



The help you need

Northwest Software, Inc.

1800 NW 169th Place, Suite 150-B
Beaverton, OR 97006 USA

Phone 503-629-0303

Fax 503-645-5892

www.nwsi.com

Preparing for an effective interview

Your goal: Get the job by differentiating yourself from competing job seekers in this tight economy

Layoffs, less-than-stellar earnings reports, pink-slip parties and bear markets are the headlines of the day. Contrary to what you might think from media reports, jobs in all industries are actually increasing, and there are still unfilled needs for talented professionals.

For instance, in this era of outsourcing people think that IT jobs are hard to come by. It might seem hard to believe, but consider these statistics from the Information Technology Association of America and the Department of Labor.

- Businesses expect to add 900,000 IT positions in the next 12 months to the 10.4 million estimated IT positions already out there.
- Of those 900,000 positions, 425,000 will go unfilled.
- Jobs in IT services are nearly 6 percent ahead of last year.
- Companies added 15,000 computer-services positions in February, for a total of 2.01 million jobs, 0.8 percent more than in January.

Despite these statistics, anyone looking for a job will tell you, "It ain't like it used to be in 1999 or even early 2000." The difference between then and now is the competition for those jobs is tougher and candidates need more than just technical skills to get the job. So how do you differentiate yourself in this tight economy?

The best chance to stand out is in the interview, but there is a lot of preparation work to do before you are face-to-face with a prospective employer. By the time candidates reach the interview process, they are more or less on the same level in terms of technical skills and experience. To really shine, you need to be well prepared, have a clear vision, and know the prospective company inside and out. You will use this information to differentiate yourself during the interview.

Articulating a Clear Vision

Establishing a clear vision and being able to articulate it in 30 seconds shows an employer you know what you want and have a plan for getting there.

Most job seekers blanket the market with the same resume. Employers, like most of us, only want to hear what is relevant to them. Research the opportunity and the company and tailor your resume to fit the employer's needs and articulate your vision. It's not necessary to start from scratch each time. You can change the bullet point order, use different words or rephrase points to highlight specific skills or change the objective to fit the particular needs of that company. These are all simple and effective ways to customize a resume. If a Unix Systems Administrator is looking for a networking position, he should highlight the networking aspects of his current job rather than the Unix skills. Emphasize a combination of the latest technology skills and management experience. In today's fast-paced world, employers want managers who know the technology they will be managing.

"Having a clear vision and tailoring my application via EZRecruit helped me realize where I could make the most impact at the company," said Gary Johnson, a senior Database Consultant at NSI. "I was able to focus my application to convince the hiring manager that he couldn't afford to let my skills go to his competition."

Articulating a clear vision also makes an impression that can be passed on should the listener hear of any opportunities in the future.



The help you need

Northwest Software, Inc.

1800 NW 169th Place, Suite 150-B
Beaverton, OR 97006 USA

Phone 503-629-0303

Fax 503-645-5892

www.nwsi.com

Know the Company Inside and Out

As with most things in life, it pays to do some research. That means going beyond looking at the company Web site 15 minutes before you leave for the interview. Here are a few guidelines:

- Research the company's business, not just the job opportunity.
- Know its competitors and the issues that are important to the industry.
- Know the top trade publications and read a few issues. If you don't know what those publications are, contact the human resources or public relations department and ask.
- Look at what the analysts are saying about the company. For public companies, all of the major search engines (Yahoo, Excite, etc.) compile extensive information in their investment sections. Getting the scoop on private companies is more difficult. You may need to look for venture capital reports or industry specific publications.
- Know who the key executives are and a little about their background.
- If possible, talk to people who already work there to get an idea of the corporate culture. When you set up the interview time, also ask for the name of someone else in the department and permission to contact them.
- Find out the personality traits of successful people in the company. The human resource department can give you a list of company awards. Ask the public relations department for press releases on past award recipients. This will show what traits the company values and rewards.

You need to find all the ways you can contribute and tailor interview answers and questions to those traits. To do this effectively takes practice.

Practice before the interview

Before an interview, ask yourself, "Why should they hire me?" Your response should be tailored to the company. For example: "They should hire me because I have Bluetooth skills that can help them with their wireless integration." Practice weaving this statement into answers to interview questions. Personal interviews are generally short, so use the time wisely. You must have immediate, informative answers to the interviewer's questions.

An interview is like a blind date; rehearse how it's going to go and play out several scenarios. Sample interview questions can be found on most job sites like Monster.com or CareerBuilder.com. Make a list and do some role-playing to determine the best way to highlight strengths, specific skills and company/industry knowledge. Determine how to turn a weakness into a learning experience or strength.

An interviewer will always give you time to ask questions. Prepare a written list of at least six questions based on your company research. Ask specific questions about the company and industry. It is always helpful to use these questions to highlight your specific skills or experience.

"It is my biggest frustration point when candidates have no questions about my company. When a candidate asks thoughtful questions about our industry, it lets me know they are interested in what we do." said Joe Mader, Senior Manager at Tektronix.

Even with limited company knowledge, you can ask thoughtful questions. For example, many B2B and B2C industries have had trouble with their CRM, ask how the company is integrating their customer relationships with the call center?

Your resume will tell an employer you know Java or C++, but the interview is the time to highlight your work on the team that integrated the technology into the company's business and show you understand what this accomplishment means to the company's bottom line.

After the interview is another opportunity for you to differentiate yourself. Ask if you can give the interviewer a follow-up call. If they offer to contact you, politely ask when to expect the call. Send a brief thank-you note. If the job contact was made through e-mail, it is appropriate to send an e-mail thank-you note. However, don't fall into the e-mail trap. It makes more of an impression talking to a live person throughout the search process



The help you need

Northwest Software, Inc.

1800 NW 169th Place, Suite 150-B
Beaverton, OR 97006 USA

Phone 503-629-0303

Fax 503-645-5892

www.nwsi.com

rather than relying only on e-mail. Also, don't forget to call your recruiter at NSI and provide a detailed summary of the interview.

Go the extra mile

In today's market, managers are looking for assurances that employees can and will contribute. Technical knowledge is important, but in a tight market it's not enough to be a good developer, analyst, etc. Employers want more. A recent Gartner Group study confirms this stating that IT service providers need to build their skills and offerings to emphasize the impact on business processes - not just the technology that supports them. In addition, employers want soft skills, the non-technical skills that we use to create successful relationships. Those relationships can be within a team or vendor to client. Strong verbal and written communication is the most valuable. In a tight economy it's the non-technical skills that will seal the deal.

Remember, 425,000 IT positions will go unfilled in 2001. That means managers have vacancies on their team. Unfortunately, managers don't always know what they are looking for to fill those vacancies, so it's up to you to convince them that they are looking for you. Show them you are a good value. Nowadays companies are looking for specialists, but if a candidate can show that he has the specialized skills plus additional skills, it sets him apart.

If the steps above seem overwhelming, you may want to look into the help of a recruiter. In addition to coaching you through career counseling, resume formatting, interview preparation and company intelligence, a good recruiter may know the hiring manager of a company and can tell you how to dress, questions to ask, questions to avoid and interview style.

Looking for a job in a tight economy means more than sending out a resume. "Our clients have been looking hard at budgets and that means the candidates we bring in have to be top-notch in every way. If a candidate isn't willing to put the time into personalizing their job search they won't be willing to put their all into the job" said Sonal Shah, NSI President. By working harder and smarter than the competition, being well-prepared, creating a vision, researching the company, and personalizing your resume and interview questions, you can ensure a list of suitors looking for your talents.