RESEARCHING EMPLOYERS

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 San Francisco, 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. Book indexes, indexes to periodicals, and search engines on the Internet can provide access to specific types of employer information.

Researching potential employers can be useful for a number of reasons. 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 broadcast network, cable channels such as ESPN, and the Walt Disney Internet Group (which includes NBA.com, NFL.com, and NASCAR.com)? You may be talking with a subsidiary of a much larger organization and not realize it.

Researching employers and asking informed questions will strengthen your position and help you make a positive first impression in an interview. Targeted questions resulting from research will also provide you with answers that can help you decide whether or not to accept an offer of employment.
TYPES OF EMPLOYER RESEARCH

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 USA, 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 RESOURCES WITH EMPLOYER INFORMATION

**Primary:** Interviews, documents (such as annual reports), websites (information directly from the employer)

**Secondary:** Books, articles, directories, databases (information produced about employer)

**Bibliographic:** Indexes to primary and secondary sources (reference guides and directories)

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.

**Employer Facts To Know (Checklist)**
The following list may be used as a guide 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.

**Basic Facts**

[ ] Name, address, telephone
[ ] Complete product line or services
[ ] 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-terms goals
[ ] Biographical information on CEO, etc. — salaries, 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

Organizing Your Data

It is essential to start early when researching a specific employer. You may find a lot of information that you will need to sort through to find the important facts. On the other hand, you may not find any printed information and need to make phone calls, set up information interviews, or search the Internet for answers.

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.

Sample Criteria Summary Procedure

There are six basic steps in determining which employers meet your personal criteria. By following the steps and 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.
Steps

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 the specifics for each employer.

5. Compare the employers based on your results.

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

INTEGRATING YOUR DATA INTO THE 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 communications, 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). When in doubt, leave it out!