

CAREER PATH:

High-Tech Careers

Steps for Developing a High-Tech Career

Introduction

This guide provides one perspective on the career search process in the high-tech field and is a good starting point for defining your own career search strategy. Change is a given in the high-tech industry and this is just as true with some of the information in this guide. Therefore, it is imperative that you do your own due diligence, in addition to using the information provided in this guide, rather than relying exclusively on the handout.

Your peers are almost always going to be the most current resource during your high-tech search. Twenty sets of eyes and ears keeping a watch on the high-tech industry are always more effective than just one set, so get to know your peers well, especially those who have similar aspirations as you do. In addition, your classmates may have contacts from previous jobs that could be very helpful to you in your own career search. Contact second year MBAs to discuss their internship experiences.

For these reasons, the high-tech career search process is very dynamic. As you learn more about the industry, or as things change within the industry, your career search strategy may also change resulting in you having to go and rework your resume, target a different set of companies or focus on a different functional area than you originally intended. All of this is quite normal. Furthermore, these types of changes should be expected, unlike in brand management at a consumer goods company, or consulting, these types of changes should be expected as you go about your search. To some extent, this is more accurate for off-campus recruiting and is less true for larger, established high-tech firms that have a fairly defined recruiting process and specific career tracks for MBAs.

A couple of caveats before we go further: This guide generally covers the entire high-tech field (not just the large, established firms) and is oriented exclusively to the high-tech industry; it does not cover Information Technology/High-Tech consulting careers. Several consulting firms focus exclusively on the high-tech world, and almost all the Big Five and other well-known firms have e-commerce and IT consulting practices. These organizations can also be great options for MBAs seeking experience in the high-tech industry. Examples of such firms include PRTM, Diamond Cluster Technology Partners, and Deloitte Consulting. However, information on these career fields is outside the scope of this guide. Please refer to the Consulting Career Path handout for more information regarding that sector. Another area that this guide does not address is the field of venture capital.

Finally, there is no such thing as “average” or “standard” in the high-tech field. There are no standard job descriptions, standard compensation packages, average starting salaries, etc. in this business. It is important to do your own due diligence when it comes to your personal career search process. The smaller the high-tech firms you may be interested in, the more important and challenging the information search becomes. Again, contacts working within these types of firms will always be your best source of information in these cases.

What is High-Tech?

Open any magazine or any newspaper from USA Today to the Wall Street Journal, and you would be hard pressed not to find a story about the high-tech industry. However, everyone has his or her own concept of what exactly the high-tech industry is; the table below is one potential categorization. There are certainly other ways to categorize this space, so the objective here is not so much to be comprehensive, but to set the context for this guide and to give you an idea of the opportunities ahead of you. There will also be plenty of overlap across the categories described below, and there is a good chance that by the time you read this guide, several new categories will have been created. The depth and breadth of this industry, as demonstrated below, also reflects the need for you to focus your career search in order to do the best job of matching your skills and goals with the right firm.

	Industry sub-segments	Sample companies
Hardware	Telecom	
	• Broadband	Cisco, Lucent, Nortel
	• Networking	Cisco, Juniper, 3Com
	• Wireless	Nokia, Qualcomm, Ericsson
	• Optical	Corning, Corvis, JDSU
	PCs	Dell, HP/Compaq, IBM, Apple
	Servers	Sun, IBM, HP, Dell
	PDA's and Handheld PCs	Palm, Psion, Handspring, Blackberry
Software	Consumer oriented	Microsoft, Intuit, Adobe
	Business oriented	
	• E-Commerce	Broadvision, BEA Systems
	• Supply chain	i2 Technologies, Manugistics
	• Sales force management	Salesforce.com
E-Commerce	B2C (business-to-consumer)	Amazon, Expedia
	B2B (business-to-business)	Vertical Net
	C2C (consumer-to-consumer)	Ebay
Services	ISPs	MSN, Earthlink, AOL
	ASPs	Verio Digex
	Portals	Yahoo!, Excite, Google
	Broadband providers	Northpoint, Media One
	Telecom services	Qwest, AT&T, Sprint
	Financial	E*Trade, Charles Schwab, ING
	Infrastructure providers	Exodus Communications, Digital Island

Career Search Step #1: Self-Assessment

High-tech companies look for a wide variety of backgrounds in potential hires. As with all other things in the high-tech industry, there is no “standard” profile for recruits. These backgrounds could include experience in consumer marketing, technical marketing, technical product development, and consulting, sales and general management. If there are specific qualifications that a firm is looking for to fill a

specific position, they usually make it clear in the job posting itself. As far as MBA candidates go, high-tech companies usually look for the following qualities:

- Leadership skills
- Communication skills
- Comfort with understanding technical concepts
- Logical and structured thinking
- Analytical skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Ability to work in high-pressure environments
- Ability to adapt rapidly to changing conditions/goals/priorities
- Ability to make decisions effectively in ambiguous environments
- Negotiation skills

Assess for yourself your current skill set, what areas you need to work on, and most important of all, what you would enjoy doing. OCD offers a number of workshops and tools that can help you through this stage of the career search process.

In addition to a core set of transferable skills, high tech companies often look for industry experience and/or a passion for high-tech. If you are not coming from a high tech background, it is imperative that you utilize business school resources and opportunities outside of the classroom to the best of your ability. Many opportunities are available including high-tech related clubs, case competitions, venture capital activities, Zell Lurie Institute, and networking with local high-tech companies and venture capital firms.

Career Search Step #2: Investigate possible career opportunities

Job descriptions are often some of the hardest things to understand in the high-tech field. Although traditional functional areas do exist in larger high-tech organizations, the actual content of the job could vary significantly. For smaller high-tech companies, this is even more important. For instance, a Product Manager at one company may be responsible for determining the features and characteristics of a product, while at another company the Product Manager may be responsible for developing and executing the marketing strategy for a product. At a very small start-up, a Product Manager may be responsible for both the activities described above in addition to others. Therefore do not rely solely on the job title to understand what the job actually entails. Listed below are some of the roles that MBAs are hired for in high-tech companies

- Product Management
- Business Development
- Marketing Manager
- Campaign Management
- Public Relations
- Product Planning/Development
- Strategy Development
- Finance

Career Search Step #3: Research employers

Once you have identified potential functional areas that would be of interest to you, as well as a segment of the high-tech industry that you would like to learn more about, spend some time identifying employers that you intend to target. As mentioned earlier, the high-tech industry encompasses many different types of organizations, so focusing your career strategy will be important to make the most of your time and resources. The Appendix to this guide lists some good resources that can be used to learn more about certain industries and organizations. In addition, Kresge Library also offers access to many online databases that have a wealth of up-to-date information on the high-tech world.

Finally, Ross alumni can be an invaluable resource in learning the idiosyncrasies of different companies, divisions and high-tech job opportunities.

Career Search Step #4: Develop a Career Search Strategy

Just as in business, having a strategy in place is crucial to making the most of your career search process. Below is a list of issues you may want to consider in developing your strategy.

- **Understand the timeframe of a high-tech search:** Unlike on-campus and self-directed searches for careers in consulting, brand management, and investment banking, the high-tech recruiting calendar can often stretch through the entire academic year. Larger high-tech firms that recruit on-campus will typically conduct their presentations and interviews at the same time as other on-campus recruiters (in the fall for full-time positions and in January-February for summer positions). However, many companies cannot forecast their staffing needs so far in advance, and often do the bulk of their recruiting for summer and full-time positions closer to graduation or even at the beginning of the summer. In addition, firms who do not fall into either of the two categories described above sometimes solicit Ross resumes or arrive for on-campus interviews during the winter semester, and OCD periodically sends messages out to alert students to these opportunities.
- **Career fairs:** OCD, as well as other schools or high-tech organizations, organize recruiting events in major tech areas around the country and the world to bring candidates and organizations together. Investigate which such events fit with your career goals. OCD's and the Ross High-Tech Club's West Coast Forum is a Michigan-only event that has been growing in size over the last few years and is a great opportunity to network and interview with high-tech organizations on the West Coast.
- **Club affiliations:** If you are interested in a career in high-tech, consider joining clubs like the Ross High-Tech Club and Entrepreneurship and Venture Capital (EVC) Club not only to raise your awareness of the industry, but also to stay informed about national and regional career fairs, case competitions, business plan competitions, job postings sent directly to the clubs by alumni, and so on. These are all opportunities for you to build your high-tech profile and position yourself better for a high-tech career.
- **Online presence:** Do you need an online presence? It is certainly not a requirement but something to consider if you do not have a technical background and are looking to convince recruiters or your interest. This could include something as simple as having your resume available on the Internet for anyone to access or developing a website that recruiters can visit to learn more about you. One note here, make sure that anything you put up on the web for recruiters to view is professional in nature. Skip the photos from your last vacation, wedding pictures, or your thoughts on the differences between Sirvananda and Bikram Yoga.

- Resumes: Will having only an iMPact version of your resume be sufficient for your career search? Although an iMPact version of your resume is essential for your on-campus career search process, you may want to consider having available electronic versions of your resume in multiple formats (MS Word, Adobe Acrobat, text) so that you can email these quickly when you come across an attractive job opportunity. Having a non-iMPact version of your resume may also give you more flexibility in what you put on your resume and how you present this information.
- ASCII versions of your resume: Some companies will ask for a text-only or ASCII version of your resume since they enter these resumes into a central corporate database that can be searched by managers. An ASCII version of your resume is simply a text file, similar to what your resume would look like if you were to create it using the Notepad program on your PC. This type of file contains no formatting and will remove any bolding, underlining, etc. that other file formats allow.
- Sending out cover letters and resumes: Most, if not all, high-tech companies like to have your resumes in electronic format. Therefore, unless explicitly requested by the company, you should email your resume to recruiters and other potential contacts within high-tech organizations. This reduces paper clutter for them, makes it easier for them to circulate your resume, and makes it easier for you to follow-up via email as well. Also attach a cover letter outlining your career interests and experiences.
- Interviewing: With interviews in the high-tech business, as with other things, there is no cookie-cutter approach to preparing for them. Each company has its own style and technique, from purely behavioral/fit interviews to the case method. Once you have identified organizations you are interested in, contact second-years who may have worked or interviewed with that company or alumni who work there now to get an understanding of what the company's interview culture is like. You should be familiar with the company's product/services offerings and be prepared to discuss one or two in detail. Companies will often ask you which of their products you'd be interested in working on, why/ how it is marketed, and what you would do to improve the marketing.
- Summer internships: Even after you've secured your dream summer job, there are many things you can continue to do ensure the success of your career search strategy upon graduation. This includes networking with contacts within the organization you will be spending your summer with, taking advantage of your location to meet with contacts and alumni at other companies in the same area, and also deciding whether high-tech is where you want to be longer term.

We hope that this guide has provided you with the information to get you started on your career search. OCD has many additional resources in areas such as resume writing, interviewing etc. that can help you fine-tune your strategy. In addition, a number of OCD counselors have experience in the high-tech industry and would be happy to meet with you to answer your questions and help develop a strategy that will work best for you.

Appendix: A list of resources

Keep up with what's going on in the industry at:

Wsj.com, The Wall Street Journal
Upside.com, Upside magazine
Business2.com, Business 2.0 magazine
Wired magazine
Business Week magazine and the e.biz supplement
Fortune magazine
CNET.com
Venturewire.com
Zdnet.com
Techweb.com
Corante.com
TheDeal.com
Telecomclick.com
LightReading.com
NetworkWorld.com

Career-oriented sites:

Cruelworld.com
Craigslist.org
Monster.com
Hotjobs.com
Wetfeet.com
MBA Jungle
Brassring.com
FlipDog.com

Commonly Asked High-Tech Interview Questions

General

1. Walk me through your resume/Tell me about yourself.
2. Why are you interested in High Tech?
3. Why are you interested in our company?
4. Why did you select Michigan?

Leadership/Management

1. Give me an example of a time when you led a group.
2. How would others describe you as a leader?
3. Give me an example of an assignment you were given that was very ambiguous.
4. What is the difference between a manager and a leader?

Analytical

1. Give me an example of an analytical project you worked on and discuss your thinking in approaching the problem?

Persuasive

1. Discuss a situation when you had to persuade a person of a different point of view to agree with an issue.
2. Give me an example when you had to convince your boss about something.

Others

1. What is the most difficult decision you've ever had to make? How did you make that decision?
2. Give me an example of a time when you took a risk.
3. What accomplishment are you most proud of and why?
4. Describe your biggest failure.

Mini-case questions

1. Pretend you were the product manager on a notebook computer. How do you make trade offs between new features, costs, and the industrial design of the notebook computer?
2. Tell me about three trends in the high-tech market. (Interviewer might also ask your opinion on a current event in the industry.)
3. Give me an example of the best new high-tech product you've seen lately.
4. You're the product manager of "X" product and you're losing market share, what do you look at?