

Tip from the Trenches

8 Ways to Research Your Prospective Employer

The amount of knowledge you have about a potential employer, and on the industry in which you hope to work can give you a competitive edge. This pertains both to making initial contact with employers and before going on interviews. In addition, having information on a company is also invaluable when it comes to evaluating a job offer.

You should know the company's industry, what they do, who some major clients are, and the names of some of the company's higher-ups, i.e. CEO, President, etc. You should also know who is in charge of hiring for the position you are seeking.

Here are some resources to find company information:

1. **Corporate Websites** - Most businesses use their home pages as a marketing or communication tool for generating and retaining business. They may also provide annual reports, news articles, business ventures, and information about products and services. You should spend a good portion of your research time reviewing the information available at your company's home page. You can locate a company's web page by using a search engine such as www.google.com.
2. **Directories** - Here you can get information on public and private companies, although you may be limited with private company information. A couple sites to check out are: <http://www.corporateinformation.com/> & <http://hoovers.com/free/>.
3. **Press Releases** - Like an annual report, press releases present information in a way that appeals to the media, and in turn to the consumer. They are generally written by professionals who know how to make even the most damaging news somewhat palatable. If you need to find out newsworthy information about a company they are a good source.
4. **Local Newspapers** - Local newspapers usually publish articles about companies in their city or town. This is often the only place you will find information on small, local companies. Some newspapers publish special business sections once a week. You will also find information about employees at those companies. Should someone win an award or special recognition, a local newspaper is where you would find it. You are probably wondering what this bit of trivia could mean to you. Well, imagine this scenario. You learn you are going to be interviewed by Joanne Manager. You do a little research and find out that she just won a 10 kilometer race. It just so happens that you're a runner as well. Isn't this a great way to establish rapport?
5. **National Newspaper** - While the New York Times is not planning to change its name to the U.S. Times, it can serve as a source of national information. The same can be said of other newspapers across the country, like The Boston Globe, The Chicago Tribune, and The Washington Post, to name only a few. Articles on larger U.S. and international companies are featured in the pages of these publications. If something newsworthy happens you will probably find it in any large newspaper. Many are also available online.
6. **Business Journals** - The most well known is The Wall Street Journal. There are also smaller, more local business journals. You can find information on local companies as well as companies with a wider geographic scope. These journals provide a good way of tracking who has moved where, what companies have what clients, and which companies are relocating to your area. Openings of new businesses should also be announced in a business journal.
7. **Industry Journals** - These publications follow companies within different industries. This is a great way to become more knowledgeable about the industry in general. You can look at trends and upcoming changes to determine how you can best make an impact. Remember, you are trying to show potential employers what you can do for them.
8. **Professional Journals** - These journals keep you apprised of goings on in your field. In addition to providing company information, professional journals give insight into changes in a particular field. These publications also contain advice about how to do your job better. Being able to discuss new medical billing software with the office manager of a doctor's office will show your level of expertise and interest in the field.