

Dos und Don'ts – the successful application process in the SAP job market

As an executive search agency, we specialise in filling positions that require in-depth SAP know-how. For this reason, we can only offer career prospects to job seekers who have at least 1.5-2 years of experience in SAP customising or SAP development.

In addition, we regularly fill SAP senior management positions or IT manager vacancies (in many cases we do not advertise these positions on our website) or we support dynamic and emerging SAP consultancies in expanding their headcount. Here, too, IT directors, executives or SAP managers must demonstrate a clear rooting in SAP issues.

This specialisation has proven to be a clear advantage to job seekers and clients in our many years of business:

We believe that our expertise in the SAP job market is outstanding and that career-oriented SAP professionals are best advised by us.

It goes without saying that we guarantee absolute discretion throughout the entire application process. We do not pass on application documents to our client companies without the written consent of the applicant.

Based on our wide-ranging experience and in-depth knowledge of the SAP job market, we have compiled numerous recommendations and tips below.

We would be happy to realise your next career step with you. Contact us by phone, e-mail or post.

We are also happy to receive unsolicited applications.

The application process

Note: For better readability, only masculine forms are used in this text. Of course, we address both women and men.

A successful application process is divided into eight sub-sections:

A: Gathering information about the SAP job market.

B: Preparing the application documents

Resume

Project/activity list

Work and training references

C: Sending applications

D: Interviews

What should you aim for in the interview?

Dealing with difficult positions in your own CV

Preparing for questions in the application process

E: Entering the offer phase

After the interview

F: Salary negotiations for SAP professionals and managers

G: Salaries for SAP jobs - overview

H: Signing contracts and counter-offers

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A: Gather information about the SAP job market

Find out about trends in the SAP market. On the one hand, this helps to track down exciting employers who may be looking for specialised knowledge that you can offer, or on the other hand, to discover new career options that you haven't thought of before.

You can also follow our Twitter or Facebook feeds.

Researching before you start the application phase will also help you assess what employers expect of you. This will help you to understand which know-how from your previous work or studies is transferable.

B: Preparing the application documents

An application for an SAP vacancy always consists of three parts: a CV, a detailed project/activity list and the work and training references.

The importance of creating a CV in tabular form and a detailed project/activity list should not be underestimated. *Background:* Decision-makers at different hierarchical levels need the information relevant to them in the best possible form. Your CV is particularly important for personnel decision-makers, whereas the project/activity list is important for potential line managers. Both decision-makers are therefore looking for different information and will make a decision about hiring according to different standards.

Personnel decision-makers are interested in the main stages of your career: employer (type and duration of employment), training/studies (what, where, how long?), internships, additional qualifications, assessment of your achievements in certificates.

It is important to make sure that your statements correspond to the information in your references. Line managers are interested in the detailed technical and business knowledge you bring with you from which environment, for example:

- How deep are you into the technical details of SAP BW?
- Can you program in the SAP environment?
- Which components of an SAP system have you already worked with?
- Do you have experience as a project manager and - if so - how large were your management spans and/or the commercial responsibility you carried?

In short: You need to convince both parties in order to receive an invitation to an interview.

CV

The CV is the first document that a decision-maker sees about you and is therefore particularly relevant for a successful application. It may have a modern design, but should be convincing in its factual sobriety. We advise against elaborate graphics or similar.

Attention should be paid to the following points:

- Address, telephone number, e-mail address and, if applicable, nationality must be included.

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- Complete, backwards chronological listing of all periods of training and employment in tabular form (the backwards chronological order is recommended in order to have the most important information at a glance).
- If there are gaps, these must be plausibly explained.
- In the CV, the most important key words (from the company/organisation's search display) must be recognisable at a glance. Example: If you have previously worked as an internal SAP BW consultant, be sure to mention your role title "internal consultant" and the professional focus "SAP BW" (without paraphrasing!). Otherwise it may not be clear to the recruiter (as someone who is not familiar with SAP) what qualifications you actually have.
- As a rule, the CV should not be longer than two A4 pages.
- A photo is recommended, but not mandatory (better no photo than a bad one). It should show you in businesslike clothes and give a sympathetic impression. We recommend black and white photos. Do not use a picture from your last holiday!

As a rule: A decision-maker will pay attention to your application for a maximum of 30 seconds during the pre-selection process. The external form is a deciding factor.

You can find an exemplary curriculum vitae here:

>> https://www.biber-associates.de/wp-content/uploads/TB_CVExample.pdf

Projectlist

The project or activity list contains in detail the information that would overload a CV. This compilation includes all the necessary information for assessing your knowledge and experience and is mainly studied in the department. The recruiter is not likely to read this document.

Attention should be paid to the following points:

- The key words that are important for your application (if possible from the company/organisation's job advertisement) must be present in the text and can be highlighted there if necessary. If you are applying for an SAP BW position, the terms "SAP" and "BW" must appear in this text - preferably several times.
- The projects or activities should be listed backwards chronologically and in blocks (the backwards chronological order is recommended in order to have the most important information at first glance).
- For each project, all technical and/or professional content should be described in bullet points. Refrain from long narrative texts; these are read less often.
- If you have managed teams or projects, mention approximately how many people you managed. If you have had budget responsibility, mention a rough order of magnitude of the project or cost centre budget you were responsible for..
- If you have development skills, mention in which components you have developed (e.g. in SAP BW, SAP SD/MM, SAP HR or SAP XI/PI).

You can find an exemplary project list here:

>> https://www.biber-associates.de/wp-content/uploads/TB_ProjectListExample.pdf

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Employment and training references

- In the case of training certificates, the certificate of the training qualification and/or the university/university degree are sufficient.
- You should provide the certificates in one (!) PDF document and also in reverse chronological order.
- It is irrelevant if the certificate from the current employer is not (yet) available. We generally advise against asking for an interim reference.

In Germany, you are generally not expected to provide references as an applicant. In Switzerland, however, this is common practice. A reference includes the following information: First name and surname of the contact person, his/her role in the context of the cooperation with you and a telephone number (extension or mobile number). References should only be given on request; it is essential to inform the reference provider in advance.

Submit the documents described in the following order: CV, project/activity list, references.

Ideally, create one, maximum two or three PDF documents from these.

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C: Send applications

Send application documents to companies whose business model matches your goals and previous qualifications. We recommend that newcomers to SAP or career changers contact SAP consulting companies. You can also send speculative applications here, even if the company does not advertise an SAP job that exactly matches your profile. SAP consultancies generally have the personnel infrastructure to have less experienced SAP junior consultants trained by experienced colleagues and coached in projects and thus familiarised with the material.

In the SAP market, the SAP consulting companies have the de facto function of "trainers" for SAP junior consultants or SAP lateral entrants.

These SAP consultancies will expect you to be willing to travel approx. 4-5 days per week to work on projects with their customers (travel and accommodation costs should be covered by reputable companies). If you do not have this mobility, it is much more difficult to enter the SAP world. We recommend that junior SAP consultants or SAP career changers work in an SAP consulting company for at least 2-3 years at the beginning of their SAP career.

Firstly, this is generally a good reference for a subsequent application, and secondly, it is easier to get started here than with SAP end users, who are usually looking for the "finished" SAP consultant with at least 2-3 years' experience and who do not have any opportunities to train SAP junior consultants or SAP lateral entrants.

D: Interviews

Today, the first interview often takes place as a video conference. A second interview usually follows on site at the customer's premises. Usually, a person from the human resources department and the potential future supervisor are present. It can also happen that someone from the management level above your potential new superior is present.

- In preparation for the first contact, look at the website of the company/organisation and try to understand the business model. If questions arise, clarify them during the interview. Carry your application documents with you in printed form. However, you should have the contents in your memory without gaps and be able to recite them.
- Take writing utensils with you for possible notes. Occasional notes during the interview show interest in the position you are applying for. It has happened that applicants have been rejected because they did not bring any documents or note-taking material for the interview. Such an attitude can appear apathetic and disinterested.
- You should always (!) appear in business attire for a personal interview. Remember: You will often be talking to personnel managers, the senior management of a company, possibly even a managing director or board member. You will therefore be dealing with people who are predominantly conservatively dressed. In many cases, a casual style of dress is customary in your future workplace, which you can then adapt to as a matter of course. The most important thing is to appear clean and well-groomed (including ironed clothes, polished shoes, etc.).
- Leave it up to the person you are talking to to conduct the conversation. Especially in telephone conferences, pauses may occur. In this case it is legitimate to ask whether you can still be understood or whether you should continue. Try to keep to a reasonable speaking time and concentrate on the essentials. If you are unsure, ask if you should go into more detail.
- Of course, you must be on time for the interview. Find out in advance how to get there and include possible delays (traffic jams, accidents) in your plans. The longer the journey and the less familiar you are with the area, the more buffer time you should allow. It is better to be an hour early than five minutes late and miss a career opportunity.
- Write down the contact details of your contact person before you leave. If you are late for the interview, call as early as possible. This way you will preserve your chance for a successful application process despite adverse circumstances.

A job interview does not always proceed in the same way, but in practice the following contents can often be assumed:

- Greeting and small talk.
- The personnel officer briefly introduces the company, the department and the vacancy to be filled.
- This is followed by a self-presentation by the applicant.
- Now the interviewer asks position-related and technical questions.
- Afterwards, the applicant has the opportunity to ask questions so that an exchange of ideas can develop.
- This is followed by a short evaluation and an agreement on how to proceed.

Your previous career is usually known to the interviewer from the documents submitted. This means that you have already impressed them with your professional qualifications. On the one hand, this help to clear up ambiguities. On the other hand – and this is an important point – these facts serve as a hook to find out, on the basis of the developing dialogue, which

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person" is hiding behind the factual information presented. HR and professional decision-makers want to understand whether you fit into the team and the company culture and whether they can imagine working with you for many years on a human level.

What goal should you pursue in the interview?

We recommend that you always conduct the interview with the clear goal of receiving an offer of employment from the company in question.

If, on the other hand, you give the impression that you are not seriously interested in the position in question or that you only want to change under very limited conditions, this is often counterproductive.

In principle the following applies: After the interview, both you and your contact person have a period of reflection to plan further steps. If an offer is made and you do not find it suitable, you can always try to renegotiate. dem Vorstellungsgespräch haben sowohl Sie als auch Ihre Ansprechpartner eine Bedenkzeit, um weitere Schritte zu planen. Solltes zu einem Angebot kommen und Ihnen dieses nicht passend erscheinen, können Sie immer noch versuchen nachzuverhandeln.

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Dealing with difficult positions in your own CV

As a matter of principle, always give true information about yourself in your application documents and in the interview. In the case of unpleasant points (e.g. dropped out of university or dismissal by a previous employer), deal with these topics openly and correctly.

You can certainly admit if something did not go as desired. In this way, you can ease the concerns of a critical interviewer, because honesty is much more appreciated than "glossing over" obvious professional setbacks. However, you must avoid speaking disparagingly about your former employers.

Prevent your interview partners from obtaining information about you on the internet that gives an undesirable impression (personal homepage, Facebook, etc.). Rejections may well occur if potential employers find compromising information on the internet. We recommend removing pages with personal content from the internet during the application process.

Preparing for questions in the application process

Recruiters usually go "in depth" to get to know you very well. They want to find out whether you fit in with the company and the team.

The following questions are often asked:

- Which activities are you really good at?
- Which activities that you are good at do you enjoy and motivate you?
- What personal skills do you have?
- What successes do you have (technical, professional, process understanding, consulting skills, management skills)? How did you achieve these successes?
- Are you mobile and flexible?
- How have you dealt with professional setbacks?
- Can you quickly adapt to a new professional environment?

- What professional goals are you striving for?
- Which professional goals have you already achieved, which ones not yet?
- Whom can you rely on - professionally and privately?
- What influence does your private environment have on you?
- How much do you want to earn?
- What difficulties do you expect in the future?
- What might hinder you in your personal and professional development?
- Can you empathise well with the professional problems of others?
- How do you imagine working together in a team?

Give examples of your „professional successes“ that you have thought about in preparation for the interview.

E: Entering the bidding phase

After the interview

If there are any unanswered questions after the interview, clarify them by phone or in another personal interview - never by e-mail. Communication via e-mail harbours great risks of misinterpretation. This is especially true for questions about contract conditions, differing expectations or topics that may have caused misunderstandings during the interview. If a possible contract offer is not yet satisfactory, you should clarify the situation promptly by phone.

Refrain from side agreements or demands for complicated special constructs for leave, reimbursement of expenses or salary modules and keep a sense of proportion when asking for expenses to be paid (relocation costs, etc.). HR managers usually have limited leeway from the company and, if applicable, collectively agreed frameworks that they must adhere to.

An employer usually makes sure that all employees with similar qualifications are offered similar contracts (e.g. with the components fixed salary, variable salary and additional benefits as pension and accident insurance). For this reason alone, exotic special requests are not appropriate.

Prepare a list of questions for the interview on contract conditions.

Example: If you have a long journey to your new job, mention this. Suggest raising your monthly salary by 100 or 200 euros as compensation or an "allowance" by 100 or 200 euros as compensation or an "expense allowance". Exotic salary components such as "travel allowance" or similar do not exist.

Also note: A company car for a long journey can be a tax trap. A thoughtless question about such a "solution" may give the impression that you have not informed yourself sufficiently about this topic. In any case, check with your tax advisor whether a company car makes sense for you from a tax point of view. As a rule, this is only the case for short journeys between home and work and is usually offered to consultants who travel a lot to external clients. Company cars for in-house SAP positions are not common.

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F: Salary negotiations for SAP specialists and managers

Contrary to popular belief, personnel decision-makers are not interested in negotiating your salary down as far as possible. Every experienced recruiter knows that the highly qualified applicant will then either not take up the position or come to the new company demotivated right from the start. For this reason, you can assume that your salary expectations will be taken seriously as a basis for negotiation if you are invited.

However, it is a serious mistake to enter into negotiations with the highest possible sum in order to then come to an agreement with the interviewer "somehow in the middle". An applicant whose demand is clearly outside the realistic range is usually not invited and thus does not have the opportunity to present his or her strengths. We therefore urgently recommend a sense of proportion.

Applicants who enter the negotiations in a realistic salary range, can really prove the required qualifications and then skilfully point out their strengths, definitely have the possibility of receiving an offer that exceeds the company's original planning.

Assuming that you have already had several very good discussions with the employer of your choice, you can try the following negotiation strategy to highlight your strengths:

- During the interviews, ask the employer which know-how they consider particularly important in the position to be filled.
- Ask the employer which soft skills are particularly critical.
- Ask what other skills would be an advantage (e.g. language skills, industry knowledge).
- Ask what detailed technical or professional knowledge he or she would like to have, but which was not listed in the job description.

Make a note of all these points (and others if necessary) during the interviews and then check which of them you fulfil and to what extent. Address the points where you can shine again individually in the job negotiations and explain why these points make you a suitable candidate for this position. Play your trump cards here - point by point. If you notice that you can impress your counterpart positively, then you can try to use these points as arguments that you should be offered an above-average salary.

G: Salaries at SAP Jobs - Overview

The following overview is taken from our counselling practice and reflects trends. It is not necessarily possible to draw conclusions about individual cases from this information. We would like to provide an overview of the various factors on which salaries for SAP positions depend.

- An SAP junior consultant without project experience generally earns between 35,000 and 45,000 euros.
- After about three to four years of SAP project experience, the salary can rise to 50,000-70,000 euros.
- In a renowned consulting firm or with an employer who successfully operates a high-margin business model, an experienced SAP senior consultant can earn 70.000–90.000 Euro after five years or even

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more.

- SAP executives or SAP senior consultants with well-founded specialised knowledge can also earn a salary in the six-figure range.
- SAP professionals with a purely conceptual and coordinating role usually do not earn much more - in some cases even less - than very experienced SAP experts with a broad range of skills. In addition, the job market for purely coordinating SAP experts is much narrower. They therefore have a higher risk of not finding an equivalent job after a sudden job loss. This is a risk that should not be underestimated, especially for older SAP professionals (over 50).

The following rough rules of thumb apply to the fine-tuning of salary ranges for SAP consultants:

- SAP consultancies generally offer more attractive salary packages than SAP end-users (often including company car options and numerous other salary components). This is primarily due to the increased travel associated with such positions. Experienced SAP senior consultants, for example, often earn more at successful consultancies than IT managers in the upper mid-market. A move from consulting to an in-house position can therefore also be associated with a loss of salary.
- In industries where high margins are earned, better salaries are earned. Examples: Chemicals/pharmaceuticals, car manufacturers, luxury goods, banks.
- Industries with lower margins usually offer smaller salary packages. Examples: Retail, medium-sized automotive suppliers, non-profit organisations or healthcare.
- Large companies usually offer more attractive salary packages than smaller ones.
- Those who bring specialised knowledge that is in high demand in the market earn more. Examples: SAP BO, SAP HCM PY, SAP IS-U, SAP PP-PI.
- ABAP developers and SAP Basis administrators often earn slightly less in-house than SAP module experts.
- In large conurbations (Frankfurt am Main, Munich, Cologne/Düsseldorf) they earn better than in less densely populated regions or in the eastern German states including Berlin.

Example: An SAP HCM PY consultant with about six to eight years of experience can earn up to about 100,000 euros as a senior specialist (i.e. not a manager!) in the Frankfurt am Main area at a renowned industrial company. At a company in the health sector in eastern Germany, an applicant with the same background might earn around 50,000 euros.

You can find more up-to-date information on these topics on our Facebook and Twitter pages:

>> www.facebook.com/ThomasBiberITRecruitment

>> twitter.com/#!/thomasbiber

H: Contract signing and counter offers

Do not make any more demands shortly after signing the contract. A signed contract should be a long-term and reliable commitment for both sides.

If a highly qualified employee resigns from his or her current company,

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it can happen that his old employer wants to keep him with a supposedly lucrative offer. In this case, it is important to weigh up carefully whether it is really a sustainable offer. This is usually not the case, as the relationship of trust has already been disturbed by the dismissal.

So it would be a shame to realise after a short time that you have missed an attractive opportunity with a new employer.

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