



## **How to Get the Most Out of Job Fairs**

**By: Linda Matias**



Job fairs are a great way to meet potential employers. Instead of cold calling or surfing the Internet, job fairs offer the chance to chat with hiring managers in person and pass around your resume or business card. There are several ways to make the most of a job fair:

### **What To Do Before You Get There**

#### *Make a List*

Before you even arrive at the job fair, get the list of participating employers. These can be found in the newspaper (usually in the classified job section or business section) or online. Make a list of employers you want to make contact and be sure to visit them first. Some employers leave job fairs early and you don't want to miss your opportunity to interview with them.

#### *Conduct research on the company*

Without a doubt, you definitely want to know the current company statistics and what projects they are working on. This information can be found online at their web site, company materials, the newspaper or the library. If you attend the job fair without knowledge of the company, you may find yourself in an interview at the booth, not able to answer their questions!

#### *Update and print several copies of your resume*

A few days before the job fair, spend some time updating your resume. Once you have made updates, have someone else look over the resume and make suggestions. After making changes, print several copies on good quality resume paper and keep them in a folder to prevent them from getting wrinkled, stained or torn. Also, if you have business cards, put those in your wallet to pass out, or staple them to the corner of your resumes.

#### *Create a sound bite*

A sound bite is a brief introduction (30-90 seconds) about your knowledge, skills and abilities. Developing a sound bite educates the listener about your qualifications, reminds you of your qualifications, and helps you keep your focus. It will also calm your job fair jitters. It can be intimidating to approach employers, even in the job



fair environment.

### **Once You Are There**

*Be considerate of the employer's/recruiter's time*

Don't monopolize their time. They want to meet as many applicants as possible.

Look for signals that you have overstayed your welcome. Non-verbal cues may include the employer looking away, glancing at their watch or shifting in their chair.

*Network with other jobseekers*

You can find out valuable information from other job seekers. Not all jobs are advertised and your peers may be aware of job openings that you had no knowledge of.

*Free resume evaluations*

Some fairs may offer resume critiques by a professional resume writer. Be sure to stop by and drop off your resume for free professional advice.

### **When You Get Home**

*Write thank-you notes*

Before you leave the fair, be sure to ask employers for their business cards and then write a letter thanking them for their time. Most job seekers won't take the time to send a thoughtful note. If you do, you will stand out from the rest.

**For Those You Couldn't Meet**

If you didn't have time to get around to all the booths, send your resume and cover letters to those employers/recruiters you didn't meet.

### **Key Points to Remember**

You will not be hired at a job fair. This is an opportunity for you to meet employers and network. When you are approaching employers, be confident and casual. They can sense desperation. You may not be interviewed at a job fair. Job fairs can have a "zoo-like" atmosphere and may not be conducive to a formal interview. Remember that attending a job fair is one tool in getting a job. Keep networking, sending out resumes and applying for jobs! Most of all, stay positive and know your new job could be right around the corner.

Recognized as a career expert, Linda Matias brings a wealth of experience to the career services field. She has been sought out for her knowledge of the employment market, outplacement, job search strategies, interview preparation, and resume writing, quoted a number of times in The Wall Street Journal, New York Newsday, Newsweek, and HR-esource.com. She is president of CareerStrides and the National Resume Writers' Association.

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