

## CareerLine Q & A

by [Jack Wilson](#)



*ACM's career consultant, Jack Wilson, answers questions from students about their forthcoming careers in computing and information technology.*

**Q: I'm program chairman for our ACM student chapter and would like to put on a career-related program for one of our future meetings. Do you have any suggestions?**

A: Yes, why don't you try getting a guest speaker from the business world? Get someone who is knowledgeable about information technology and has had experience in hiring, managing, promoting and giving career advice to computing professionals. A good source would be the CIO or VP of Information Systems in a nearby company. If you don't know who that is, you can call the company and ask.

In fact, I would suggest you consider at least two such programs so that you can get different perspectives from the management side as well as from the individual contributor side. You can use the same source to ask the top management person to recommend a top technical professional. Another source would be a local software development firm, which is an additional reason for having at least two programs. You may also want to consider getting both male and female career perspectives.

If you don't have the luxury of scheduling more than one program, consider a panel discussion with a mix of three-to-four industry people, keeping the above suggestions in mind.

**Q: I want to start planning for my first internship next year. What would be the best criteria to use in preparing me for a full-time job when I graduate?**

A: First, I want to congratulate you on your desire to plan ahead. Second, without knowing more about your interests and skills, I can only offer you some general suggestions.

If you have your sights set on future employment, after graduation, with a particular company or industry, then that should be your top priority in targeting an internship. Your experience, although brief, with that company or in that industry will add measurably to your future candidacy. If you have no such preferences, then I would recommend the following pursuits:

1. work that allows you to function in both an individual and a team role. Both are important in today's workplace.
2. work that helps you develop not only your technical skills, but also your interpersonal qualities. One such example is in working closely with users or user groups.
3. work that enables you to have some discrete accomplishments, not just maintaining a status quo, but some distinct technical tasks that you can complete during your time there.
4. work that gives you exposure to the business; that helps you understand business processes and the relationship of computing jobs to these processes.

These are things to be thinking about as you look for and evaluate potential internship opportunities.

**Q: I'm planning to pursue a PhD but would like to work for about two years before doing so. Should I inform the employers with whom I interview, and if I do, will that hurt my candidacy?**

A: That depends on who you're interviewing and why you want to pursue the PhD. Let me explain:

If your PhD is totally irrelevant or without value to the potential employer, and you plan to leave that company in two years, it would probably not be a great idea to tell them you'll only be with them for two years.

On the other hand, if you're talking with a company that does research and development, and has PhDs working for them, you might be able to get some encouragement and perhaps even financial assistance after a period of steady employment and good performance.

Another alternative for you would be to do contract work for that two-year period. I think you need to look at where you're ultimately headed after your PhD to make this decision.

**Q: One of the recruiters I've talked with has suggested that I work with him exclusively in seeking my first job. Is that a good idea?**

A: Not to my way of thinking. I believe you should be free to work with as many and whomever you choose, without Restrictions. I DO NOT recommend signing any such agreement or paying any fee. The fees of legitimate recruiters are paid by their clients, the employers. I DO recommend having an understanding with every recruiter that your resume will not be presented to an employer without your knowledge and concurrence.