

Application Tracking Software (ATS)

Why ATS can make or break your job search & how you can win!



What is Application Tracking Software (ATS)?

Application tracking software is used by companies 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, nearly 99% 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.

The ATS Prefers 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.

The ATS Reviews Your Responses to Application Questions (AKA: Knockout Questions)

Applying to a job online usually includes **answering application questions.** Companies that fully deploy an ATS rely on the software to review your responses.

- **Knockout Questions** – The application questions are sometimes referred to as “knockout questions”, meaning that responses can either remove or advance a job applicant based on set criteria.

An example of knockout questions –

Question	No Experience	0 – 6 Months	7 – 12 Months	Over 12 Months
<i>Microsoft Excel</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<i>MATLAB</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<i>Working in Teams</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Let’s say that the recruiter and/or hiring manager 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** are straightforward and may or may not be set to eliminate a job candidate prior to scanning the resume. Answer these questions honestly using a strengths-based mindset to respond. Don’t undervalue your skills and experience!

The ATS Reviews Your Resume – Keyword Matching

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

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

An illustration of keyword matching – (The keyword list is likely much longer in a real-world scenario.)

Resume Keyword	Yes	No	Score
Google Analytics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Problem Solving	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Leadership	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

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

- Carefully review the job posting. Highlight keywords in the responsibilities section and keywords in the qualification-skills section.
- Use [WHO Logic](#) to write a value-centered and aligned resume that provides proof of your skills.
- Add keywords from the job posting directly into your resume Skills Section as an easy way to match.

The Importance of Human Support – Fast Networking

Fast Networking - offers you the opportunity to gain some support from a human rather than just relying on the ATS to make the match. Sometimes human intervention can move an applicant forward that otherwise may have been rejected by the ATS. Keep in mind that some companies reward employees for referring qualified candidates!

Steps for Fast Networking & Message Suggestions

1. *Identify the company on LinkedIn.* Find Spartans (if you can't find Spartans, identify other individuals – see pages 81 – 87 for advice on who to reach out to).
2. *Initial Outreach on LinkedIn:*
Hi, [insert name]! I'm also a Spartan. I just applied for a role with [insert company name] and it would be great to connect with you. I would love any advice and insight you might be willing to offer. Thanks for considering this request. I look forward to our connection.
3. *Meeting Request* (assuming the person accepts your connection request) – (if not, move on to someone else at the company after 3 – 5 days):
Once the person accepts, use the LinkedIn message feature 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 sometime soon. I would love to chat more about your experience and receive any advice you may be willing to share.”
After 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 see if you can get a referral or recommendation from this person in support of your application.