



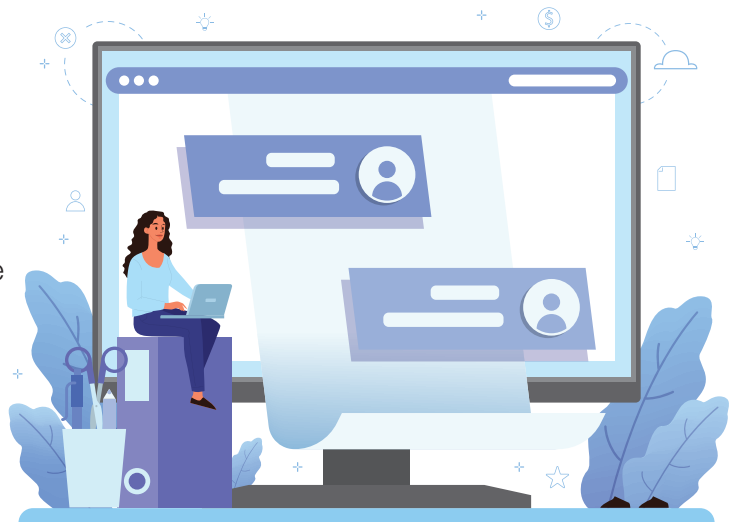
## THE CAREER SEEKER'S GUIDE TO VIRTUAL EVENTS

In-person career fairs can be a hassle. You have to make up an excuse to leave work. Change into your Sunday best. Fight the traffic to arrive before other candidates. Pay for parking. Navigate your way through the crowd. Wait in line for a chance to speak with recruiters.

But with COVID-19 ushering in a wave of virtual networking events, it's easier than ever to connect with potential employers, learn from other professionals in your industry, or even land your next career opportunity—all from the comfort of your home office or living room—bunny slippers optional.

But just because it's easier doesn't mean you'll knock your first virtual event out of the park. Online networking and event platforms come with their own nuances. Just because you're a savvy in-person networker doesn't mean you'll be able to make the same impression online.

**Before you embark on your first virtual career event, keep the three 'Ps' in mind: Preparation, Presence, and Progression.**



# 1 PREPARATION

It's easy to think of a virtual career event as a low-pressure, low value engagement that you can easily blow off. But unless you're registering under an alias (and we do not recommend conducting your career networking as Bugs Bunny), then a career event is your opportunity to create a good impression on potential employers and career advocates—so you should prepare for it.



- **Research:** When you register, make note of the companies attending. Re-check the list the day prior, as some companies may sign up at the last minute. Prior to the event, identify who you'd like to connect with. Get an idea of their current openings, what types of positions they're hiring for, and any company news or announcements. You will certainly earn brownie points with a recruiter if you're able to reference a specific opening or contract announcement your skills align with.
- **Test:** Make sure you test your connectivity and any webcams or audio features prior to the call—it's worth noting many virtual events do not involve video or voice functionality, but just involve basic chat. Know the format of your event before you register and plan accordingly. You don't want to be caught with your webcam on unexpectedly.

Tech problems happen—if you hit a snag with your equipment or connectivity, try to reconnect and provide that information. If you need to drop off to attend another meeting or appointment, just say so. Ghosting an online chat is as rude as leaving mid-conversation—don't do it.
- **Craft Your Elevator Pitch:** Whether the event is video, audio, or chat-only, everyone needs their networking elevator pitch to be polished. Don't hesitate to write it out and practice it a few times, but try not to just read it or copy verbatim. The more relaxed and involved you can be at an online recruiting event, the better your chance of making a good impression.
- **Write Questions:** Write out expected or common responses as preparation (but don't read them like notecards during a video chat!). Also, have a list of questions for potential employers. Some of these can be about general topics like remote work policies or employee benefits, but try to use your research to craft at least one original question for each company you connect with—something specific to team structures, contracts awarded, office locations, or other issues that show you know the company or organization and are ready for your opportunity to work there.

## 2 PRESENCE

One of the biggest pitfalls of virtual networking events is the temptation to multi-task. We all think we can do it—few of us can. If you are running multiple other platforms or performing other functions in the background, your attention and your connectivity will suffer.



**Eliminate Distractions:** Pick a quiet room in your house for the networking event. This is no time to take advantage of the free WiFi at your favorite local coffee shop. Lock up the pets and find a sitter for the kids. Make sure the location you choose is quiet, well lit, and comfortable. If you don't have a home office, a bedroom or closet can be a surprisingly successful video chat location—if you set your backdrop correctly.



**DISTRACTIONS HAPPEN:** How you respond to the distractions that unexpectedly hit during a virtual event may be as important as your event participation itself. Resist the temptation to scream at your spouse or roommate for interrupting you or for losing your cool because the UPS man knocked. Life happens. Be agile, affable, and flexible—every job requires it.

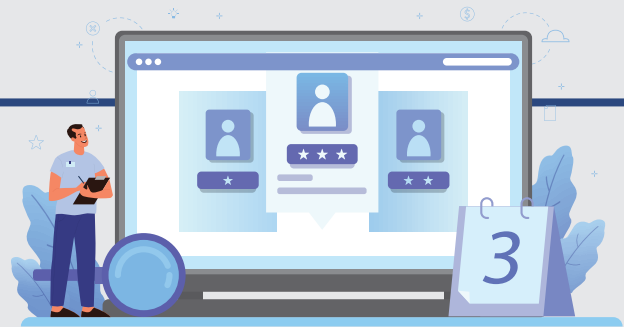
**Dress for Success:** Even if your networking event is chat only, you should still dress as if you're getting out of the house and meeting someone. It's a mental trick that will remind you to present your best self. Brush your teeth, do your hair, and perform similar grooming rituals as if you were going into the office. Don't wear a suit—you'll likely look too serious (or silly), especially for the post-COVID workplace. But a nice button down or blouse will never let you down, and will remind you that you mean business.

**Practice:** There is an art to letting your personality shine in a virtual recruiting event. The reality is that some people glow on screen in a way they never could at an in-person event. Maybe all of those years of AOL have made you a chat-room ace. Maybe years of video-gaming mean you think quickly and don't mind a video chat. For others, the video or virtual format can be stilted and awkward. If it's your first virtual event, take some time to practice the format with a friend—set up your own Zoom or Skype call, and do a little mock back and forth engagement. Do you have “resting ‘bitter’ face” every time a recruiter asks you a question? Try to work on a neutral or smile. Is your posture...weird? You won't know unless you practice—make your mom or most critical friend give you feedback.

**Be Personal:** It can be difficult to let your personality shine in a virtual interview, but practice helps. Think about what makes you unique or special—both in your vocation, and as a person—and consider ways to highlight that in a virtual interview. Take the time to craft a greeting and conclusion. Start and end every conversation well, and you'll leave a solid first impression.

# 3 PROGRESSION

Think of any career event as just a stairstep on your path to a new career opportunity. It shouldn't be the first step in your interaction with an employer, and it certainly shouldn't be your last.



- **Take the Next Step:** At the event, don't hesitate to ask recruiters what the next steps are. Do you need to visit a company page or job listing? Are there other contacts you should reach out to within the company? If you're interested in the company, be forward and ask the recruiter for their email address. But don't ask for contact information for anyone who you don't really want to follow-up with. Just like in an in-person event, you don't need to connect with every company or contact who attends.
- **Jot It Down:** After any networking event, make a note of who you spoke with, any recruiters you made a connection with, and questions that came up after the event concluded. Just as you research companies before the event, do some research on the tail end. What went really well? What questions were you unprepared for? Your notes will help you impress even more at the next event.
- **Follow-Up:** If you do connect with the recruiter via email, messaging platform, or career network after the event, make your message memorable. Keep in mind they likely chatted with dozens of candidates. A 'nice to meet you' may collide with a lot of other similar messages. Use your notes to make your follow-up message personal or memorable in some way.
- **Follow-Through:** If you say you're going to apply to a specific job or send additional information, make sure you do so. Don't hound a recruiter after the event if you haven't done your part.

Virtual networking events are here to stay. Make sure you take advantage of the opportunity to connect with new employers and consider new opportunities. There may be no better way to keep your job search skills sharp.