

EQUIPPD · FREE RESOURCE

The Company Research Playbook

Build a target list instead of applying into the void.



How to pick companies deliberately, research them properly,
and track it all without losing your mind.

Built for the Equippd community · equippd.io
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Why volume applying fails

The default job search is: find postings, click apply, repeat, hear nothing. Hundreds of applications, a handful of replies, and no information about why. It is demoralising and it is also just an ineffective use of the same hours.

The alternative is a **target list**: a deliberately chosen set of companies you have researched, ranked, and are pursuing on purpose — with the referral routes mapped out before you apply.

The number that should reframe this

A referred candidate is dramatically more likely to get an interview than one arriving through the careers portal. Which means one afternoon spent finding a person who can refer you is usually worth more than another forty cold applications. Research is not procrastination from applying. It is the higher-leverage half of applying.

Build the list in three bands

Aim for roughly 25–30 companies, split deliberately. The mistake almost everyone makes is filling the list entirely with the first band.

Band	How many	What it means
Stretch	~8	You would need things to go well. Competitive, well-known, high bar.
Likely	~12	Your profile fits the posting. With good preparation you are a real candidate.
Comfortable	~8	You clearly clear the bar. These exist so you get an offer in hand.

Why the comfortable band matters most

An offer in hand changes everything else in the process. It gives you a deadline to push other companies with, a number to negotiate against, and — most importantly — it removes the desperation that makes people accept bad roles. Never run a search without this band.

What to actually research

Fifteen to twenty minutes per company. Anything more is procrastination; anything less and you will sound generic in the interview.

Question	Where to find it	Why you need it
What do they sell, and to whom?	Homepage, pricing page	You cannot fake this and interviewers always notice
How do they make money?	Pricing page, annual report if public	Tells you which teams matter internally
How big are they?	LinkedIn headcount	Predicts how broad or narrow your role would be
Growing or shrinking?	News, LinkedIn headcount trend, layoff trackers	Affects your job security and progression
What is the tech stack?	Job postings, engineering blog	Tells you what to emphasise and what to learn
What do employees say?	Glassdoor, Blind — read the 3-star reviews	Extremes are noise; the middle is where truth lives
Who do I know there?	LinkedIn, alumni tools, Discord/Slack groups	This is the referral route
Recent news?	Google News, their blog	One specific reference makes you memorable

Read the three-star Glassdoor reviews rather than the one- and five-star ones. The extremes are written by people who were just fired or just promoted. The middle is written by people describing an ordinary week.

The tracker

One sheet. Do not overbuild this — the elaborate tracker is a classic form of avoidance. These columns are enough:

Column	What goes in it
Company	Name
Band	Stretch / Likely / Comfortable
Role & link	The specific posting
Why them	One sentence, in your own words. If you cannot write it, drop them
Contact	Anyone you know or found there
Referral asked?	Date you asked
Applied	Date
Status	Applied / Screen / Interview / Offer / Rejected / Silent
Next action	The single next thing <i>you</i> owe, with a date
Notes	Interviewer names, what they asked, what you promised to send

The two columns that do the work

“Why them” forces you to justify every entry, which keeps the list honest and gives you your cover letter opening. “Next action” means you never open the sheet and wonder what to do — the answer is already written down.

Working the list

- 1 Research before applying, not after.** Fifteen minutes up front changes what you write.
- 2 Look for a connection before you submit.** Alumni, former colleagues, people in communities you are in. A warm route beats the portal every time.
- 3 Ask for the referral properly.** Say which role, why you fit in two lines, and attach your CV so it is one click for them.
- 4 Tailor the top third of your CV** to the posting's language. Not a rewrite — the top third.
- 5 Follow up once**, about a week after applying, to whoever you know there. Once, not three times.
- 6 Log every rejection and any reason given.** Patterns appear after about ten and they tell you what to fix.

7 Refill the list. As companies close out, add new ones so the pipeline never empties.

When you get nothing back

Silence is almost never about your worth and almost always about volume, timing, or a role that was already filled internally. But if you are twenty applications in with no screens, stop applying and change something — the CV, the band mix, or the referral strategy. Doing the same thing eighty more times is not persistence, it is just slower.

*Pair this with **The Behavioral Interview Playbook** and **How to Evaluate a Job Offer** — research gets you the interview, the playbook gets you the offer, and the offer guide makes sure you do not undersell it.*