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-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** –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>No Experience</th>
<th>0 – 6 Months</th>
<th>7 – 12 Months</th>
<th>Over 12 Months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Microsoft Excel</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATLAB</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in Teams</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 some support from a human rather than just relying on the ATS to make the match. Support from a human has the potential to move an applicant forward who otherwise may be rejected 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.** Find Spartans (if you can’t find Spartans, identify other individuals – see [page 83 in WHO Logic](#) for advice on who to reach out to).
   a. You can also find Spartans in LinkedIn Groups – [MSU Engineering Connection](#)
      i. Once you are a member, you can DM people without being formally connected!

2. **Initial Outreach on LinkedIn:**
   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!

3. **Request a Brief Meeting** (assuming the person accepts your connection request) – (if not, move on to someone else at the company after 2 – 3 days):
   Once a person accepts, message them and ask for a quick conversation.
   “Hello, [name]! Thanks for accepting my request to connect. I’m wondering if you have time for a 15-minute conversation this week or next. I would love to chat more about your experience and receive any advice you may be willing to share.”
   After 3 - 5 days, if the person doesn’t respond to your request to meet, send another message.
   “Hello, [name]! I know you are very busy. I’m still hoping I can get some time on your calendar. Are you available at [include a specific time & time zone] on [include a specific date]?”
   Sometimes giving someone a specific date and time is just easier for them to then respond.

4. If you can secure a date and time for the conversation, use [pages 84 – 87 in WHO Logic](#) to help you prepare to ask 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 may need other strategies to help you make connections. You can use tools like [hunter.io](#) to find a person’s work email and enable a direct message. If you email directly, 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.