditional formats. Employers may use online tools to screen out applicants that do not follow directions. Errors in submissions are just as damaging online as in person.

Internet security is also a concern. If a job listing is too good to be true, it probably is. Anyone can create a website and solicit your information. Use caution when replying to advertisements and unsolicited contacts. While there are employers that may seek you out, there are also dishonest people that might be "phishing" for your personal information: social security numbers, employment history and other confidential information.

Trade Journals

Most occupations have trade journals (teachers, lawyers, engineers, etc.) that advertise job openings. Also, pay attention to the articles that mention companies who are growing, new companies coming to your area or announcements of promotions that may create vacant positions. These hidden job opportunities are waiting to be discovered. Check with the Reference Librarian at the public library for journals it receives that may list job opportunities. Many of these are also available on the Internet.

Broadcast Marketing & Cold Calling

Broadcasting

Broadcasting is another effective way to increase your network. It simply involves conducting a mass mailing of your cover letter and resume to companies that interest you. Your goal is to intrigue someone enough to give you a call. Your letter should be similar to the cover letter you use when applying for a specific job, except that you are inquiring into possible opportunities. In this letter of inquiry, state what type of employment you are seeking or that you would like to find out about career opportunities in the ____ department. If someone referred you, mention that person's name.

To increase your chances of being hired, write to the person in charge of the department in which you would like to work, rather than a general greeting. To get the name of the department manager, telephone the company and say to the receptionist:

“Good morning, my name is _____. I would like to send some materials to the manager of your marketing department. May I have the manager’s name so I could address it to his/her attention? Could you spell it for me? What is his/her official title? What is the complete address?”

Despite your efforts, your letter may never reach the intended person, because an efficient administrative assistant screened your letter and forwarded it to the personnel office. Therefore, a follow-up telephone call and verbal request for an interview should be made to the department manager about five days after you send your letter and resume. For example:

“Good morning, Mr. or Mrs. _____. My name is _____. I sent you my letter and resume earlier this week regarding opportunities in your department. I am just following up to see if you have received it (wait for an answer). I was hoping to discuss this position further with Mr. or Mrs. _____. Would this be possible?”

There are many places to look for job opportunities besides the yellow pages. For example, there is a journal entitled *Job Choices* that lists names and addresses of companies that typically hire college students. The Chamber of Commerce is another good source for new and expanding businesses in your area. Check out your college’s career resources. Most of those are online.

Cold Calling

Cold calling requires you to contact prospective employers in person or by telephone to find out if there are any job opportunities. Cold calling can be very discouraging. It is a time consuming process. Some people you contact may also be unfriendly and it may be difficult for you to get past the “gate keeper”. Also, personnel departments of large corporations will usually ask you to leave a resume or simply apply online.

Cold calling is more productive if you find out who heads the department of interest to you. Then, you can contact him/her directly by phone or in person. Know that some managers may not appreciate you stopping by without an appointment. If you do decide to meet face-to-face, dress and act as you would for an interview.



Despite your efforts, you may still be referred to the personnel department. Whoever you talk to, try to find out:

- If they anticipate any future openings
- If any other departments are hiring
- If there are any other locations that may be hiring
- If he/she knows of any related businesses that might be hiring

Develop a telephone script before calling an employer. Say something about yourself that would interest the employer. You might mention an accomplishment, for example: increased sales by 20%, lowered employee turnover rate by 10% or implemented new training program, etc.

A common response that you will have to deal with is: "We don't have any job openings." You could respond by saying, "If you do get an opening, I would love to discuss working for your company in the future." Then offer to send a resume and thank the person for his or her time.

Employment Organizations

South Carolina Employment Security Commission

Locate the state employment agency and inquire about their database of local and national job listings. They may offer other services such as resume assistance and/or career counseling. Most states now commonly call these areas "One Stop Centers."

Private Employment Agencies/ Temporary Agencies

Private agencies can help you find permanent and/or temporary employment. Some agencies specialize in job placement for certain occupations, so you may want to use those that concentrate on your field of interest. The employer usually pays their fees, but you should ask before signing any contracts. Read the contract carefully and make sure you understand what you are signing. If you don't, ask questions.

Getting job assignments through a temporary agency is a great way to give you some exposure to different industries and working environments while enhancing your current skills or gaining new ones. They can also help you get your "foot in the door" should a permanent job become available. Additionally, temping gives you contacts for new networking opportunities.

College & University Career Resource Centers

In most cases, employment services at colleges and universities are limited to students and alumni. As a courtesy, college career services offices may allow graduates from other institutions to access job opportunities, but you may not be able to work with a counselor.

Midlands Technical College Student Employment Services offers many wonderful resources online at www.midlandstech.edu/ses. These include: Job postings, Occupational information, Tips on Interviewing, Resumes and Salary Negotiation, as well as notification of special events (i.e. Career Days and other major recruiting).



Co-ops and Internships

Educational employment opportunities exist on most college campuses. In addition to volunteer and service learning projects, which are typically unpaid, there are some paid experiences available to students that aggressively seek out these opportunities. Students that are lacking experience should certainly consider any opportunity to build their work experience, as employers hope to find a balance of education and experience in their applicants.

Internships are structured learning experiences that typically last at least 10 weeks. Co-ops are restricted to certain programs of study and are actually “classes” for which a student must register. Based upon the number of hours worked and the completed learning objectives, college credit hours are awarded. If you are interested in an internship or co-op, contact the Student Employment Office.

Career Fairs

Career fairs can be networking gold mines because they bring large numbers of employers together in one location. Employers may have immediate vacancies they are looking to fill or they may be gathering resumes for future opportunities. Some even conduct interviews on the spot. To capitalize on a career fair keep in mind:

Before

- Get a list of employers that will be attending.
- Research the companies to determine who you want to contact and prioritize because time likely won't allow you to speak with everyone.
- Dress the part – look like you are meeting employers for an interview (because you might!).
- Take copies of your resume (at least one for each company you are interested in – plus extras).
- Consider bringing a portfolio of your work if possible.
- Bring a notebook and a pen.

During

- Approach employers based upon your prioritized list, ensuring that you will speak with all the ones that you consider important.
- Consider many types of employers – don't assume that an employer will/won't be interested in your major.
- Introduce yourself, telling the recruiter your name, program of study and what you are interested in – then ask questions, “What are the opportunities for someone like me?”
- Collect literature, business cards and ask, “What's the next step?”, if it is not made clear.
- Ask for the contact person's name so that you may direct questions or communicate with him/her in the future.

After

- Follow directions regarding how to apply online, if required.
- Follow up – send e-mails, thank you cards or letters to employers you found to be interesting or helpful. Include another copy of your resume with correspondence.

Sample Networking Letter

Samuel Jones

1111 Main Street
Harden, SC 55555

(555) 555-5555 (cell)
joness@bellsouth.net

June 10, 2008

Mrs. Sarah Trapper
Senior Accountant
Carolina Loan Corporation
555 Profit Street, Suite 100A
Dollar, SC 55555

Dear Mrs. Trapper,

I met Mr. Brian Jones at a recent job fair at Midlands Technical College. Mr. Jones mentioned that Carolina Loan Corporation was seeking entry-level accountants. He described a challenging, rewarding position in a company built on teamwork and loyalty. Indeed, your reputation for excellence and adherence to the highest ethical standards make me want to join your team.

Highlights of my skills include:

- Associate Degree in Accounting
- Broad knowledge of accounting principles, including but not limited to: accounts payable/receivable, auditing and financial analysis
- 2+ years of experience using Excel and QuickBooks
- Outstanding communication, research and analytical skills
- 5+ years of customer service experience with 2 years of managerial experience

My attached resume offers further details of my qualifications and abilities. Please let me know if you need any additional information. I would greatly appreciate an opportunity to discuss this position with you in person. You can reach me by phone at (555) 555-5555 or by email: joness@bellsouth.net. I assure you that I can hit the ground running to bring tangible results.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Samuel Jones

Sample Networking Letter

Susan Simpson

203 Constant Avenue
Columbia, SC 55555
simpsons@rr.com
(555) 555-5555

June 10, 2008

Name
Title
Company
Company Address
City, State, Zip

Dear Name:

I am contacting a select group of firms who may be seeking self-motivated paralegals. As a hard-working, dedicated professional, I know the value of teamwork and attention to detail. Furthermore, I believe I could make a strong contribution to ABC Firm's well-known commitment to friendly, efficient client service.

I currently have more than 6 years of experience in proven customer satisfaction. As my resume illustrates, my work history is one of increased responsibility, quick promotions and outstanding performance. In addition, my computer skills are extensive, including proficiency in Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

I will graduate from Midlands Technical College with an Associate's Degree in Paralegal Studies in December 2008. I am available to work full-time starting in December. I believe I have the education and skills to meet your needs and the aptitude to grow with the position.

Thank you for your consideration. Please let me know if you need any additional information. I would welcome any opportunity to discuss upcoming positions at ABC Firm and am available for an interview at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Susan Simpson