

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF A JOB FAIR

Job fairs, sometimes also called career fairs, come in all shapes and sizes, from small community sponsored events to giant regional career expositions held at major convention centers. Job seekers use job fairs to network, make positive first impressions, and learn about companies and what it's like to work for them.

Traditional job fairs consist of booths and/or tables manned by recruiters and other representatives from each organization. For on-campus events, some employers also send alumni representatives. Attendees usually spend a few minutes at each table, talking with company representatives, handing out resumes, and collecting business cards.

Virtual and online job fairs have become popular in recent years. Virtual Job Fairs are conducted online and will give you the chance to review companies, chat with recruiters, sort job options and directly apply to open positions. The advantages to virtual job fairs are that there are no travel expenses and no need to take time off school or work.

Fashions and Accessories

Generally, the appropriate attire for career fair attendees is more relaxed than what you'd wear to an actual job interview. In most cases, "business casual" is the norm. If you're unsure of the dress code (particularly for off campus events), it would be wise to err on the overdressed side – you'll make a better impression if you appear professional. Think of it as a dress rehearsal for your real interviews! Remember to bring copies of your resume (or resumes, if you have several versions tailored to different career choices), a pen or pencil, a folder or portfolio and some sort of note taking device (a paper or electronic pad). Keep track of the recruiters with whom you speak and send follow up notes to the ones who interest you. Don't bring your backpack; it's not only cumbersome for you, but it gets in the way of others and screams "student!" instead of "candidate!"

Have a Game Plan

- Research the companies that will be there. Check out their web sites. The No. 1 complaint from employers is that candidates simply didn't take the time to learn about the company and its opportunities in advance. If you don't have time to research every company, select the top five to 10 companies you'd like to work for and research those.
- Identify companies attending the job fair that are recruiting your major and rank them according to your interest.
- Approach companies that interest you the most first. Make contact and get information. ASK QUESTIONS!

Stop, Look, and Listen

Keep your eyes and ears open and always look engaged and interested. Listen to what your fellow job fair attendees ask and answers they receive. You might pick up some

valuable information, in addition to witnessing some real life career search “dos and don’ts”.

To maximize your career fair experience you must be an active participant and not just a browser. If all you do is stroll around, take company literature and load up on the freebies, you really haven’t accomplished anything worthwhile (unless you’re a collector of key chains, mouse pads and pocket flashlights). It is essential to chat with the company representatives and ask meaningful questions.

Here’s a great bit of career fair advice from Stanford University’s Career Fair guide:

“Create a one minute ‘commercial’ as a way to sell yourself to an employer. This is a great way to introduce yourself. The goal is to connect your background to the organization’s need. In one minute or less, you need to introduce yourself, demonstrate your knowledge of the company, express enthusiasm and interest and relate your background to the company’s need. ”

Career Fair Etiquette

1. Don’t interrupt the employer reps or your fellow job seekers. If someone else is monopolizing the employer’s time, try to make eye contact with the rep to let him or her know that you’re interested in speaking. You may be doing a favor by giving the recruiter an out. If all else fails, move to the next exhibit and plan to come back later.

2. If you have a real interest in an employer, find out the procedures required to secure an interview. At some job fairs, initial screening interviews may be done on the spot. Other times, the job fair is used to pre -screen applicants for interviews to be conducted later (either on campus or at the employer’s site).

3. Sincerity always wins. Don’t lay it on too thick, but don’t be too blasé either. Virtually all employers are looking for candidates with good communication skills.

4. Don’t just drop your resume on employers’ display tables. Try to get it into a person’s hands and at least say a few words. If the scene is too busy and you can’t get a word in edgewise, jot a note on your resume to the effect of, “You were so busy that we didn’t get a chance to meet. I’m very interested in talking to you.” Look around the display for the recruiter’s business card (or at the very least write down his or her name and get some literature with the company’s address) and send a follow up note and another copy of your resume.

Follow Up

- Ask for a business card or contact name
- Inquire about the best method for following up with an organization
- It is important to TAKE INITIATIVE and follow up with opportunities through phone calls, emails, letters – don’t wait for them to contact you if you are interested!

Tips for Conducting Virtual Job Fairs

- Prepare for an online job fair in the same manner that you would a traditional. Or face-to-face job fair. In other words, do your research, have your resume and other paperwork in front of you.
- Dress professionally. While virtual job fairs may seem less formal and more relaxed than traditional job fairs or in-person interviews, they're not. Companies make significant investments in virtual job fairs—in registration and set-up costs, in personnel time and in technology. They take the events very seriously and are looking for job seekers who do the same. Recruiters may want to video chat with you so make sure your room, as well as your personal appearance, are at their best.
- Check your connection. There's almost nothing worse than being in the middle of instant messaging or a video chat conversation and having your internet connection cut out. Before you log on, double check your battery to make sure it's fully charged and make sure you have a good internet connection.
- Be professional. Just because you're sitting on your couch instant messaging doesn't mean you should forget to be professional—remember to address recruiters as "Ms." and "Mr." Be polite. What you should forget is the casual way you communicate with your friends online—don't use emoticons, LOL or type OMG.
- Take notes. This step is perhaps the easiest and most important to accomplish: Take notes - a lot of them, every step of the way.
- Follow-up. Send thank you notes to everyone who takes the time to talk to you. It will impress them and keep your name and resume at the top of their mind.