

Making the World Smaller: Internships, Applying and Making it in Big Tech

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This anonymized email correspondence is part of my series on “Making the World Smaller”. See the [introductory post](#) for context.

Hi! I am fascinated by your story about working at Google, Facebook and other companies and love your motto Fix the World. I myself have a small problem with getting an internship as a programmer and I thought maybe you could help me. I will be 18 years old next summer and I think I have the right skillset to both bring benefit to a company like Facebook and have a chance to pass their interview (actively programming for 5 years now; experienced in problem solving, algorithms, data structures, etc.). Last summer I worked as a software developer for a smaller company. The problem is that I couldn't find any way to deliver my CV to their PR other than through their standard forms, which all require at least studying at university (I am at high school). That leads to them discarding it immediately.

So I was wondering if you know a better way to send my CV to Facebook, or if it is possible at all.

Thanks in advance and please keep blogging!

Hi,

Thanks for reaching out. Let me see if I can give you some advice or help you out.

First of all, it definitely is extremely rare for school students to do internships at big tech companies. That probably has a few reasons, including that HR assumes you're missing important classes/knowledge that you would get in university. Another reason is that internships usually have the purpose of finding potential full-time hires. It's less beneficial to a company to give someone an internship and invest thousands of dollars in that person, when his/her graduation date is still 4-5 years away.

That said, you're lucky you're in an industry where many of the usual norms and practices, such as requiring formal education or only hiring experienced candidates, are often broken or redefined. So it's definitely not impossible to hire an 18-year old, and there have been such cases at Google and Facebook — but they're very special cases. My own case was sort-of special in that I got into the

interview stage with Google right after high school, which doesn't happen that often (though there was a second guy who interned with me that year who was also in his first year). Thinking back, I think what convinced that recruiter to reach out to me while I was still in school was that I had a quite convincing LinkedIn profile for my age with some research experience, had a fairly active blog and also some pretty large projects going on rather than just a bunch of small projects like most kids do.

Another thing I can tell you is that it's much, much harder to get an internship by applying on the website than it is by either (1) getting a referral from someone or (2) being approached by a recruiter. Even when I had the Google internship on my CV, I would often not hear back from online applications. At the same time, I was getting lots of interest on LinkedIn from Microsoft, Facebook etc. and got into the interview stage with all of them. Referrals are also a great way of getting into the process. You just have to know someone at a company, and they can send your CV to certain people. Recruiters will usually look at referrals first before online applications, so your chances of getting noticed are much higher. The person at the company who referred you also gets a money bonus when you get the job, so it's a great deal.

So, if you really want, I can send your CV to some people here, and someone will take a look at it. I can't pledge for your chances, however. I think if I were you, I'd try to get involved with some big open source projects that you're passionate about, or try to come up with a large project (an app, a library etc.) that many people will find interesting and/or use. These things always look good on CVs. You could also reach out to someone at a nearby university (some professor/PhD student) and ask if you can help them with some research. That's also great experience.

I wouldn't worry about getting the big tech jobs too soon. They'll come naturally if you stay passionate about programming and are proactive in marketing your skills. When I was your age I definitely wasn't looking for big tech internships, I was more interested in exploring the possibilities that coding opened to me and was very eager to learn new things. Tech companies are very, very hungry for talent, so you'll have recruiter emails dropping in your inbox before you know it if you keep doing what you're doing.