

Gen Z job hunters: your guide to SMEs

Small to medium enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of innovation and creativity across loads of industries. But finding the right SME for your career can be a different ballgame compared to finding a role in a bigger organisation. Armed with insights from our latest survey, we're here to help you make the most of the opportunities SMEs can give you and help you land a role where you can thrive.

Step 1: understanding the SME psyche

1. Tailor your application

- Highlight versatility in your CV – according to our research, SMEs value candidates who can wear multiple hats, so make sure your CV shows all your skills and that you can adapt.
- Cut the fluff in your cover letter – get straight to the point about why you're excited to join their team and how you can make an impact
- Show some passion! SME owners have high stakes, and they're understandably deeply invested in their mission, so make sure you express your enthusiasm for their work

2. Research the SME – know who you're applying to

- Look through their website, get to know their story, browse their socials – make sure you get an idea of their company culture, values and goals
- Look for signs of innovation, community focus or industry recognition to get an idea of their stability and growth potential

3. Look for early signs of a good cultural fit

Think about what's important to you in a job role – whether that's value alignment, flexibility or something else – and ask the following questions when you're looking at the job description and their website:

- Do they mention cultivating a close-knit, collaborative environment?
- How does the company handle remote work or flexible schedules?
- Is upskilling, mentorship or career progression a focus?
- Do their values align with what matters to you, like sustainability or diversity?
- Will you see the results of your work up close?

Step 2: during your interview

1. Ask direct, insightful questions

Transparency and open dialogue are important features in any job interview – so here are a few questions you could ask to get a picture of the organisation:

- What are the main challenges the team is working on right now and how could this role help?
- What opportunities are there for learning new skills or transitioning into new responsibilities?
- How does the company support employees during busy periods or sudden changes?
- What do you value most in a team member?

2. Highlight your adaptability

Our research shows that SMEs value employees who can adapt and take on diverse responsibilities. So, make sure you're ready with a story that shows where you've adapted, solved problems or gone above and beyond. The STAR method is a great way to showcase this – here's a quick example.

Situation: "We had a last minute client project that needed a quick turnaround"

Task: "It was my responsibility to step outside my usual duties and help coordinate design and content"

Action: "I worked across teams to meet the client's needs while making sure the quality was high"

Result: "The project was delivered on time, and the client was so impressed they extended their contract"

3. Observe the company's atmosphere

During an interview with an SME, you might notice a more relaxed and personal vibe – but make sure you keep an eye out for red flags like unclear role expectations or resistance to questions about culture or growth.

Step 3: post-interview actions to help you stand out

1. Write a personalised thank you note

Most SME teams are small, so sending a thank you email can make a big impression and make sure you stick in the interviewer's mind. Make sure you highlight what you liked about the company or any specific elements you discussed in the interview, and mention how the role supports your goals. This is also a great opportunity for you to ask any questions you might have thought about after your interview.

2. Reflect on the fit

Ask yourself a few questions to see whether the company is the right fit for you:

- Did you feel comfortable with the team's working style?
- Do their values and goals align with mine?
- Can I see myself growing in this company?

Bonus tips for navigating the SME job market

- Stay open to hybrid roles – working at an SME means you might find yourself filling responsibilities outside your job title. See this as an opportunity to build skills and diversify your experience.
- Prepare for an all-hands-on-deck culture – many smaller organisations need everyone to pitch in. Mention in your interviews how you thrive in team environments or get excited by hands-on challenges.
- Showcase your SME-friendly skills – mention skills like multitasking, creativity under pressure and resourceful problem-solving.
- Get ready for unique challenges – SMEs do have challenges that larger organisations don't, but they're platforms for incredible growth, creativity and impact.

Want to know if an SME is the right fit for you?

Take our quick quiz to find out!

