

JOB SEEKER TIPS: HOW TO SUCCEED AT A JOB FAIR

Takeaway Points

- Research the companies that will be represented at the fair. Look at each company's web site, get a feel for the products or services they offer, and try to remember one or two things that set each apart.
- Craft a brief-but-powerful verbal sales pitch that summarizes the value and abilities you can offer an employer.
- Dress as you would for an interview. Lean toward a conservative outfit, preferably a suit. Keep accessories simple, and be neatly groomed to project a professional impression.
- Job fairs give you solid practice promoting yourself and creating a positive impression.

By: Team Pongo

Career Expo, Recruitment Event, Jobapalooza. Whatever you call it, a job fair is a roomful of mutual potential: employers looking for new hires, and job hunters hoping to *be* hired. Unlike more conventional job search methods, job fairs guarantee a receptive audience for your resume and personal sales pitch. But your warm reception won't last long if you aren't professional, presentable, and well prepared.

What Is a Job Fair?

Job fairs come in all sizes. Most are made up of collections of employers looking to fill all sorts of openings. Some are held by a single organization recruiting for a certain type of position, and others are hosted by college campuses for corporate recruiters looking to fill internships or entry-level jobs.

Employers sponsor or attend job fairs because they provide a great way to meet dozens of potentially qualified job seekers at one time, in one place. Compare that to soliciting resumes, conducting phone screens, and arranging face-to-face interviews, and you can see how a job fair can take employers and job seekers one step ahead in the job search process.

Five Steps to Job Fair Success

Whether you've been in the workforce for many years or you're an inexperienced college student, you need to be as ready to work a job fair as you would be for a job interview.

1. Do your pre-fair research.

- Research the companies that will be represented at the fair. Look at each company's web site, get a feel for the products or services they offer, and try to remember one or two things that set each apart (so you can demonstrate your knowledge when you speak with their reps at the fair). If there are more companies at the fair than you think you'll be able to see, narrow your choices to those that best fit your goals and values.
- Search online for news and blog posts that were written by or about the employers you're interested in. For public companies, check out their recent financial reports to see how well they're doing and where they might be heading (see <http://www.sec.gov/edgar.shtml> for more information).
- Read bios of the higher-level executives. There's a chance you could meet one or more at the fair, so it helps to know something about them.

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2. Prepare and rehearse your “pitch.”

- Craft a brief-but-powerful verbal sales pitch that summarizes the value and abilities you can offer an employer.
- To find your pitch, review your resume and pick out all the valuable skills, talents, experience, and education you bring to the table.
- Decide which of these qualifications will be most relevant to the employer(s) you’re targeting.
- Write a summary of these key factors, keeping your focus on how you can help employers, not how they can help you. Practice the summary with your friends and relatives, and ask for their feedback.
- Rehearse your pitch, revise it, and rehearse it again until it’s a strong, crisp statement you can deliver smoothly and confidently within one to two minutes.

3. Dress conservatively, but comfortably.

- Dress as you would for an interview. Lean toward a conservative outfit, preferably a suit. Keep accessories simple, and be neatly groomed to project a professional impression. Like it or not, employers will be comparing your appearance to that of the rest of the job seekers around you.
- A fresh haircut or manicure can also boost your confidence and help project professionalism.
- You may wind up spending a few hours on your feet, so wear comfortable shoes.
- Don’t spoil your professional image by carrying your supplies in a backpack or overstuffed purse. Borrow or purchase a professional-looking portfolio or briefcase.

4. Have copies of your resume and calling card ready.

- Decide if you want to hand out one “general” resume that can cover several positions, or bring a few different versions, each of which emphasizes a different aspect of your qualifications. Either way, bring plenty of copies.
- Some companies no longer accept resumes at job fairs. Instead, they ask you to submit your resume online after you go home. If this is the case, be sure to get the name and title of the company representative, and mention in your cover letter that you spoke to him/her at the job fair.
- Give each person you meet your calling card (combination business card and mini-resume) so that they have a portable reminder of how to contact you, and a handy place to jot down notes about you.

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Did you know?

Pongo's [Resume Builder](#) provides you with all the tools you need to enhance your job search. You can build as many resumes as you like!

5. Follow up after the fair.

- Within one to two business days, follow up with any employer that interests you and has a copy of your resume. This is a subtle way of helping keep your name fresh in a hiring manager's or HR representative's mind.
- Send handwritten notes to the people you spoke to, thanking them for their time and reiterating your interest in working for their company.

On the surface, a job fair may seem like a lot of effort with little payoff. After all, you're likely not going to be hired on the spot. The event can tie you up for several hours, perhaps requiring you to take time off from work or classes. But it can also be the first step in a process that leads you to the kind of job you're looking for.

Even if they don't directly advance your career, job fairs offer a venue to get solid practice promoting yourself and creating a positive impression. It's a great way to hone your interviewing skills, check out your competition, and refine your business etiquette.

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