

CARPE DIEM: AN INDUSTRY TRADE SHOW

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An industry trade show can be a gold mine of job opportunities for a college or university student, however the approach you use to mine those opportunities is different than a traditional career fair.

More and more students are being given the opportunity to attend industry events and/or tradeshows within their educational discipline.

Some event organizers have recognized that these events create career connections for students and thus have begun offering specific areas or activities for networking and/or interviewing to take place. Whether the event you attend has sanctioned student activities to interact with employers or not, you should still take advantage of the show floor to build your professional network.

Often, only larger companies have the budget or volume of openings to participate in a student event, so walking the aisles may be your only chance to learn about



At the PMA Fresh Summit more than 21,000 participants throughout the global fresh produce and floral supply chains come together.

Photo courtesy of Produce Marketing Association

other openings and/or smaller employers.

The following tips are helpful to keep in mind if you have an upcoming industry event in your future.

Just as with a career fair, it will be important that you do your homework ahead of time so you know who will be there and with whom you want to speak. Look for companies that make a product with which you are familiar. You will want to be able to ask questions and carry on a conversation with some background knowledge.

Remember the majority of attendees are professionals who've been engaging with the companies and products for some time and are well versed in the industry.

Your lack of research will be more noticeable in conversation. Make a list of booths you want to visit and questions you want to ask beforehand.

Your questions should focus on the company and its products, and then casually work towards inquiring about employment opportunities.

Remember that companies have trade show exhibits to promote their products to customers. Since the company is there to grow sales, most representatives will be sales or technical reps.

Depending on the size of the company, those individuals may or may not be aware of any intern or full time opportunities available.

Don't let their response deter you; use it as an opportunity to showcase your determination. Ask for a name of someone in the company you should contact, a web site to visit or if they could pass your information along.

This leads to the next tip — go prepared.

Since it is not a formal career fair you may not think you need to bring along copies of your resume. Incorrect!

Always have updated copies of



AgCareers.com Director of Sales, Beth Hales, talks with participants at a university career fair. Hales suggests that students can stand out by researching which employers they want to talk to and practicing a professional approach that involves prepared questions.

your resume on-hand if you are in the market for a job offer! Some companies or representatives may not be able to accept your resume so be sure to have business cards available as well.

Lastly, have a padfolio or some type of note taking device in hand to make notes about the contacts you made, important information they shared, and what your next step will be.

Some of these events can have thousands of vendors attending; thinking that you'll be able to keep track of your notes mentally is just not realistic.

Once you've finished your visit, step away to a secluded spot and make a few quick notes.

One mistake many industry event attendees make is getting wrapped up in the giveaways.

Companies invest a lot of money in promotional items to help their customers remember them. While these are there to be taken, and can be a great conversation starter for you, don't overstep. One pen, one koozie, one notepad is plenty.

Another area of caution and opportunity is the after-event activities.

Often companies host receptions and dinners following a long day on the trade show floor. These can be much more relaxed settings but are



Attendees at the 2013 International Production & Processing Expo (IPPE). The IPPE is held in January at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta, GA.

Photo courtesy of US Poultry and Egg Association

still opportunities to make an impression.

You may not be attending this type of event as an invited attendee but find yourself at the same bar or restaurant as someone you spoke to earlier in the day.

Remember that people are always making mental notes, you don't want to reverse a good impression you made earlier in the day by drinking too much or not applying your filter before speaking.

If you have gone to the extra

effort of attending an industry related trade show and engaged in conversation with representatives, don't get lazy afterwards.

Follow up with the person, connect with them via the appropriate social media outlets, send an e-mail, and call the HR office they referred you to. Even if the conversation left you with no specific next steps in the process, a simple "thank you for your time" e-mail can go a long way.

Usually within three to five days of the show ending is a good window of time for follow up.

Dropping the ball after the event can damage all the hard work you put into making a great first impression and building your network. Those students who maintain their connections will be much more successful at reaping the rewards of attending the event.

The extra effort you put into researching, attending, and networking at industry events can provide you with numerous opportunities that your less ambitious peers may not utilize.

The opportunity to be surrounded by such a diverse group of professionals is immeasurable. Don't let yourself be intimidated ... embrace the exclusivity and seize the day!

QUESTIONS TO ASK AT AN INDUSTRY SHOW

Beginning the conversation can be a bit intimidating. Here are a few questions to spark stimulating discussion and keep the conversation going.

- I've utilized your product in the past, are there any plans to release an updated version?
- Can you tell me more about your product? Who is your primary customer?
- How long has your company been in business?
- Can you tell me how your product differs from the competitor?
- How long have you worked with (company name)?
- Within your company, what types of degrees do employees have?
- Are you aware of any internship or full-time opportunities currently open with your company?
- What would be my next steps for exploring a career with your company?