

Keys to Researching Your Next Employer

By Beth Braccio Hering, CareerBuilder Writer

"I know right away when a candidate doesn't know the current news about our company," says Chris Brabec, [director](#) of leadership [talent acquisition](#) for Western Union. "If you don't know the [CEO](#) is retiring, or if a company made a big acquisition recently, that's not a good sign. If a candidate can't tell me what the company does (or thinks Western Union still does telegrams), that's another sign she hasn't done her homework."

In a job market where applicants frequently cast a wide net with the hope that anybody will respond, job seekers sometimes cut corners by not thoroughly checking out potential employers. But failure to know about the place you claim you want to work at can make you seem unprepared and disinterested -- and cost you a job offer.

Here, experts weigh in on things you should learn before seeking employment and how to find that information.

What to know

"Companies have told us that one of the things they use to weed out candidates is that the student didn't know anything about the company," says John M. Thompson, executive director of [career services](#) at Texas Christian University in [Fort Worth, Texas](#).

Among the things Thompson encourages his students to find out are:

- What does the company do?
- What are its products?
- What is the company's mission?
- Where are its offices?
- How big is the company in terms of employees/revenue?
- How is it positioned in its industry?

"Everyone, but particularly for more senior-level roles, should know our stock price," says Yolanda Bush, director of [human resources](#) for Western Union. "Research the company's leadership team and the company's efforts around corporate social responsibility. This will help candidates position themselves to discuss how their skills and experience will help us succeed in the marketplace."

Julie Rulis, a senior recruiter for Western Union's talent acquisition team, agrees with her colleague's advice and adds, "If you are doing an interview at a company, find out if it's in the [Fortune 500](#) and where it is on that list. Even better: Find out where it was a year ago, and if it's different, maybe ask why. It shows you've done your homework. A job candidate should know our products and services beyond just the basics. With all the tools available nowadays, there's no excuse not to know."

How to play detective

The "tools" Rulis is referring to are all the different ways a job seeker can find information. Abby M. Locke, master [résumé writer](#) and personal [brand strategist](#) for Premier Writing Solutions in Seattle, offers these suggestions:

- Review the company's website.
- Read press releases.
- Pay attention to industry publications.
- Use Google alerts to stay on top of current company news.
- Do an informational interview with past or current employees.
- Talk to a representative at a career fair or trade show.
- Follow key decision-makers on Twitter.
- Use LinkedIn groups and other online social media tools.

Online directories such as Bloomberg and Standard & Poor's also give information on many businesses. For additional help in finding appropriate databases, job seekers may want to consult their local library or the college career center of their alma mater.

Show what you know

Finally, while you don't need to be a walking fact book, be ready to incorporate your knowledge of the company into correspondence and conversation when opportunities arise.

"I ask job candidates questions like what they know about the company beyond what's on the website, how they feel they fit in with our overall values and corporate culture, or what they found out about the company in their research that they didn't know before," Rulis says. "This is a great opportunity to show off your preparation -- talk about our competitors or the fact that you read that we're entering an entirely new business segment."

Get to know your potential employers, and chances are they will want to get to know you.

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