

CAREER CORNER

#7 IN A SERIES

Research Before the Job Interview: Your Future Depends On It!

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Arriving at an interview informed and inquisitive can be the distinguishing factor between you and other candidates.

One of the highlights of any job search is landing that long-awaited interview with a coveted employer. Once presented with that opportunity, you will then have to demonstrate that you are the best fit for the position. To do this, you should prepare for the job interview by researching your potential employer. In other words, gain as much knowledge as possible about the organization or company and its broader industry. This research could mean the difference between a job offer and a rejection letter.

Why Research an Employer?

There are several advantages to conducting research prior to the interview. Employers want to know what you have to offer them and how you will fit into their organizational structure and culture. Arriving at an interview informed and inquisitive can be the distinguishing factor between you and other candidates. Establishing a strong knowledge base about the organization will demonstrate that you cared enough to learn something about them. It shows the employer that you are well-informed, interested, motivated, professional, determined, and have a strong work ethic. It will also bolster your confidence because the information will enable you to ask more intelligent questions and respond effectively to those that are posed to you. Other points to consider while researching are the potential for long-term career opportunities and whether the position and the organization are a good match for you, both personally and professionally.

What Do You Need To Know?

When researching any company, organization, or institution, some of the basic employer information you should secure prior to the interview includes:

- Name and location(s)
- Products or services
- Size of organization
- Growth history
- Potential for growth
- Public or private ownership
- Parent company/subsidiaries
- Financial picture (assets, stocks, mergers)
- Reputation
- Current career opportunities
- Current problems
- Noteworthy new developments



Once you have these rudimentary facts about the organization, you can expand your search to the broader context of the employer's industry. For example, if you are interested in interviewing for a position with Hewlett-Packard, you should have a basic understanding of the computer services industry as a whole. Essential information to familiarize yourself with includes:

- Major competitors
- Historical trends
- New developments/current topics in the field

As you research, consider the type of employer that interests you. It might be a large public organization or a small private-sector company. You may want an employer that supports diversity initiatives, ecological programs, continuing education, or on-site daycare and other benefits for employee families. All of this information is vital in preparing for the interview and determining if the employer would be a good match.

Where Can You Find This Information and More?

The best place to begin your research is to go directly to the employer's Web site. You can collect an abundance of information by thoroughly reviewing their site. In addition to learning about the employer's products, services, or other basics, look over the Web site to gain an overall impression. Try to locate their annual report, which will provide pertinent financial information. This can often be found under "Investment Relations" or "Investment Publications." Look for areas of the site that say "New" or "What's New." Here you can find the most current information on new developments within the organization.

View links to “human resources” or “careers” to learn about job opportunities and download job applications. Note the format of the Web site. How does their Web site reflect who they are? Is it well organized or difficult to navigate? Is it engaging or dull? Conservative or liberal? Reviewing the employer’s Web site is like reading an online brochure for the organization. Take the time to read it carefully.

After researching the employer’s Web site and those of their competitors, you can move on to external sources for other perspectives and more in-depth views of the organization. Some additional factors to explore in your expanded search include views of their culture, financial status, and comparisons within the industry in general. The Internet serves as an excellent vehicle through which to obtain these outside profiles of the employer. There are many Web sites that can aid you in finding material such as financial reports, industry trends, and insider reports on the employer (see Research Resources).

Rounding Out Your Research

Although the Internet can be a very useful tool when researching employers, you should also supplement your online search with other sources. There are also many print resources that provide valuable information on organizations and industries. Many of these can be found in your local or college library (see Research Resources). Another easy way to get more information is to ask the employer’s human resource department, or the person who sets up your interview, to send you any orientation materials or other literature that describes the organization. For another perspective, don’t forget to use your own personal network. Talk with friends and relatives, professors and professionals who are in the field or have contacts in the industry.

Once you have completed gathering all your information about the employer, organize your notes and materials into one file that you can bring with you to the interview. This way you can review the information prior to the interview, cite pertinent facts, and ask well-prepared questions. The employer will be impressed with your exemplary research!

Chart Your Own Course

Taking the time to research the employer and the industry is a key component for a successful and fruitful job interview. You will surely stand out as an informed and confident candidate. Most importantly, you will be well equipped to decide if the job is the right one for you. It’s worth the effort – your future depends on it!

Research Resources:

INTERNET RESOURCES:

Guide to Researching Companies, Industries, and Countries

http://www.quintcareers.com/researching_companies.html

Researching Companies on the Internet – A Tutorial:

<http://www.learnwebskills.com/company/index.html>

Hoover’s Online

<http://www.hoovers.com/>

Plunkett Research, Ltd.

<http://www.plunkettresearch.com/channels.htm>

Better Business Bureau

<http://www.bbb.org/>

Annual Report Resource Center, IRIN

<http://www.irin.com/cgi-bin/main.cgi>

Vault.com (Why Work For Us?)

<http://www.vault.com/companies/searchcompanies.jsp>

Wetfeet.com (Company Profiles, Insider Guides)

<http://wetfeet.com/research/companies.asp>

Industry Research Desk

<http://www.virtualpet.com/industry/>

U.S. Industrial Outlook

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m3617

Standard & Poor’s Industry Surveys

http://sandp.ecnext.com/coms2/page_industry

BUSINESS RELATED NEWS, MAGAZINES, AND NEWSPAPERS:

Barron’s Magazine

Business Week

Forbes

USA Today

Wall Street Journal

The Internet resources listed above may change over time.

Enrolled students and alumni can access the most current information as well as many additional career-related links on the Excelsior College Web site. Go to **www.excelsior.edu**, then log in and click on the Career Resources link on your MyEC page; for graduates, click on the Alumni Connection.

Questions or comments about this article?

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