

Researching employers Worthwhile part of job search

In today's competitive job market, a successful job search campaign can depend on your knowledge of a prospective employer. Such knowledge does three things: the fact that you've taken the time to find out about the company indicates enthusiasm and initiative; it allows you to decide whether the job is for you — to compare your interests and goals with those of the company, and it provides a common base to ask and answer questions in your job interview. It is a real confidence-builder — both of self-confidence and that of your prospective employer.

Remember, the research is for your benefit. If nothing else, it allows you to answer the fundamental question: Do I want to work in this organization?

So where do you start? First, establish what you want to know about the company. Even if you don't think it is important to know how long the company has been in operation, your interviewer might think you should know. Find answers to the basic questions on the company and tailor the rest of your research to the specific job that you're interested in.

KEY QUESTIONS

- ▼ Is the company a private or public corporation?
- ▼ What does it do?
- ▼ What products or services does it provide?
- ▼ How long has it been in operation?
- ▼ How many people does it employ?
- ▼ What positions are available?
- ▼ Who are the key people?
- ▼ Is the company growing?
- ▼ Are there plans for expansion?
- ▼ Where is the company (and its subsidiaries) located?
- ▼ What is the current financial condition (sales, assets, earnings)?

ANSWERS AVAILABLE

Answers to these questions can be found in many places. Large companies have information available, such as annual reports, recruiting brochures, product profiles or company abstracts. Smaller firms are harder to research, but you can still find answers to some basic questions:

- ▼ How long has the firm been in one location?
- ▼ Does the firm often advertise for staff?



Sometimes smaller firms are easier to approach and you might be able to speak to someone who works there.

If you are a high school or university student, many educational institutions host career days which let employers introduce themselves and field questions regarding their organization. In many cases, these information sessions are held early in the academic year. Job fairs hosted by campus placement or

government agencies, such as Employment and Immigration Canada, provide similar employer/student contact.

LIBRARIES ARE GOOD SOURCES

Libraries provide resources for further research. Directories, corporate abstracts, annual reports, videos and business publications are available. Directories offer an overview of companies. Some national directories include:

- ▼ Canadian Trade Index
- ▼ Dun & Bradstreet International

ernments also issue directories of companies.

The Blue Book of Canadian Business analyses the role of 130 major Canadian companies. The Financial Post publishes a list of the top 500 Canadian companies yearly, in its summer edition. Both resources offer similar information to that found in annual reports, but with an analysis of the company's strengths and weaknesses. Most libraries have copies of these publications and also try to keep up-to-date annual reports in hard copy and on microfiche.

You can examine business journals and newspapers for the most current developments within a company and also to find out about private companies which do not have to publicize their financial status.

INFORMATION SURVEY

You can conduct your own effective information survey. Before you start, make sure you have your script of questions ready. If you're using the telephone, remember the following:

- ▼ Find a quiet place with no interruptions.
- ▼ Be friendly and cheerful.
- ▼ Talk slowly and clearly.
- ▼ If people are busy, ask when you can call back.
- ▼ Make sure you talk to the people who hire or train employees.
- ▼ Practice with a friend before you actually call an employer.

In-person interviews must be set up differently. If you are planning a short survey (five to 10 min.), you have the choice to set up an appointment or make a cold call. With a long survey (20 to 25 min.), you must arrange an appointment time.

PICK THE RIGHT PERSON

Again, make sure you are talking to the person who does the hiring or training. Dress as if it is an actual job interview and be sure to you arrive on time. Don't be afraid of these surveys; remember people like to talk about where they work and what they do.

You will probably find a combination of methods will provide the most answers. This approach will ensure your information will be focused on the specific job you are interested in. If you do your homework, you will be prepared for your interview and also for the job, should you be offered a position.