



Career Fairs: In the Know Before You Go

Preparation is key to career fair success.

Knowledge is empowering

Career Fairs are a great way to meet a large number of companies looking to hire. As a job seeker, your goal at these events is to quickly and effectively communicate your skills and to convince company representatives that you are a good fit for their team. To make a great impression, have more than just your elevator speech, résumé, and interview attire ready. Research all attending businesses *before* you go. Make sure that when a recruiter asks, “What do you know about us?” you have a solid answer prepared. Bear in mind, how well you respond can make—or break—your chances of landing an interview with that company.

It’s all “About Us”

Before attending a career or job fair, review each company’s website. You don’t need to know every detail about the company, but you’ll better engage a recruiter if they realize you have researched their business. Your extra effort and familiarity with the company will enable you to speak with confidence, and contribute to creating a good first impression. Have an overview of your company of interest. Learn what they do. Read about key business leaders. Look at the “About us” section to understand their history and philosophy. “Press releases” or “News” sections can bring you up to date on company happenings. Understand the business locations: is the company headquartered in the United States and/or do they have an international presence?

Know the company they keep. Research clients and business partners on the company website or in industry news publications. Understand how and with whom the company makes money and conducts business. If they produce a product, find out where those products are sold or distributed.

Understand what makes the company “different.”

It’s unlikely that you’ll need to recite all of the business’s products and services from memory, but you should have a general idea of how that company views itself in the marketplace and what it does better or differently than other businesses. If you’re not clear on this, it could be a good question to ask during a conversation with a recruiter.

Look for current trends and news. It’s good to be up-to-date on all company and industry news, both the good and the bad. However, focus on the good news when speaking to company reps at a career fair. Is the business growing? What new products and services are they focusing on? A quick news search will give you one or two topics to discuss with a recruiter, if needed.

Research common job positions. Know ahead of time what roles the company recruits for and how you might fit in their organization. This is particularly important at a job fair where you will need to quickly present yourself and identify what department(s) you are interested in. Career fairs can be crowded, so prioritize the companies that you speak with based upon if they are a fit for your background and interests.

Listen in

Finally, if you’re waiting in line to meet with a company, pay attention to the conversations ahead of you. Try to determine what’s most important to recruiters based upon their exchanges with other candidates. You’ll be better prepared and save time by not having the recruiter repeat him/herself.

The more you know, the better your chances of impressing a recruiter at a career fair—and being considered for an interview. Your knowledge will affirm your interest and help establish common ground with the hiring manager; let your extra effort be an indicator of your future performance as a potential employee. Speak intelligently, have the credentials, and connect—be remembered more than the next job seeker in line.

So do your career fair homework and take full advantage of these recruiting events: you can make in-person connections, learn from industry professionals, and set yourself apart as a savvy candidate.



i n a nutshell:

Enhance your job candidacy by researching companies *before* you attend a career fair:

- **Review the company website and industry publications**
- **Check out “About Us,” press and news releases**
- **Know the clients; study trends**
- **Understand what differentiates the company from others**
- **Have facts and figures handy; give your checklist of employer details a quick review before approaching the recruiter**
- **Listen and learn from other prospectives’ conversations**
- **Focus on the recruiter; this is your opportunity to learn**

Be smart! Do your research and tip the hiring scales in your favor.