

How to Navigate a Virtual Career Fair

Career fairs have almost become a rite of passage – crowds of professionally-attired students lining up at booths or tables to meet employers, hoping to make a connection that leads to a great opportunity. Maybe you've heard about career fair experiences from relatives, friends, or older students. Perhaps you have even attended some already yourself, so you know what to expect. However, as with many other aspects of life, some career fairs are taking on new forms, and you have now been invited to participate in a virtual career fair. How will meeting with companies online change the career fair dynamic, and what can you do to boost your chances of finding that great opportunity?

The good news is that you will see many of the opportunities you would normally have seen and possibly even more! Generally, virtual career fairs will have the same kind of employers who would have participated in an in-person fair. You may also see some new companies, located further away from your campus, who are able to participate since the fair is now virtual.

While the opportunities may be similar, the way you interact with companies will be very different. Instead of meeting a recruiter in person, you will only interact over video. As anyone who has used Zoom, Facetime, or any video chat or meeting software knows, video interactions can be great, but they are also slightly different than seeing someone in person. Many of the tips you have seen for in-person career fairs still apply. However, to prepare for video chats with employers, we have these helpful tips to make your virtual career fair a success.

Tip 1: Use a Stable Device

Since you will likely be in a video chat with an employer, consider using a laptop or desktop that is resting on a desk or table. This ensures that your screen does not move while you are talking to the employer. If you decide to use your mobile device, find a way to prop it up so you don't need to hold it. Even if you are blessed with nerves of steel and steady hands, a table or desk location will always provide better video, and you will feel more comfortable if you can speak freely without worrying about moving or dropping your device. Whatever device you choose to use, make sure the camera works, and that you are either plugged in or are fully charged, with several hours of battery life.

Tip 2: Check Your Wi-Fi or Internet Connection

For the best experience at the fair, you will need a steady and reliable Wi-Fi or internet connection with download and upload speeds of at least 2 Mbps to support video chats. If you do not have access to a good connection in your residence hall, home or library, ask your career office to see if they have any suggestions. Wired internet connections are often more stable and reliable than wireless.

Tip 3: Inspect Your Background and Lighting

If you plan to video chat with an employer, remember to quickly scan your surroundings to make sure that things are orderly. You don't want to be embarrassed by compromising items in the background, such as open bottles, controversial materials, or a pile of dirty laundry. Also

consider finding a quiet place where you can concentrate and not be disturbed by roommates, family members, or pets. If you do not have access to such a place in your residence hall, home or library, ask your career office to see if they have conference rooms, interview rooms, or open offices that can be used. Lighting is also an important consideration. If there is a bright light behind you, your face will not show up well on camera. Avoid having bright sunny windows directly behind you. Try to have some light on you, so that the employer can see you when you are talking. Bright sunlight directly behind your screen is another hazard to avoid; you will look much better during the fair if you are not constantly shielding your eyes!

Tip 4: Dress Professionally

Since a virtual career fair enables employers to see you on camera, professional attire will help you to make a good first impression. Some experts advise dressing as if you were attending an interview; others say that business casual – button-down shirt or blouse – is reasonable. Try to stay away from T-shirts with logos, ripped clothes, or tops that reveal too much. From a video perspective, it is also good to wear solid colors, avoiding clothes with lots of patterns, stripes or plaids. Your goal is to have the employer to focus on you as a person and not to be distracted by what you are wearing.

Tip 5: Turn Notifications Off

While you are in the live virtual career fair, you will want to focus your attention on connecting with employers. To avoid being distracted, consider turning off notifications for social media, news, and other applications. If you are busy looking at the notifications for other applications, you might miss that opportunity to video chat with your employer of choice!

Tip 6: Have Your Resume on Hand

While you may have already uploaded your resume for employers to see, you should have a copy of your resume nearby. An employer may start your video chat by asking you something specific on your resume, and you will want to be able to speak to it without missing a beat. Video chats are short and timed, so you want to make the most of every minute you have with an employer.

Tip 7: Pick Your Chat Strategy: Group vs. 1-on-1

Both group and 1-on-1 chats can be great ways to interact with an employer. Which one you choose depends on your immediate goal. Group video chats are a great way to learn about a company, ask general questions, and hear the responses to other students' inquiries. If you have found an employer you are interested in, then a 1-on-1 video chat is the better way to see if there are opportunities for and to advance to the next stage of the hiring process.

Tip 8: Research and Plan Ahead of Time

Similar to in-person career fairs, you can get more out of the experience if you have researched in advance the employers who will be in attendance, their profiles, and jobs that they are offering. Use that research to create a prioritized list of companies with whom you would like to speak, so you know exactly which employer lines to get into when the virtual career fair opens.

Tip 9: Arrive on Time

Similar to an in-person fair, it's best to arrive on time to be the first in line. Unlike a physical fair, you can stand in multiple lines at once, so arriving when the fair starts means you will get top spots for the employers on your prioritized list.

Tip 10: Take Notes

When you have finished a video chat with an employer, make sure to take notes. You may talk to many companies over the course of the fair, and you will want to remember specific information about each employer for follow up after the fair.

Tip 11: Apply to Jobs

If you enjoyed your video chat with an employer, then check out the company's job postings. Go ahead and show your enthusiasm by applying to the jobs immediately after the fair. After all, finding that great job is why you attended the fair!

Tip 12: Send Thank You Notes

After the fair is over, you can retrieve the names of company representatives, emails, and notes that you have taken. Use this information to send thank you notes to the representatives, expressing your interest and gratitude for taking the time to video chat with you. Making this extra effort can help the representatives remember you in a positive light.

While a virtual career fair may seem quite different at first, in the most important ways, it is just like a regular fair: the employers are still there to find great candidates and you are there to find a great job. While meeting people online is certainly different from the in-person experience, it is still a fantastic way to find an opportunity, as long as you understand the differences and use them to your advantage. By following the simple tips above, you can make the most of your virtual career fair experience!