

# Ten Smart Ways to Research a Company before Your Interview

By Sara True Pacelle, NorthBridge Career Partners

A successful interview starts with a lot of hard work and time spent learning all you can about the company. The interviewee needs to sound smart and well-informed about the company to attract the interest of the interviewer. Since there is a wealth of free available online resources that give company information, there's no excuse not to be really knowledgeable about a company, especially public companies. Once you're sitting in that interview chair, it's critical that you can demonstrate a real understanding of the employer's perspective, what they need from their employees, their challenges, concerns and competition. Most importantly, you need to convey that you have the desire and the know-how to help them be successful. Sound a bit like an unpaid consulting project or a business school assignment? Yes, the time spent researching and attaining that company knowledge can seem vast but, it will be worth your while.

Here is a list of ten resources we use to research a company:

1. **Google:** Of course, that is the first step to researching a company. If you have personal contacts within the company, that's even better, but if not, Google is the best first step. You can find out competitors to the firm by googling its company description and other similar companies will be listed.
2. **Company Website:** Needless to say, spend a lot of time on the website. It's a treasure trove of information. A recent review of a venture capital firm's website shared its own corporate philosophy, portfolio of companies it has funded, executive team members and their biographies, news of latest investments, current investment strategy, future outlook and plan, and even job postings and careers at the firm.
3. **LinkedIn:** LinkedIn has company pages to follow and it is easy to find employees who work at these companies on LinkedIn. There is a ton of information on LinkedIn about who just joined or left a company, where they came from or where they went, etc. available jobs, employee benefits, company products and services, common skills and qualifications of current employees. When you follow the company, you get update alerts on the company's activities. You can also see who else is following that company
4. **Twitter/Facebook:** Many companies also have corporate pages on Twitter and Facebook that announce their latest news and happenings. Twitter is really useful to follow conversations about job opportunities, new products and the overall culture of companies. Google, Bank of America, GE and Wal-Mart are a few examples of companies that have really robust Twitter career pages. Companies are using Facebook to recruit employees (particularly young career professionals because they are active Facebook users) by posting job openings on their fan pages. They also use Facebook for market research to float ideas about new products and services because Facebook is so interactive and engaging.

5. **Company Blogs:** Company websites will often times have employees tasked to administer their blogs and write well-crafted messages about the companies' focus, mission and latest news. Blogs can also give insight into the company's culture or personality. Whole Foods is a good example of a well-developed company blog. Whole Foods Co-CEOs, John Mackey and Walter Robb also have their own blogs where they give deep insight into the company and its plans.
6. **Annual Report Financial Statements for Public Companies** are a great source of information about how well a public company is doing and any future plans they may have. They are found under the Investor Information on a public company website. Be sure to read the fine print which can list company affiliates, partners and other interesting data. Apple's Annual Report reveals its business strategy, organization, products, competition and customer markets among other information.
7. **Press Releases** issued by the company or its public relations firm give a glimpse into what the company is most proud of and want the public to see.
8. **Industry Associations** focused on your intended business will be the place where industry thought leaders and most influential leaders will be sharing their expertise and vision. Associations are an excellent resource to find out what is on the mind of these business leaders. One example of a robust industry association is the Conscious Capitalism Institute where you'll find influential business leaders from all over the world meeting to share their innovative thoughts and concerns around the conscious capitalism movement.
9. **Competing Companies:** Be sure to research companies that directly compete with your target company. Get to know your target company's competition and what they are doing. Wouldn't it be impressive to a prospective employer if you were able to give them a heads up on what their competition was doing?
10. **Glassdoor.com:** This site describes itself as an anonymous workplace community that gives a free inside look at over 200,000 companies including salaries, employee reviews and interview questions. We like it to research companies because the reviews are by actual employees and they give both pros and cons of that company. You can also identify salary expectations and prepare for interviews by seeing actual interview questions that other job candidates were asked.

Sounding well-informed and concerned about a company and its success can set you apart in an interview. (Remember to also research the backgrounds of your interviewers on LinkedIn as well before you go into that interview.) The more prepared you are for an interview, the more confident you will be and confidence bodes well in an interview.

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