

What do I look for on a company's website to prepare for my interview?

There are many ways the internet is not helpful for people's job searches. It is too easy to spend time alone, looking at a computer screen, sending off resumes, and then getting discouraged because nothing happens.

But the availability of information about a company through a website can be very helpful! The more you can be prepared for your interview, the more confident you will be. Here are some helpful ideas:

What's on the site map?

If you are lucky, your target company will have an informative site map. The link to it is usually at the top of the page (often right hand corner), or at the very bottom of the home page. A good site map can give you a lot of information about the company's structure. (You can look at the site map for Tools for Transition to give you an example)

Product Lines

If you are applying for a job such as project manager or sales manager for a specific product line, you want to know where it fits within the company's entire product line. You want to know about the specific products, including what are the target markets. Is the position you're interviewing for supporting their flagship product? Maybe a new product? You need to know.

Target Markets

Many companies will be explicit about their target markets. For example:

- Government
- Education
- Telecommunications
- Health Care
- Transportation

What do you know about these markets? How does the position you are applying for relate to them?

Geographic Markets

Where is the company's focus? Are they full operational in Asia and new to South America? Do you speak another language that might be helpful for a specific market? Have you traveled to any of these markets in your current or previous jobs?

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Public Financial Information

If the company is public, be sure to review recent financial statements, press releases and information about their stock prices. If you are somewhat familiar with this information, you can ask specific questions in an interview that might be helpful. For example, "I know the stock has dropped to \$5 over the past 6 months. What are the plans for improving things so the market will be more favorable?"

Employee Benefits / Culture

Some companies post their employee benefits directly on the website. This can be helpful for negotiations. Example "I understand all employees are covered under Blue Cross. My wife and I have been with Kaiser for the past 20 years. If we choose not to move our coverage to Blue Cross, can anything be done to help us cover the premiums with Kaiser?"

Most companies will put something about the values they want to convey to their employees. Usually things like fairness, opportunities for promotion or casual work environment will be mentioned. But sometimes other helpful (and less generic) information is included.

For example, I looked at a site with a client recently as part of his interview preparation. It said that many people had been with the company 8+ years, including some who returned to the company after going to other companies. They probably were "post-dot.com" people who welcomed the ability to return to this company. It said a lot about the values of the top managers in creating a healthy work environment.

If the company you are targeting does have a full site map, be sure to take advantage of the information provided. Even if you are applying for a position that supports the general corporate functions, it is still important to know as much as you can about the company.

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