

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO VIRTUAL CAREER FAIRS **15 TIPS TO ENSURE SUCCESS**

What can you expect at a virtual career fair?

Virtual career fairs are just like traditional ones, where employers gather to meet with job seekers and discuss employment opportunities. The only difference here is that it's held virtually on an interactive platform. Virtual career fairs feel similar to online discussion posts.

After you log in a virtual fair, you can choose to "enter" various rooms within the virtual career fair. Each room houses a different employer participating in the fair. When you enter a room, the employer receives a notification. Others already in the virtual room may be in the midst of a conversation and you are welcome to introduce yourself and chime in. You may also be invited to chat privately with an employer, where you may ask about open positions, details about the organization, etc... During these private chats, the employer will ask you questions about your qualifications, similar to questions you'd received in a screening interview. Employers may even want to video chat with you face to face.

Before the fair

First things first, remember to register for the fair ahead of time. Take some time to set up your profile and navigate around on the platform, so that you aren't stressed out when the fair begins.

Tip 1: Research participating organizations

After registering, take some time to review the organizations attending the career fair. Each organization will have a profile page where you can learn about the company. Some organizations will post the positions that they have open on the career fair platform, others will direct you to their website or Handshake. Create a list of the top 10-20 companies that you want to speak with during the fair so that can prioritize your time.

Tip 2: Update your Resume

Because you're going to provide your resume to employers you meet with, you're will want it to be up-to-date and spotless for the optimal first impression. Take the time to customize your resume for the positions you are interested in. Don't forget to have your resume reviewed by Business Career Services. If the platform allows, upload your resume to your account so it is accessible and ready to hand over to any employers you meet with at the career fair.

Tip 3: Update your Online Profiles

Many of the employers attending the fair will utilize Handshake to post their positions, screen applicants and collect job applications. Remember to update your Handshake profile so that it reflects your current experiences, as a recruiter may utilize Handshake to review and screen candidates. While you are at it, update your LinkedIn Profile as well. You may want to connect with employers after the fair on LinkedIn.

Tip 4. Practice your Pitch

It can be intimidating to enter a chat room with conversations already in progress. How will you introduce yourself to an employer when you enter the chat room? Your name, major, and the opportunities you are interested in are good starting points. Once you've introduced yourself, ask a question to get the conversation going. Prior to the fair, type up customized versions of your "elevator pitch" in a word document. This will enable you to copy and paste your introduction into the chat room. Error free and conciseness are key, so make sure you proofread beforehand.

Tip 5. What to chat about

When you are in the chatroom, all conversations are public. Before you ask a question, you may want to peruse the ongoing chat to see what else has been asked and review the responses. What questions should you ask an employer in the general chat room? Here are a few to get you started: "How would you describe the company culture?" "What is one of the biggest challenges of the job?" "What skills do you look for most in a candidate for X position?" "What projects do your interns work on?" If a recruiter is interested in you, they may invite you to a "private" chat, so you'll want to have questions prepared for this as well.

Tip 6. Prepare responses to interview questions

Your goal with an online job fair is to chat one-on-one with recruiters in a private chat -- and by chat, we mean participate in a screening interview. You should prepare short accomplishment stories and responses to typical screening interview questions. Prepare your responses ahead of time-- type up what you want to say to some of the common questions. Keep responses concise utilizing the STAR format. Some questions to think through: Why are you interested in the position/company? How is your previous experience relevant? Tell me about your leadership experience. Tell me about a project that that challenged you.

Tip 7. Make sure your technology is ready to go

You'll want to make sure your device is capable of supporting you in the virtual career fair. For the best experience in the fair, use a desktop, laptop or tablet rather than a smartphone that you'll need to hold throughout the fair. You may also want headphones if you cannot attend from a quiet, private location. Check your camera and sound to ensure that both work properly before the fair.

Tip 8. Scout a location in a distraction-free environment

You will also want to plan out where you'll be attending the virtual career fair from. A quiet location is ideal—and camera capabilities mean that you'll want to ensure it's distraction-free (i.e. clean and appropriate) for employers. Turn on your camera and check out the background to make sure it's looks ok.

At the virtual career fair

Once you log in, how can you stand out from the crowd at a virtual career fair?

Tip 9. Dress for Success

You can expect to interact with employers at a virtual career fair primarily through chat functions. However, some employers may wish to speak with you face to face. Make the most out of this opportunity to make a connection by looking professional and presentable (at least from the waist up). As a bonus, dressing professionally will help you to feel confident and engaged in the process.

Tip 10. Be ready to put yourself out there

At virtual career fairs, it's all the more important to exert yourself to make connections. Once an employer engages you in a chat, the ball is in your court to introduce yourself and ask questions about the organization and open positions. Attendees must present themselves to employers and feel confident doing so. Lurking in the background won't make a favorable impression.

Tip 11. Use clear, professional business communication

Being a virtual career fair, much of your communication will be done through written interactions in the chat function of the platform. To make a great first impression, you'll want to demonstrate articulate written communication. Text lingo, emoticons and slang aren't appropriate. If you have pre-written your responses to questions, be sure to customize them based on the position and the current conversation you are having with an employer.

Tip 12. Demonstrate strong body language in video chats

Just like in a traditional career fair, you'll want to present yourself as a confident and competent job seeker. One way that employers pick up on this is through your body language. If you're on a video chat with a recruiter at the virtual career fair, you'll want to stay conscious of your body language. On camera, remember to hold eye contact with the employers you're interacting with. Speak clearly and avoid slouching. Keep hand gestures to a minimum so you don't distract the person you're talking to or block your face from the camera.

Tip 13. Ask for next steps and contact information

When talking to recruiters, don't hesitate to be forward and offer to send a copy of your resume. You can also ask about the next steps in the process—whether that means filling out a job application or sitting down for a formal interview. Before parting ways with a recruiter, be sure to take down their contact information. Some employers may have it uploaded and accessible within the virtual career fair platform. If not, ask how you can stay in touch. You'll need this information for following up after the virtual career fair. You may also be able to save your chat, so you may want to do this to keep a record of who you've spoken to and what you discussed.

After the virtual career fair

Don't let your efforts go to waste by neglecting to follow up after the virtual career fair.

Tip 14. Reach out the next day with a thank you

Whether it's an email or hand-written thank-you note, be sure to reach out to the connections you made at the career fair, thanking them for their time and further expressing your interest. You can also reach out through LinkedIn.

Because recruiters at career fairs come in contact with many candidates and resumes, you can use this chance to refresh their memory and remind them about why you're a promising candidate, why you're interested in the company and the skills or experience you bring to the table.

You may also want to send them your resume if you haven't already, along with work samples if relevant.

Tip 15: Apply!

If you haven't yet applied to the jobs you are interested in, make sure to do this in a timely manner. *(And don't forget to check your email/voicemail regularly, you never know when you'll be invited for an interview!)*