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Career fairs crowded but still worth a go

Unlike individual office interviews, such events enable job seekers to meet more employers

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Crowded like a pasar malam. That is why Mr Teo Eng San, 44, gives job fairs a miss. He does not believe they will help him find a job.

Mr Teo, a former quality assurance department head who has been jobless for two months now, will stick to Internet searches.

"I don't see how I can find a job at a job fair. They are crowded and there are always more candidates than vacancies. The chances are very slim," he said.

But that is not a fair assessment, said human resource experts and companies, who said these fairs do get people employed, provided they are well run and job seekers go well prepared.

As the jobless rate worsens, the job market now favours employers.

At least eight large-scale job fairs have been organised in the last three months, all attracting big crowds. They were mainly the efforts of the community development councils (CDCs) and the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA).

But some were organised by private event companies.

Last month, an event organised by South East CDC attracted 5,000 job seekers who were drawn to the more than 1,000 jobs on offer.

Earlier this month, a four-day career fair at Suntec convention centre saw some 20,000 people vying for 800 job openings offered by the integrated resorts.

Human resource experts say attending job fairs is still helpful in any job hunt.

Ms Lynne Ng, regional director of Adecco South East Asia, a human resource consulting firm, puts it this way: "When the economy is challenged, as it is now in Singapore, job applicants should be exploring all job-seeking avenues."

Attending such fairs provides the chance to meet as many employers as possible.

Mr David Leong, managing director of PeopleWorldwide Consulting, said: “In the usual interview, a job seeker goes to one office to see one employer. If he’s lucky, he may get two interviews. At a job fair, he can go to many interviews.”

Both job seeker and employer also get to interact face to face and exchange information about a particular position and its requirements on the spot, he said.

Job seekers can also pick up clues about a company’s culture and working environment from the way its representatives present themselves there, said Ms Ng.

“If the employer’s team members at the job fair booth are polite and well-informed, then there is a good chance that this is how the company conducts its business activities,” she said.

On the hiring side, employers can quickly compare candidates.

Companies may advise a candidate on the spot if he is suitable for the post.

For many companies, a job fair is also a channel to showcase job opportunities. It reinforces the company’s branding as well, said Mr Tay Kok Choon, country manager of JobStreet Singapore.

In these tough times, companies see job fairs as an attractive means of hiring. Chinese restaurant Dian Xiao Er has participated in at least five fairs in the past year, its human resource manager Calvin Koh said.

These were organised by CDCs and his firm did not pay to join up. Jobs on offer included those for waiters and kitchen helpers.

The job match rate was not high but he saw the events as an opportunity to reach out to a large pool.

“Frankly speaking, if we can fill about 25 per cent of the positions, we’ll be very happy,” Mr Koh said.

He added: “In good times, not many people turn up at such fairs so we may get only about 30 applicants. But now, the response is much better. Just last week, we received 178 applicants for the 30 positions we offered at a job fair.”

Ms Ng said a successful job fair will have a system in place to evaluate applicants and assess if they are the right fit for the job.

Some fairs do “screening” processes ahead of the event to ensure a better fit between job seekers and employers.

For example, the NTUC Women’s Development Secretariat organised a job fair for women at the Employment and Employability Institute last month.

Each of the 1,800 women who registered with it was contacted before the event. Details and preferences were double-checked and suitability for the jobs on offer was assessed. Several women received job offers on the spot.

Some organisers are moving away from generic job fairs. The North East CDC shifted its focus to organising industry-specific recruitment drives which it feels produce better job matches.

Its spokesman said about 60 per cent of those who turned up for its security-industry job fair last month were shortlisted by firms. The list of those who landed a job has not been finalised, she added.

CDCs are also bringing in training providers for the fairs. They help increase awareness of relevant training opportunities for workers who wish to upgrade their skills or acquire new skills for new sectors, said Mr Chan Heng Kee, chief executive of WDA.

An example of a training provider that has participated in such fairs is Health Management International. It provides health-care skills training for job seekers without the relevant experience and helps match them with jobs in health-care institutions.

To stand out from the crowd, job seekers must come prepared for the fair, human resource experts said.

JobStreet's Mr Tay said: "Many people go to job fairs as though they are visiting consumer fairs."

Job seekers should find out what companies are participating ahead of the event. They should also do their research on the companies and identify the ones they are interested in, he said.

PeopleWorldwide Consulting's Mr Leong said job seekers should also avoid petty conversations.

"Keep the conversation simple and short. And remember, the employers are eyeing a positive attitude and enthusiasm," he said.

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NEED A JOB?

Each week, The Sunday Times' Job section will feature two readers who are looking for jobs. A recruitment expert will look through their resumes and suggest what they should do or aim for to increase their chances of getting employed. E-mail your resume (with photo) to suntimes@sph.com.sg

She's keen on marketing in any industry

Norzilawati Mohd Taib, 27

- The senior marketing manager was laid off in January when the events company she was working for shut its Singapore office.
- She has five years of experience in marketing conferences and business events. In her last role, she managed the company's Singapore and Shanghai marketing and creative teams.
- She is looking for a marketing manager position, preferably in the banking or health-care sector.
- She holds a bachelor of arts in mass communications from the Management Development of Singapore (MDIS) and has a diploma in business management, majoring in retail and travel management.

SHE SAYS

"I've been job-hunting for about a month now. So far, I've been shortlisted for interviews with two companies and I'm now waiting for them to get back to me. I want to broaden my work experience so I'm open to working in any industry."

HR EXPERT RECOMMENDS

Ms Nancy Oon, assistant manager of GMP Recruitment, a division of The GMP Group says:

"Wati's résumé is very impressive. She has covered a wide range of duties in marketing. Her strength in events management will be attractive to events companies especially. She also presents herself well. Her answers are very structured and well-rounded.

"Although marketing skills are transferable, the marketing positions she is interested in may require other skill sets like writing. She might want to highlight her experience in writing press releases and newsletters when she applies for jobs.

"The good thing is that she has a mass communications degree, which means she will at least have some basic skills.

"One area that she can look at is corporate communications. Companies are now hiring and this is a good opportunity for her to expand her scope."

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He wants a job which helps people

Dennis Lim Ho Soon, 30

- He was a senior technician in the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) for 10 years before his contract ended in September last year.
- He was appointed crew chief for the RSAF Black Knights lead pilot's aircraft last year. He has also won several outstanding serviceman awards during his career.
- He hopes to move into the social service sector and eventually become a qualified counsellor.
- He has a diploma in mechanical engineering from the Singapore Polytechnic and is taking a specialist diploma course in counselling psychology from the Academy of Certified Counsellors.

HE SAYS

"I want to work in an industry where I can help people. Having gone through the job descriptions for positions available in the social service sector, I realised that they mostly require related qualifications or skills, which I don't have. So right now, I hope to start in support, administrative or planning role first."

HR EXPERT RECOMMENDS

Ms Tricia Hoy, assistant manager of GMP Technologies, a division of The GMP Group says:

"The highlight of Dennis' career would be the outstanding service awards he won in the RSAF and appointment as a crew chief of the Black Knight aircraft.

"His technical skills will serve him well in the aerospace industry, which is hiring now.

"However, since he wants to become a counselor, he needs to further his studies, get a diploma and eventually a degree to reach his goal.

"In the meantime, he could take on project management roles which will allow him to work with people. Previously, he was a supervisor to junior crew members and he could highlight this to potential employers.

"There's no harm in him trying to secure a junior position in the social service sector now. If he gets a job in the industry, it will be a good channel to network. This may help him find a counselling position eventually."

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