

Job Fairs can be Tricky to Organize

03/21/05

Has Westchester County considered holding a job fair exclusively for the professional services field?

Thanks for asking about job fairs. Job fairs can be tricky to organize and trickier yet for the companies interested in attending. There are several questions that you need to consider, when looking for, or thinking about, attending a job fair.

Is a specific fair the right venue for your company?

How do you know if the fair will be well attended?

What is the right payoff to justify the expense of participating?

What are the alternatives?

Most job fairs are held at local colleges. For example, there is a job fair at Westchester Community College in Valhalla on March 30. This job fair provides an opportunity to find an internship position or a part-time/full-time position. More than 4- disciplines and job recruiters will be attending. Some job professions that will be offered are: retail management and fashion merchandising, chemical dependency counseling, emergency medical technician-paramedic, telecommunications technology, networking, computer applications specialist, help desk support, medical billing and

coding and Web development for e-commerce.

Another job fair at the Westchester Community College's Valhalla campus on April 13 is specifically for health care. This one is focused on the student who seeks a career in health and nursing, or an employment possibility to view what health professions are available.

The recruiter in any job fair will look for people who have an associate or bachelor's degree in order to attend the fair and qualify for any job opportunities. Many job fairs are held each year across the metropolitan area. Most are close to New York City, where they have a greater potential to attract a high volume of candidates and companies seeking candidates. One of the main advantages of a job fair is it's likely to attract candidates looking for jobs right now. Unfortunately it may also attract perpetual job seekers and drifters, who may be less than optimum candidates. Be prepared to sort through candidates, so you can quickly identify and focus your recruiting efforts on candidates who will be good for your company.

Assess how well the job fair has defined its target market, and how that matches your recruiting goals. It is best of the fair has a theme that will attract qualified candidates. Be certain the main

idea of the fair is consistent with employees you're looking to recruit. Even if you aren't a hospital or doctor's office, you might want to consider the health fair, since the attendees are likely to be well disciplined, value education and training, and some may be looking for outside-the-box opportunities.

A job fair can be successful if it possesses three things:

- A good location and organized space for meeting with candidates.
- Clear description of the recruiters that will be attending the job fair, which shows up in advertising to the general public.
- Specific goals the organizers have for holding the job fair.

The trickiest of the three can be organization of the space, and picking the right location for the fair. How can a job fair succeed if the location is unknown, hard to find, or hard to get to? Where are all the candidates going to fit? Estimating the number of attendees versus available space is a skill, and may tell you a lot about the experience of the fair organizer and its goals for size of the fair.

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Advertising the job fair correctly is vital to its success. Making sure the public knows about the vent improves attendance numbers and benefits you as a potential employer. You, as employer, want to be able to choose among a quantity and variety of candidates to find the person(s) that best fit your job requirements. Look for ads in the local paper and Web advertising, supported by a Web site to announce the fair's details and pre-register candidates. Fliers in local shopping malls and colleges also help people know of an event being held in their neighborhood. Since most people listen to the radio, some job fairs will get announced on the local radio stations.

As a potential employer, you want to ask the organizer the following: how many candidates, how many companies and what are they doing to hit attendance goals? Is the organizer prepared to do everything possible to publicize the fair and to recruit candidates? If you don't see an aggressive marketing program, be careful. Ask for pre-registration numbers. If there are too many companies and not enough candidates, you will be tripping over your competitor, or bidding up to sign a recruit.

Most job fairs tend to be free of charge for the attendee, or charge a minimal fee of \$5 to \$25 dollars to qualify candidates.

Job fairs can be costly for the employer, and it can be hard to justify the participation costs. The Journal News, for example, charges employers from \$1,500 to \$2,900. And that's before incidental costs such as, electricity hook-up, extra chairs, tables, brochures and giveaways. A more reasonable price for a local job fair is one held at Westchester Community College (WCC). Here, the price for a booth is around \$75, which covers exhibition expenses for two representatives, publicity, lunch and a 5-foot table. Their advantage is they have an easy-to-access internal population of candidates. The trade-off is that the candidate pool may not be as broad as you want, since it is likely focused on WCC students and graduates.

Figure out what you want to accomplish at the job fair, and compare that to what it would cost to achieve that goal through other, more traditional recruiting channels. Compare costs like advertising, and don't forget to include the cost of screening resumes, which can be time consuming.

Posting on a Web site is about \$350 for one ad, lower if you buy a package. Local papers and the Pennysaver can work, depending on who you're looking for, especially for people who want to work close to where they live. Prices vary depending on size of

ads, frequency and have no guarantee of results.

On one hand, recruiting new employees is a 24/7 sales job. As owner you need to always be on the look out for good employees. On the other hand, you need to know when to go where the active job seekers are hanging out, and a job fair can be a great place to start.

Looking for a good book? Try Paul Falcone's "96 Great Interview Questions to Ask Before you Hire." Or, to see it from the candidate's point of view, there's a video titled "Secrets to Job Fair Success" How to use Job Fairs to Find a Great Career.

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