

## Job Search Tips 2: Top 10 Suggestions for Career Fair Preparation

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Career fairs are an excellent opportunity to research the job market and network with companies and fellow professionals. Career fairs come in all shapes and sizes, from small, single employer gatherings to multi-day, multi-employer events. Most universities have campus events in fall and winter, and the Oil & Gas industry holds a big event in Calgary every summer. The following preparation ideas will help you get the most out of your day.

- **Know yourself:** If you don't know what YOU have to offer, it's hard to convince an employer. Prepare for the career and job expo, and take the time to do a [self-assessment](#). Figure out who you are, your strengths, your employment skills and unique traits, and what motivates you to deliver quality on the job. Use this information to create a 30- to 45-second self-introduction (also known as your "elevator pitch").
- **Find out who'll be there, and create a "hit list":** Check out the exhibitor list ahead of time (this information is usually published on the event website). Make an "A" list (top 10 companies you must meet) and a "B" list (a "nice-to-meet" list, time permitting).
- **Research top targets:** You don't need to study company financial reports, but you should understand each organization's market, mission, values, main activities, reputation, and how you would fit in there.
- **Connect through social media:** Companies start building relationships with potential hires through social media even when they do not have job openings! There is a huge focus on engaging candidates through LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and RSS. Follow your favourites and "like" them. Connect with current employees. Get to know organizations online before you meet their recruiters in person.
- **Apply online:** Most companies won't accept resumes at the Expo; instead they will advise you to apply online. Get a head start and do this before you meet with them. If you haven't done company research already, you should do some while you're on the company website completing your personal profile.
- **Prepare tailored questions for each target employer:** PwC reported recently that job seekers do research but don't ask the right questions at career fairs. Lack of preparation and poor question choice mean many job seekers give a poor impression. Take time to prepare questions to set you apart. Examples of good questions might include: *What particular skills do you value most? What do you like about working for your organization? I read about XYZ project on your website; is your department involved in that work? What are the typical career paths for new hires over the first few years on the job?*
- **Create a professional email address:** Make sure your email is easy to type, and professional. Use some combination of First Name Last Name. Avoid underscores (\_), symbols (&\*#), inappropriate words or sayings, or awkward combinations of numbers and letters!
- **Make personal business cards:** Even if you're not currently working, make or purchase some professional looking business cards. These should include your name, profession, phone and email, and URL to your LinkedIn profile. If you are already employed, consider the optics of using your work business card and perhaps opt for personal cards as well.
- **Gather materials for the Expo:** Prepare your Expo kit well ahead of the fair; this should include your business cards, copies of your resume (some employers will accept them), a portfolio or notebook, two or three pens (in case one runs out), and your lists of "A" and "B" employers and prepared questions.
- **Choose your outfit, and check that everything's in good condition:** You'll be making a first impression on potential employers at the Expo, so make sure you dress for success. Business casual or professional is appropriate (see examples [here](#) and [here](#)). Decide your outfit ahead of the fair, and several days prior, check each item and make sure everything is clean (don't forget shoes) and blemish-free.

Being prepared for the Career Expo sets you up for success on the day. You'll be confident knowing you're ready, and will be able to enjoy the experience because of it. In Job Search, Part 3 we'll discuss tips and tricks for getting the most out of the event itself.