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How to get the most out of Career Fairs

Career fairs are a great way to connect students with employers. It's not often that you get the opportunity to compare dozens of employers all in the one place at the same. For employers, it is a chance to promote what their organisation does and what opportunities there are for graduates and pre-graduates.

As an employer, the students who stand out from the crowd at career fairs have clearly done some preparation to ensure that they get the most out of the opportunity. Below are some tips on why it's important to attend, and what to think about before, during and after the career fair.

Why bother going?

Final year students

- To take advantage of the chance to meet employers face to face. Practice making a good impression.
- To learn more about what employers have to offer and what they are looking for. Ask about all the things that you can't find out from their web site.
- To talk to recent graduates and find out exactly what their job involves. Find out if its really what you are interested in.

Pre-final year students

- To learn more about different types of jobs and employers
- To get career information to help inform your decisions about which subjects to take and how far to pursue your studies before you apply for jobs.

Before the career fair

- Find out which employers are attending.
- Do some research on the employers attending and make a list of essential and desirable employers to meet.
- Plan your visit so that you have enough time to talk to everyone on your list.
- Update and print your CV so that you can refer to it or provide it to an employer if the opportunity arises.
- Think about what information you want to find out from each employer.

- Prepare an introduction to make a good impression. It might sound something like this:
 “Hi. I’m Neville Henderson, a final year BCA student majoring in Human Resources. I see from your web site that you take on students from all disciplines. I would really like to know more about what areas of your organisation I could apply my studies?”
- Dress sensibly – ditch the jandals and singlet and wear something a bit more smart casual.

At the career fair

- Make a good impression – speak clearly and confidently, offer a handshake and make eye contact. Leave the chewing gum, and the four letter words at the door to ensure that you are remembered for the right reasons.
- Grab a business card to help you remember the name of the person that you talked to at each stand – you may well be meeting them again for interviews further down the track. Introducing yourself using their name makes a great impression.
- Don’t get too distracted by giveaways – your aim should be to learn about prospective employers and evaluate who you might like to work for rather than trying to collect as many free things as possible.
- Ask for copies of graduate programme flyers and useful company information (e.g. annual reports). These are great for helping to complete your application and prepare for interviews.
- Keep an open mind about employers that you don’t know much about. Find out what they have to offer – you might be surprised. For example, at the Ministry of Economic Development, we don’t just take on economics graduates, but graduates who have studied law, commerce, political studies, geology, physics, philosophy, psychology ...
- Make brief notes of key information that you learn about each employer – this will make it easier to remember things when you come to apply for jobs.

After the career fair

- Review your brief notes and summarise what you learned, and what your next steps are.
- Follow up with an email to the person you talked to if you have any further questions.
- Find out more about the employers that you are most interested in from their web site, the media or their annual report.
- Put your new found knowledge into practice when you apply for summer internships and graduate jobs.