HOW TO PREPARE FOR A VIRTUAL CAREER FAIR

WHAT IS A VIRTUAL CAREER FAIR?

A Virtual Career Fair is held online. Virtual career fairs give you the opportunity to discreetly connect and speak with employers in a more convenient way. They are like traditional or in-person career fairs; except they are held virtually on an interactive platform.

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT AT A VIRTUAL CAREER FAIR?

Virtual career fairs feel similar to online discussion posts. After you log in, you can choose to “enter” various rooms within the virtual career fair. Each room houses a different employer participating in the career fair. When you enter a room, the employer receives a notification. At that point, a representative from the employer will greet you via a chat function.

“Employers in virtual career fairs are very engaging. They’re there because they’re eager to hire and are looking to engage with potential candidates like yourself,” says Jessica Koltz, Rasmussen College senior career service advisor. “Once they greet you, they’re looking to receive some engagement from you in return.”

Others already in the virtual room may be in the midst of a conversation and you are welcome to chime in. You can also opt to chat privately with an employer, where you may ask about open positions, details about the organization and your qualifications. Employers may even want to video chat with you face to face.

BEFORE THE VIRTUAL CAREER FAIR

Do not “walk” into a virtual career fair with zero preparation. These are the things you will want to do ahead of time to set yourself up for success.

• MEET WITH A CAREER COACH/PEER CAREER COACH (PCC)

The Office of Career Services is open for virtual visits/appointments via Zoom, Phone, or email.

• PREPARE YOUR RESUME

Make sure you have a resume that highlights your skills, abilities, and experience. If there are specific employers that you are scheduled to chat with during the virtual career fair, make a variation of your resume that is tailored to each employer.

This is a no-brainer, yet so important. Because you are going to provide your resume to employers you meet with, you are going to want it up-to-date and spotless for the optimal first impression.

“Don’t wait until the last minute to review your resume,” says Amy Ites, Rasmussen College senior career service advisor. “Have it updated, proofed and reviewed by someone else ahead of time.”
The same goes for your LinkedIn account, or a portfolio of your work samples. 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.

- **PRACTICE YOUR ELEVATOR PITCH**

Practice introducing yourself with your elevator pitch. Start by sharing your name, year in school and major or area of interest. Talk about the positions you are interested in, and some relevant skills or experiences.

How will you introduce yourself? Why are you interested in the company? What types of positions are you seeking? How is your previous work experience relevant? What do you plan on asking the representatives at the virtual career fair?

You will want to spend some time mulling over questions like these, so you are ready to answer them without hesitation when the time comes. Your well-thought-out responses could impress a recruiter—and even allow you to stand out from the crowd of applicants.

- **REGISTER AHEAD OF TIME**

You are going to want to register beforehand. Not only will this prevent any last-minute hiccups before the career fair, but it will allow you to get a glimpse at the employers participating in the fair. Which leads us to our next tip...

- **DO YOUR RESEARCH**

After registering, take some time to review the organizations attending the career fair. You will want to get an idea of some of the companies you would like to meet with and familiarize yourself with their products and services. You also do not want to “walk in” unprepared—learn about the companies and think of questions you will want to ask.

“At virtual career fairs, companies look for candidates who are curious and ask questions,” says John Capra, zone recruiting manager at Combined Insurance. “In order to stand out from the crowd, candidates should do their research and know about the companies and positions they are interested in.

- **MAKE A LIST OF QUESTIONS**

Prepare two or three questions to ask each employer. These should be related to the company or positions you are interested in. As part of your research before the event, make sure your questions are insightful and not easily answered by looking at their website. Here are some sample questions that might be good to ask:

  - “How did your degree help you prepare for the position you are in now?”
  - “I read that your company just started a project doing ______. What opportunities would an intern have in this project?”
  - “What do you like most about your job and working for ______?”
  - “I am interested in following up with you about your job opening. Could you tell me the next steps in the process? And could you give me your email address so that I can follow up with you in a few days?”

- **GET ORGANIZED**

Instructions for how to connect with each employer at the virtual fair will be in their schedules and will be emailed to you prior to your scheduled chat. If you are using a virtual program to connect with the employer, like Zoom or Skype, test it before your scheduled time.
Whether you have a video chat or a phone call scheduled, dress professionally. Dressing up can put you in a better mindset for the virtual fair and help you make a good first impression if you are on camera. Additionally, be mindful of your background if you have a video chat scheduled with an employer.

Have a notebook and pen nearby as well. After speaking with employers, write down a few things that you discussed. Take note of what you liked or did not like about the company. You will want to reference these notes later to recall the conversation if you are asked to schedule an interview.

**ENSURE THAT YOUR TECHNOLOGY IS READY TO GO**

You will want to ensure that your device can support you in the virtual career fair. While it is preferable to have camera capabilities in case an employer would like to speak with you face to face, you do not necessarily have to have a device with a camera, says Ites.

You should also try a dry run the day before the virtual career fair to ensure smooth sailing on the big day, advises Chris Brown, vice president of Human Resources at West's Unified Communications.

“Plan an IT dress rehearsal before to avoid last minute surprises. Also, be sure to download necessary software for the fair, if need be. Install these a day early, leaving enough time to clarify any troubleshooting questions you may have.”

He also advises attendees to think long and hard about the type of device they plan to use.

“Choose your device wisely. To avoid shaky camera syndrome, use a desktop, laptop, or propped-up tablet rather than a smartphone that you will need to hold throughout the conversation,” he says.

You may also want headphones if you cannot attend from a quiet, private location.

**DURING THE VIRTUAL CAREER FAIR**

This is your chance to be evaluated on more than just your resume. Once you log in, how can you stand out from the crowd at a virtual career fair?

**ATTEND FROM A DISTRACTION-FREE ENVIRONMENT**

In addition to your professional attire, you will also want to plan out where you will be attending the virtual career fair from. A quiet location is ideal—and camera capabilities mean that you will want to ensure it is distraction-free for employers.

“Even on a small screen, potential employers can still see plenty of background. Make sure the room you are in is clean, quiet, and well lit. Your expertise should be the focal point of the conversation, not a visible pile of laundry or dirty dishes,” says Brown.

**BE READY TO PUT YOURSELF OUT THERE**

At virtual career fairs, it is more important to exert yourself to make connections. “It’s even easier to be a wallflower at a virtual career fair than a traditional one,” warns Koltz.

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.

**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 will want to demonstrate articulate written communication.
“Grammar matters, and text lingo, emoticons and any slang won’t be appropriate,” says Koltz. “Your professional written communication needs to be on its A-game.”

- **DEMONSTRATE STRONG BODY LANGUAGE IN VIDEO CHATS**

  Just like in a traditional career fair, you will 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 are on a video chat with a recruiter at the virtual career fair, you will want to stay conscious of your body language.

  “On camera, it’s even more critical to hold eye contact with the employers you’re interacting with,” says Brown. “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.”

- **ASK FOR NEXT STEPS AND CONTACT INFORMATION**

  When talking to recruiters at the career fair, do not 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 getting in touch with human resources, 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 will need this information for following up after the virtual career fair.

**AFTER THE VIRTUAL CAREER FAIR**

Do not let your efforts go to waste by neglecting to follow up with an employer after the virtual career fair.

- **REACH OUT THE NEXT DAY WITH A THANK YOU**

  Whether it’s an email, phone call 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.

  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 have not already, along with your portfolio or work samples if you have any. You can also stay in touch by adding the recruiter on LinkedIn.

- **GET EXCITED FOR THE FUTURE OF CAREER FAIRS**

  Employers partake in career fairs because they are looking for job seekers like yourself. Just because they are held virtually does not make that any different.

  With this expert advice in hand, navigate the new waters of virtual career fairs with ease. You never know—it just might get your foot in the door of a field you are vying for, or even land you the job of your dreams.

  But first you need to go through the application process. If you are lucky enough to land an interview, you must give it your all to show them why they should hire you. No matter what format of interview you encounter, make sure you are prepared to make a lasting impression.

---

12 Ways to Make the Most out of a Virtual Career Fair - By Kristina Ericksen, Rasmussen College