Application Tracking Software (ATS)

The Three Strategies You Need to Help You Beat the Bot (ATS)

What is Application Tracking Software (ATS)?

Companies use application tracking software to assist with the application and hiring process. A human is not typically doing the first review of your application and resume. That's the job of the ATS. **This means the ATS can make the determination to move you forward to a human or reject your application.** According to Jobscan.co, 97.4% of Fortune 500 companies use an ATS. Medium size and small companies have also adopted ATS to improve the efficiency of application review, processing, and hiring.

Strategy 1: A Plain Resume – Avoid Templates & Heavy Formatting

ATS systems vary in ability but many struggle to interpret resume templates and heavy formatting. Tables, columns, graphics, color, and pictures can make your resume look great, but the ATS doesn't care. It's programmed to look for key words and may even reject your entire application if it can't interpret an object on your resume. Our advice – **don't use templates and avoid heavy formatting**. Check out our sample resumes If you need a basic resume design example. And use our VMock system to create an ATS friendly resume.

Strategy 2: Keyword Matching

Applying to a job online usually includes **uploading a resume**. Companies using ATS rely on the software to scan your resume for keywords and alignment with the job.

- *Resume Keyword Matching* – A recruiter or hiring manager selects keywords from the job posting, and the ATS scans for the keyword from the resume. There is often a minimum matching threshold.

How to Keywork Match

Adjust your resume to match keywords in the job description. To do this you should -

- Review the job posting. Highlight keywords in the responsibilities and qualifications-skills sections.
- Upload your resume and the job posting to the VMock Optimizer and/or ChatGPT and work through suggestions offered from these systems to help you better align with the job posting
- Add keywords from the job posting into your resume Skills Section as an easy way to match.

*In addition to ATS resume scanning, some job applications include questions designed to either move you forward or knock you out of the running (often referred to as "knockout questions").

An example of knockout questions –

Question	No Experience	0 – 6 Months	7 – 12 Months	Over 12 Months
Microsoft Excel	○	○	○	○
MATLAB	○	○	○	○
Working in Teams	○	○	○	○

Let's say that the company sets the criteria at 7 – 12 months or higher for each response. In that case, the ATS can remove anyone selecting less than 7 – 12 months.

The **knockout questions** may or may not be set to eliminate a job candidate. Answer these questions honestly using a strengths-based mindset. Don't undervalue your skills and experience!

Strategy 3: Fast Networking - The Importance of Human Support

Fast Networking - offers the opportunity to gain support from a human rather than just relying on the ATS. Support from a human has the potential to move an applicant forward who may otherwise be obstructed by the ATS. And some companies reward employees for referring qualified candidates!

How to Fast Network & Message Suggestions

1. ***Identify the company on Handshake and/or LinkedIn.*** Target Spartans (if you can't find Spartans, see page 83 in WHO Logic for advice on who to reach out to).
   a. You can also find Spartans in LinkedIn Groups like the MSU Engineering Connection. Once you are a group member, you can direct message other members without being formally connected!

2. ***Initial Outreach on LinkedIn*** –
   There are Generally Two Connection Request Options: **Connect** *or* **Connect with a Message**

   Option 1: Connect with a Message *(is the ideal option but LinkedIn does place limitations on the number of messages you can send per month.)*

   Message Suggestion -
   "Hi, [insert name]! I'm also a Spartan and just applied for a role with [insert company name]. It would be great to connect and get some advice from you. Thanks & Go Green!"

   Option 2: Connect *(without a message – you are likely targeting Spartans because of the affiliation)*

   After 2 - 3 days, if your connection request has not been accepted, move on to someone else at the company.

3. ***When the Connection Request is Accepted,*** *Ask for a Meeting*:
   Message Suggestion -
   "Hello, [name]! Thanks for accepting my connection request. I'm wondering if you have time for a brief chat. It would be great to learn more about your experience and obtain any advice you may be willing to share. Are you available at [include a specific time & time zone] on [include a specific date]."

   After 3 - 5 days, if the person doesn't respond to your request to meet, send a reminder and date options.

4. ***Prepare for your conversation.*** Use pages 84 – 87 in WHO Logic to help you prepare questions and pitch your skills and experiences relevant to the job. Your goal is to get support for your application in the form of advice, a referral, or recommendation.

LinkedIn Limited Your Outreach Message Capability – What Now?

LinkedIn periodically adjusts the number of outreach messages you can send for initial connection requests. This means you can try the connect option without a message. You can also use tools like **hunter.io** to find a person's work email and then try a direct message. If you email directly using someone's work email, **be respectful!**

Your message might include something like –

"Hello [name]! I'm also a Spartan and discovered your profile on [LinkedIn or Handshake]. I was unable to message, so I found your email address and hope it's okay to reach out to you directly. I just applied for a job at [name of company] and would welcome a chance to connect with you. Any advice you can offer would be appreciated. Thanks & Go Green!"

Check out this short video on how to work around LinkedIn's connection message limits.