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Career Advice & Articles

Make Company Research the Bedrock of Your Job Hunt

Research skills may be one of the most important tools in your job-search arsenal, proving to be a potent weapon in identifying and securing the best employment opportunities.

While in the past, conducting in-depth research was a complex and time-consuming endeavor, technology has made the job easier, more accurate and more effective. Today, a savvy executive candidate can access critical business information by tapping into online business sites, company websites and library databases with the click of a mouse. And, in many cases, the information is free.

Leveraging Websites and Databases

When beginning your hunt, consider using a search engine, which can provide a broad range of authoritative information on industry trends and general company profiles. Because search engines gather information from thousands of sources, they can alert the astute researcher to company lawsuits, financial difficulties, merger and expansion activities, and even information on potential front-runners for a given executive position.

Company websites also are great sources of information. They often include details about the organization, open positions and benefits of working for the firm. Company web pages also frequently contain financial reports, which can serve as a gauge for the overall health of a company while also possibly revealing preliminary information about executive compensation and upcoming organizational projects.

In addition, don't overlook your city's library as a strong source for ferreting out company research. There, you can find a wide variety of directories and subscriptions to business publications from markets around the world, providing you with data on regional firms that is unavailable through other means.

Mining Your Network

Also remember that keeping your ear attuned to your professional network can add substantially to your research efforts. Tapping your web of friends and colleagues can yield job leads, especially since most high-level positions are filled by word-of-mouth. Perhaps more importantly, these relationships can provide you with firsthand information about a potential employer's operations, corporate culture and political workings — information that is not easily gleaned from other sources. Here are some approaches to take to maximize your networking efforts:

- Consider taking your network online. Websites such as LinkedIn are fast becoming virtual meeting grounds for job seekers and recruiters. Joining an online network can connect you to peers from around the world and allow you to chat with contacts from the convenience of your own home or office 24 hours a day.
- Attend conferences and seminars outside your field. Approaching the professionals you meet at these_ fei can clue you in to new opportunities — such as an executive position in operations rather than finance — or provide you with a different perspective on a company for which you are considering working.
- Utilize an executive search, recruitment or staffing firm. Due to their wide web of contacts and established relationships with industry leaders, professional recruiters often have an inside view of local firms. They also can help you pinpoint executive opportunities that few others are aware of.

Hiring managers expect that you will be well versed in the intricacies of their companies and may not consider you for the position you seek if you come across as less than knowledgeable. In addition, not taking the time to conduct the necessary research prior to an employment interview could lead you to take the wrong job. So start early and practice for yourself the same due diligence that you would undertake for your company. You will impress the interviewer with your depth of knowledge and have confidence that you are making the right career decision.

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