IT Graduates: A Guide to Securing Your First Job

With the arrival of Autumn, the coming weeks will see many Canterbury University Students attending their graduation ceremonies. This will result in a sudden influx of tech talent into the market, which for graduates means that there will be strong competition for those valuable first job placements. Landing a job is a different type of challenge to university work, so how can you set yourself up for success after graduating and secure that perfect first role at the company you want?

Personal Branding

Having a strong personal brand makes a great first impression and allows candidates to stand out from the crowd. A well-structured CV is a good starting point for forging a personal brand, however, setting up an online presence is an important second step.

Social media is key to a successful digital network and it's where most employers can go to find your contact information and examples of your work. Public profiles, like Facebook, can contain unfavourable content, such as images or updates which may turn off a potential employer. It's good practice to remove any unfavourable content from public view on your social networks, as well as ensuring that your profiles are up-to-date with your recent experience and contact information.

Applying a little creativity with your brand image is a good way to get noticed. Elski Felson turned his

back on traditional paper CVs and decided to apply for a role at Snapchat, by capturing his 'resume' with their social media app and then uploading the footage to YouTube. Whilst unfortunately, it's unclear if Elski heard back from the app giant, his video resume has now been watched over a million times.

LinkedIn is designed to be a professional platform and it allows you to showcase your recent experience, skills and interests. Whilst it is common for employers to pre-emptively search applicants on LinkedIn, it can provide a head start when job searching as you can sometimes locate contact information for potential Hiring Managers that you can directly approach.

GitHub and Stack Overflow are networks specific to the IT sector, and can be used to assist your job search. GitHub is the largest code sharing platform to date, and is a fantastic place to showcase work from previous projects, allowing users to build credibility within the community. Stack Overflow is an educational question and answer forum and is where programmers of various levels of experience go to find, or provide, solutions to problems posed by its community. It also contains a built-in credibility system. If you use either, then consider including them on your applications. For a more detailed guide on personal branding for graduates and students, click here.

Keys to Success

Personal Branding
Have a strong CV and online presence, and make sure you highlight your best work and achievements.

Networking
Take every opportunity to network within your industry by going to conferences and graduate fairs to propel your career forward.

Interning
If you are still studying, look at undertaking an internship or graduate programme to get some experience before graduating.

Freelancing
Working as a freelancer is a great opportunity to utilise and hone your skills outside of a full-time work environment.

Be Bold
Don't be afraid to contact your ideal company directly; do your research and think outside the box.

Networking

Utilising professional networks is great for accelerating your career after graduating. Your network has already begun to take shape; as your University Lecturers can play an influential part in it. They will have valuable information on conferences, job vacancies, internships and places you can go to find more information on how to further your career.

University Graduate fairs are a good place to start as they're designed for candidates in your position and will be attended by recruiters interested in young talent in your area. By approaching and engaging recruiters you can promote yourself and your skills. If you take full advantage of these fairs, you can make a strong first impression to those who attend.

Your experience with a Graduate Fair will give you some insight into what attending a conference will be like. Conferences are usually annual events, specialising in a particular field and often attended by professionals from all over the world. Attending conferences will provide you with direct access to influential and inspiring people. If you would like to learn more on finding conferences in your area and how to make the most of them, then click here.

Interning

For those graduating next year, it's quite common for graduates to find their first full time job from completing an internship. Getting involved in Summer Graduate Programmes such as Summer of Tech can be a great way to get your foot in the door. Some efficient methods of securing an internship is either via your University or by approaching employers directly. Landing an internship can allow you to show a potential employer how hard you work and your enthusiasm by getting stuck into everything they throw at you, but remember to avoid the trap of being an eternal intern. If you're after more information on securing internships, then click here.

Freelancing

You know the old saying, practice makes perfect? Freelancing is a popular choice with many programmers as it offers a deal of flexibility and ample opportunity to practice your skills. The rise in popularity in freelancing has seen a number of dedicated networks appear, which offer help to those wanting to explore freelancing further. These include Freelancer, Upwork and Elance, which allow people to post projects and hire technical talent to complete them.

Be Persistent

Everyone has an ideal company they want to work for. Contacting yours directly, and finding out as much as you can about potential vacancies in your area, can promote your genuine interest in their company. Even if they don't have any roles at the moment, they may have a junior role coming up soon and will often keep impressive CV's to review again once the time is right.

A mixture of persistence and 'outside-the-box' thinking may get your resume noticed right at the top! Nina Mufleh's dream was to work for Airbnb, and she simply wouldn't take no for an answer. After months of sending emails and applying to vacancies but not getting much response, she decided to take a different approach, and recreated her CV in the style of Airbnb's website. Nina decided that her web CV would not focus on her past experiences, but on what Airbnb's next venture should be. Despite her unique approach paying off and her website being seen by Airbnb's CEO; Brain Chesky, Nina instead secured a role overseeing the growth of freelancers on one of the largest freelancing platforms; Upwork.

Setting yourself personal milestones can be a great way to provide you a way to measure your progress, and may also keep you focused on your objectives.

Summary

Breaking into the job market after graduating is a daunting process, but if you know where to look there are a vast number of resources ready to be used. Your journey may have already begun, but dedicating time to build your current network and strengths can really make a difference. Looking at the above two examples, you can see the amount of hard work needed to be succeed. If you're after more advice on setting up your personal brand, expanding your network or simply need help looking for job vacancies, then feel free to contact us.