Researching Potential Employers:
Finding Your Best Fit

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Why Research Employers?

You may research employers for any number of reasons: to find out more about a specific region, a specific industry, a specific position, or a specific organization. If you know where you want to work, like Atlanta, you may research employers by location. You may want to work in an industry, like healthcare, and you can locate information this way as well. If you are interested in a position like nursing, you can also research employers by positions available. Finally, when you have identified the organization(s) you want to work for, you can begin to search for information by the employer's name.

Employers are looking for someone with a real interest in their organization, and research reflects interest and enthusiasm. A favorite question of employers is "Why are you interested in our organization?" When you know something about an organization, you can describe in more relevant terms how you could work within that environment or how your skills could help the employer be successful. Being familiar with an organization can also help you answer questions like "Will my personality fit in this environment?" and "Do my goals correspond to the promotional structure?"

There is more to many organizations than meets the eye. When you assume that you know enough about a potential employer without researching it, you could be overlooking important information. For example, most of us know that the Walt Disney Company owns many theme parks and resorts. But, did you know that they also own ABC television network? You may be talking with a subsidiary of a much larger organization and not realize it.

Researching employers and asking informed questions can help you decide if an employer is a good fit for you. The information you gather about employers will strengthen your position and help you make a positive first impression in an interview. Targeted questions resulting from your research can also provide you with answers that can help you decide whether or not to accept a specific offer of employment.

What's Inside

Types of Employers to Research

For Profit: Operated mainly to make profit for owners and/or shareholders

- Publicly/privately held: Easier to find information on publicly held companies as they report to the government; should generally be free, sometimes not up-to-date
- Parent/subsidiary/division/affiliate: Generally easier to find parent company information
- Domestic/international/multinational: Domestic information usually easier to find than international
- Large corporation/small business: Large, nationally known employer information easier to find than local or regional
- Well-established/"emerging": The older the organization, the more possible resources exist

Not For Profit: Operated mainly for religious, charitable, scientific, public safety, literary, or educational purposes, exempt from paying federal income tax on net earnings

- Educational organizations: School boards, colleges, universities, consulting institutions, etc.
- Professional and cultural associations: American Psychological Association, etc.
- Social service agencies: United Way, YMCA, American Friends Service Committee, etc.
- Environmental and political organizations: Environmental Defense Fund, Greenpeace, etc.
- Foundations (educational/philanthropic/research): Foundation Center, etc.

Governmental Organizations:

- Local: Public Works, Police and Neighborhood Services Center, County Public Health Unit, etc.
- State: Department of Environmental Protection, Agency for Health Care Administration, etc.
- National: Department of Agriculture, Internal Revenue Service, etc.
- International: United Nations, International Monetary Fund, International Peace Academy, etc.

Types of Employer Information Resources

- Primary (information directly from the employer): Interviews, documents such as annual reports, and websites
- Secondary (information about the employer): Books, articles, directories, databases
- Bibliographic (reference guides and directories): Indexes to primary and secondary sources

Resources on employers may be organized by numerical hierarchical codes developed by the US government. Currently the NAICS (North American Industry Classification System) is in use; however, the older system of codes, the US Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) System may still be utilized by some business information resources. NAICS Codes are compatible with United Nations International SIC and fall into 20 sectors such as Health Care and Social Assistance, Management of Companies and Enterprises, Retail Trade, Construction, and Manufacturing.

Information Interviews

One route to researching a potential employer or industry is through informal sources of information. The information interview, an appointment set up to obtain "insider" employer or industry information, may provide answers to your questions that print or electronic resources do not cover. Learning about an employer's needs and how you might fit in will help you later in the job interview and in deciding whether to accept a position with the employer.

Unlike the job interview, an information interview depends on you to initiate contact with an employer and schedule the appointment. If you already have a referral through friends, family, former employers, etc., you can call the employer directly to set up an appointment at his or her convenience. If you don't have a referral, you may network with faculty or other university personnel, contact professional organizations, or call the employer and ask the receptionist for suggestions. FSU students can use ProfessioNole for resources, found at **http://career.fsu.edu/professionole/students.cfm**.

Preparing for the information interview and knowing how to conduct yourself during the appointment is very important, as it is different from a job interview! In The Career Center Library, ask a career advisor for the two-page handout on Information Interviews (found in the Interviewing Section of Mobile Files, Module 13). The handout describes how to arrange and prepare for the information interview and contains possible questions and tips you may use.
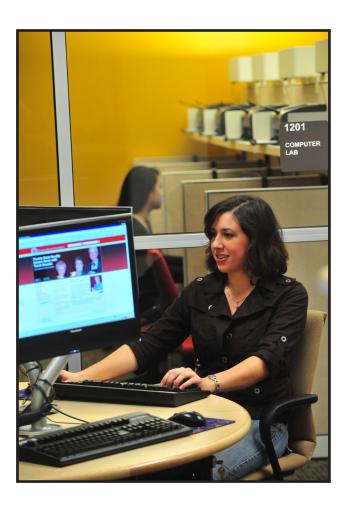
Organizing Your Data

Start early when researching a specific employer. You may find a lot of information that needs sorting through to identify important facts. On the other hand, you may not find any information and need to make phone calls or set up information interviews.

Once you've started, you'll want to keep your facts organized by maintaining a filing system. Keeping a file on each employer will make interview preparation easier. You may also want to create an interview summary sheet to record facts for a possible interview with an employer.

Finally, part of your research data will focus on personal criteria and how an employer meets those criteria. Once you decide what employment factors are important to you, i.e., work activities, career path, values, etc., you can create a criteria summary sheet like the one on the next page. This will allow you to record pertinent facts about employers you are researching.

Employer Facts To Know

The information to the right may be used as a checklist for gathering data on potential employers. The earlier you start researching, the more categories you will be able to cover. Remember, not all facts may be relevant, depending on the type of employer you are researching.

Employer Fact Checklist

Basic Facts
- ☐ Name, address, telephone
- ☐ Complete product line or service
- ☐ Number of plants, stores, outlets, employees
- ☐ Geographical locations
- ☐ Location of corporate headquarters
- ☐ Parent or subsidiary company information

Employer History/Image
- ☐ Industrial Outlook
- ☐ Organization's national and local reputation, awards, other recognition, etc.
- ☐ Associations they are actively involved with
- ☐ Major competitors (How can you help the employer gain a competitive edge?)

Financial Information
- ☐ Stock prices if relevant
- ☐ Size of firm and industry
- ☐ Potential growth
- ☐ Annual sales growth for past five years

Philosophy/Goals
- ☐ Mission statement - should reflect current strategies and long-term goals
- ☐ Biographical information on CEO, etc. - salary, age, education
- ☐ Political, research or social interests/financial support

Professional/Work Environment Concerns
- ☐ Organizational structure
- ☐ Position descriptions
- ☐ Types of training programs
- ☐ Salary and benefits
- ☐ Typical career paths
- ☐ Employer's review or evaluation process
- ☐ Background of entry level positions and managers
- ☐ Employee morale

Criteria Summary Procedure

There are six basic steps in determining which employers meet your personal criteria. By using a form similar to the example below, you may more clearly make decisions on whether to interview with certain employers or on whether to accept or reject specific offers of employment.

1. Identify what types of Information about the employer or the position are important for you to know, and rank them in order of importance from left to right.

2. What are your Preferences with respect to these factors? This step includes examining your values, interests, preferred work style and environment, etc.

3. Identify the Employers you are currently considering.

4. Research and record specific Data that's important to you for each employer.

5. Compare the employers based on your results.

6. Determine which factors are negotiable. Remember that in every decision, there will be compromises!

Example Criteria Summary

1. **Information**	Starting $	Location	Activities	Work Style	Special
2. **Preferences**	$30,000	GA, CA	Sales, Mgmt	Team	

3. Employers	4. Research Data				
PharmCo	$27,000	FL, GA, AL	Pharm, Sales	Yes	Environment
RetailCo	$29,000	Nationwide	Retail Chain	Yes	Beagle Award
JoeCo	$25,400	CA	Etc.	No	Joe's there
Stuff4You	$27,500	PA, NY		Pairs	Etc.
GeorgiaInc.	$28,000	GA		Sometimes	

Your Criteria Summary

1. **Information**					
2. **Preferences**					

3. Employers	4. Research Data				

Sample Employer Resources

The following are examples of information resources you can use to identify types of employers, review employer profiles, and research employers in-depth. Where necessary, step-by-step directions are provided on how to maximize your search for information.

Books, documents, and guides: Focused on employers, states/cities, industries, or products

- **Career Center Library**: Reference books with career-specific employer information
- **Career Key**: Visit career.fsu.edu/careerkey to search the Career Center's holdings
- **FSU Libraries**: www.lib.fsu.edu
  - **To access books on one specific employer**:
  1. Click the "Find Books, Journals, and More" link
  2. Use the "Search box to search the employer's name
  - **To access GOINGGLOBAL electronic guides on international employment:**
  1. Log in to your Blackboard account
  2. Select the "Secure Apps" tab
  3. Locate the Career Center's Going Global link

Directories: Organized by employer name, product, service and/or location

- **Career Center Library**: General and career-specific reference directories
- **FSU Libraries**: Visit www.lib.fsu.edu; then:
  - **To access directories**:
  1. Select "Advanced Catalog Search"
  2. Under Option 1, search for "Select Headings" (type directories) and "Subject Headings (type your industry or career field)
  3. Select "Search"
  - **To access databases:**
  1. Select E-Resources by Subject: "Business"
  2. From the Databases list, select "*Business and Company Resource Center*"
     - a. Select "Advanced Search"
     - b. Change "Content Area" to "Company Profiles/Products"
     - c. Keyword search on company name and/ or country, officer, etc.
  3. Or from the Databases list, select "*Hoover's Company Capsules/Profiles*" (Advanced Search is default):
     - a. Select "Database: *Business-Hoover's Company Records*"
     - b. Keyword search on company/ organization name, location, person, ticker symbol, etc.

Employer Publications: Focused on the employer's organizational philosophy, goals, and structure

- **Career Center Library**: Annual reports and recruitment brochures

Newspapers/Magazines: Articles on current and retrospective employer activity, such as mergers, community activities, etc.

- **Career Center Library**: Selected print articles on specific employers and career fields
- **FSU Libraries electronic articles**: Access through www.lib.fsu.edu; under Most Used Databases, scroll down and select:
  - **Lexis-Nexis Academic:**
  1. Under "Quick News Search," type the name of an employer
  2. Select a time period under date
  3. Select "Search"
  - **List all databases:**
  1. Type "newsb" in the "Find a Database" text box
  2. Select "Search"
  3. Select "Connect to Newsbank Info Web"
  5. Scroll down and select "Access World News or America's Newspapers"

A sample result from Hoover's Company Information database

Incorporating Data Into Your Interview

Simply being informed about an employer does not guarantee a successful interview unless you use that information effectively. Knowledge of products and opportunities is only helpful if you know how to tactfully weave that knowledge into the interview. Spouting out facts or prefacing a question with a lot of memorized details will not convince the employer of your interest and/or knowledge.

During the interview, most employers will ask some variation of, "Why do you want to work for our organization?" or "What are your long-range career goals?" Relating your skills to those in the literature which seem to be needed for a position, or valued by the organization in general, can be an effective way to show that you've done your homework. Remember to bring in transferable skills like communication, writing, sales, or computer knowledge. Before the interview, brainstorm how you can help the employer be competitive in specified markets found through your research.

Another way to incorporate information is through the questions that you ask the employer, usually towards the end of the interview. Request information only on topics you really want to know more about, and avoid being too detailed or projecting a "know-it-all" attitude. Ask questions that encourage the employer to expand on information from the literature. Some examples of topics you could address are: corporate policy regarding government regulations (rather than a local environmental scandal) or future marketing strategies for specific products (rather than a recent drop in stock prices). If you're not sure, remember: when in doubt, leave it out!

Good luck finding a comfortable fit!

References

1. Crowther, Karmen N.T. (1993). *Researching your way to a good job*. Wiley: New York.

2. Flanagan, Deb (1998-2004). *Researching Companies Online*. (Online), Available: http://www.learnwebskills.com/company

3. Stoodley, Martha (1997). *Information interviewing: How to tap your hidden job market* (2nd ed.).