

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Do Your Due Diligence

By
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February 12, 2012

A few years ago while looking for work, Bryan Webb stumbled across a sales job opening for a company in Ontario, Canada, that he knew little about. He quickly researched the company and employees on Google and LinkedIn.com before contacting somebody who he knew who knew somebody who knew the chief operating officer.

After relaying messages through three degrees of separation, Mr. Webb secured an interview within 24 hours and a job offer after that.

Job hunters stand a better chance of landing a job when armed with an informed view of a company, its culture and—if possible—a direct introduction. Fortunately, there are many free online tools that can help you dig up what you need to impress potential employers.



Research your target company. You don't want to be jobless in a year because of sweeping organizational changes or a merger. Karl Miller was hired as an on-site consultant by American International Group in 2008, a week before the

insurance giant went into a financial tailspin. He continued to get emails about a start date all the way up to the Federal Reserve bailout of AIG.

Websites like Google Finance, Google News and Morningstar.com can help you track the financials of publicly traded companies, and they can be customized to update you about any major changes as reported by the media or industry bloggers.

You also should research competitors—who may offer similar job openings—to get a better sense of how different companies position themselves in the market.

Check the company website to get a feel for the corporate culture and for job listings. You can look up recent company achievements, which are typically lauded in the press section of the website.

If you have trouble finding what you need, tighten your Google searches by using commands like [careers site:ford.com], which will limit results to only specific topics like "careers."

Research people you'll be interviewing with and potential co-workers.

The advanced search tab on LinkedIn can dissect a company by industry, job title and proximity to you. Members can also be sorted by degree of relationship, allowing you to find direct contacts who can set up introductions with key people outside of your network, says Krista Canfield, a spokeswoman for Mountain View, Calif.-based LinkedIn.

You can use Google Scholar, Patent Search and Twitter to become more familiar with the work of employees who have published papers, filed patents and tweet about work.

Facebook offers fewer search options but has greater potential networking opportunities, including groups within your career field.

Members will share inside information on jobs and companies, but be prepared to actively invest in the community. You can also "like" or "friend" corporate pages that will stream updates and job openings on your newsfeed.

Be tactical with your newfound knowledge, says Bryan Power, a people operations manager at Google. Don't be a know-it-all.

Use your research to appear knowledgeable and try to frame answers positively, even if you know the exact reasons why your predecessor was fired.

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