

Customer Service Career Development

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Employment Resources

There is no shortage of avenues to job postings. The problem is to compete against the incoming flood of applications and resumes from dozens or even hundreds of others who aspire to be employed in the same position. This is especially true of job openings posted in local media. Of course, the more specialized and developed the skills you have to offer, then the better chance you have of standing out in the stack.

Another tactic is to sidestep the typical employment process and connect directly with the decision-makers who may help you navigate the help-wanted labyrinth, or—given the right set of circumstances—even create a position just to match your specialized abilities.

First, you may want to do a scan of the sorts of companies and positions seeking what you have to offer. Here are a few sample employment boards to investigate:

Career Builder: <http://www.careerbuilder.com>

Indeed: <http://www.indeed.com>

Monster: <http://www.monster.com/>

Spend an hour or so visiting these pages; perform a search for *customer service* positions; and get an idea of the sorts of positions available, what companies are hiring, what skills they seek, and where they are located. You may even post your resume and apply for positions, but try not to get overwhelmed or discouraged by the process.

Another tactic is to attempt to develop a relationship with a manager, vice president, or other well-placed contact in a desired company or organization. Research everything you can: what is the company's history? Where did your contact go to school, what have they written, and what projects have tackled? Write your contact a message expressing interest in his or her works, ask questions about his or her success, and request advice. You are not looking for a job at this point, but you are looking to build a relationship. It is even better if the company has no job openings, because you are not competing against anyone. When an opening comes along, you may have established a relationship with a key contact, and he or she may be happier to hire someone he or she already knows.

An important item to keep in mind about employers and hiring is they are likely to be as apprehensive about the selection process as you are. They are putting themselves on the line with their hiring decision, especially for a position so out-front as

a customer service representative. They are inviting a stranger into their home, and that is just plain scary. It is much easier to hire someone than it is to get rid of them. Appreciate their apprehensions, and try to shine as you attempt to assuage their own concerns with reasons why you are the perfect fit (if indeed you are).

Internships

Internships are a valuable tool for career development. They allow you to learn valuable skills while putting them to practical use in the field, to demonstrate your abilities in a low-stake position while making useful connections, and to decide if it is really the kind of work you want to dedicate your life to anyway. There are many examples of well-known and successful former-interns, including Bill Gates and Oprah Winfrey.

Most job boards will allow you to search for *internship* positions. Many company websites will announce internship opportunities. You can also offer yourself as an intern directly to a key contact within an organization. There are some websites that specialize in connecting applicants with internship openings, such as InternshipPrograms.com. On the website below, spend an hour researching for internship opportunities by field (e.g. marketing), employer, and location.

Internship Programs: <http://www.internshipprograms.com/>

As you arrange your internship position, there are a number of useful tips you might keep in mind:

- **Negotiate a good title for your resume:** for example, rather than intern, try customer service program coordinator, technical support developer, or such.
- **Investigate if the field is a good career fit:** check the company out, while the company is considering you. Is this what you want to dedicate your life to?
- **Develop industry and company connections:** the most valuable payoff is the people you meet, the references you gain, and the leads you get.
- **Be low maintenance, observe, and contribute:** many managers may dislike interns; interns sometimes take more work to manage than they give. Don't do that.
- **Treat it as a real job:** always give your best; you never know who is watching.
- **Volunteer for a non-profit:** it can be more interesting work, offering a greater diversity of assignments and having less pressure to generate revenues.

International Careers

All the above suggestions and resources apply to a career in the global marketplace as well, especially if you can bring multilingual and cross-cultural skills to

the table. Beyond the regular abilities required for a position in any field, you may be able to expand your resume offerings in critical ways: do you speak a second or third language? Do you have overseas experience? Do you have an especially suitable background (e.g. language skills plus specialized technical training)? Have you worked with international multicultural customers and employees?

The database below provides contact information for a number of international organizations, as well as links to their *about* and *employment* pages. This resource is especially useful for those who hope to apply their communication and technical skills to government work, social marketing, and development programs. Please spend an hour scanning through the database entries on each organization, its mission, and its geographical range of activity.

Database of Transnational Organizations: <http://wwmr.us/support/transorgs/transorgs.html>

Summary:

- There are many employment boards (e.g. Careerbuilder.com, Monster.com, and Indeed.com) that list job openings and allow resume postings, though it is easy to get overwhelmed and discouraged by the process.
- It is possible to find job openings by connecting directly with key managers and decision-makers within a chosen organization.
- Employers are also apprehensive about the hiring process; strive to become a perfect fit for their needs.
- Internships are a useful opportunity to develop your skills, demonstrate your abilities, develop key contacts, and try out a field to see if it fits.
- International careers can be exciting and fulfilling. To appeal to international employers, develop valuable skills such as foreign language proficiency, cross-cultural abilities, on-site country experience, and project management.