

Why Attend a Job Fair?

Many students feel discouraged when they take the time to attend a job fair, only to have employers tell them to apply online. Employers encourage candidates to apply or post a resumé online because technology contributes to a more efficient and cost effective application process. However, both online and personal contacts with an organization are important aspects of the job search. What are the advantages of each?

The online application process...

- Helps you to better present your qualifications at the job fair. After completing some online research of the organization and reviewing its application process, you are better prepared to approach the recruiter at the job fair.
- Helps you to present how your qualifications meet the employer's needs on your resumé and in your brief encounter with a recruiter at the job fair.
- Improves your chances of getting a job. The more contact that you have with an organization, the more opportunities you have to present your qualifications.
- Apply online BEFORE the job fair to make your conversations with the employers more productive and interesting AT the job fair. Refuse to be turned away when someone says "you need to apply online"... you can say "I already have, and I have some questions for you!"

A job fair...

- Is a great opportunity to meet employers. Where else can you see many employers in one location, or be seen by them?
- Is a necessary evil, but also an investment in your future. You probably won't get a job offer at a fair, but you will make some contacts that may benefit you in the future.
- Introduces you to the realities of the job search. When you're in "a sea of candidates," you become aware of the competition and you get a better idea of what it takes to get a job.
- Provides you with a chance to explore employers and career opportunities that you never may have thought about.
- Prompts you to do something about your resumé writing and interviewing skills.
- Provides you with an opportunity for face-to-face contact with a recruiter and a chance to polish your networking skills (no matter how brief your contact is).
- Is a great opportunity for situational leadership. Take charge and assert yourself. Get to be known!

Face-to-face contact with employers is crucial in a competitive job market. You may send out hundreds of "faceless" resúmes or online applications, but direct interaction with employers at a job fair allows you to deliver a "30-second commercial" selling your skills and personal qualities to the employer, ask questions, and make a great impression! Also, keep in mind that employers pay a fee to attend a job fair – if they didn't think it was beneficial for them to meet candidates in person and that this could all be done through a website, then they wouldn't come!

Some Words of Advice

As the Boy Scouts motto states, "Be prepared!" At any time, you should be prepared to apply online, complete a hard-copy employment application, ask and answer questions, present references or other documents, attend an information session, have dinner with a recruiter, and/or participate in an interview. Depending on the employer, all of these steps may be part of the application and hiring process. During your job search, including your attendance at a job fair, you need to be prepared for any situation that could contribute toward securing a job.