

Recruit Like the Pros

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Resumes and interviews form the bedrock of a successful hire, but many companies supplement the standard question-and-answer format with creative techniques that allow potential star employees to shine. Here's how five companies have reinvented the interview process.

Google: The Talent Show



At its offices all over the world, Google holds events designed to help the company connect with local talent. One, targeted at math and computer specialists, is called a Code Jam. "We invite a bunch of people to participate in a three- to four-hour coding competition," says hiring director Arnon Geshuri. "They sit in a big room together, so you can see how people approach questions." The top 100 finishers are invited back to apply for a job. In India, Google sponsored an essay contest that attracted applicants from around the country. In addition to connections with creative thinkers, the gesture generated plenty of positive publicity. "We're not really about job fairs," Geshuri says. "We try to come up with interesting environments where people can be their best."

Starbucks Coffee: See the Product, Love the Product



At Starbucks Coffee's headquarters in Seattle, candidates don't have to worry about being sufficiently caffeinated, but it helps to have a coffee palate. "We often conduct brief coffee tastings," says Carmen Hudson, Starbucks Coffee's staffing manager for global strategic sourcing. "It allows candidates to experience a bit of Starbucks culture, emphasizes our core product, and provides a break for candidates between interviews." Of course not every company sells coffee, but

the point is to put the candidate in direct contact with the brand or product to gauge their levels of familiarity and comfort.

Southwest Airlines: The Always-On Interview



If you're flying Southwest Airlines to interview at the company's Dallas headquarters, be sure to turn on the charm as soon as you enter the airport. Although it's not official company policy, flight attendants and other Southwest employees often submit comments about job candidates to those in charge of making the hire. A unique mix of southern hospitality and northern wisecracking is the hallmark of Southwest's corporate culture, particularly among those who serve the public. If you don't have it, other Southwest workers are likely notice. "If one of our employees is impressed, or not so impressed, after talking with a candidate on a flight, they let us know," says Amy Webb, manager of employment in Southwest's People department. "They give us feedback proactively."

FedEx: Computerized Matching



Many large companies that hire on a regular basis now use clever online software that screens and filters applicants before scheduling interviews. FedEx has introduced a [career center](#) on its website that allows applicants to post their resume and receive pointers to the jobs that best match their experience and skills. "It's all about providing the communication, understanding, and education applicants need—just like we would for our customers," says FedEx director of recruitment John Leech.

Microsoft: Gazing into the Crystal Ball

Microsoft

Microsoft sometimes invites candidates to ponder the future as a way to look for people who understand the strategic challenges the company faces. "One of our online media businesses asked candidates what they thought the future of online music looked like, and how teens would be using the Net ten years from now," recalls Scott Pitasky, Microsoft's general manager of recruiting. Other questions include asking candidates to name companies that they consider best at customer experience, and what Microsoft could learn from them.

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