Things To Consider in order To Maximize the ROI of Your MBA Program

Don’t try to outmaneuver the job market.
Career indecision or the desire to wait out a shaky economy are poor reasons to pursue graduate education. If you have a clear professional goal from the beginning you will find it easier to stay on track academically and to attract employers.

Weigh starting pay against cost of education.
MBAs have a reputation for pursuing careers in high paying fields like investment banking and management consulting. If this is what you want, choose a school that will give you access to those recruiters, and be willing to pay dearly in tuition for the privilege. But if you are passionate about marketing, accounting, the nonprofit world, or entrepreneurship, then consider carefully your debt burden in relation to your expected salary after graduation. According to an analysis by Poets and Quants, over the last decade the cost of getting an MBA has “significantly outpaced starting pay at every one of the top 20 U.S. business schools.”

Maintain your professional presence and hone your interpersonal skills.
An MBA candidate is never 100% student, even if she’s pursuing her degree full time. The easiest way to reenter the professional world is to never completely leave it. Keep up with former colleagues, stay active in trade organizations—or become a member of new ones—and maintain a robust social media presence. Blog, tweet, and post your way to personal brand recognition.
A 2009 survey conducted by the Graduate Management Admissions Council showed that business school alumni ranked interpersonal skills as the number one most valuable contributor to their job performance, regardless of industry. Take advantage of every opportunity you have to improve your so-called “soft skills” while you are in school, whether through formal coursework in business communications or just getting actively involved on campus.

Use your unique position to seek advice and cultivate new relationships.
The label “MBA student” can gain you entry into areas that might not be available to you otherwise. Student projects can lead to interviews with CEOs, and club leadership can give you unparalleled access to recruiters. Career changers should ask alumni for guidance on how to market themselves in their newly-chosen field.
Savvy MBAs realize that everyone they meet along the way—including their fellow students—can be a potentially valuable professional connection. They also serve in that capacity themselves and share information, connect others, and prove their worth as someone to know. Join social media professional groups based on your alma mater, former employers, current school, and trade organizations in your field. Link with fellow students and professionals you meet. When people seek advice via these networks, take the time to help them.

Stay on track to meet your career goals—not just academic deadlines.
Time management is one of the most important skills you will learn in business school—and one of the toughest. If you plan to go to school at night while working during the day your challenges are clear. But even full time students face difficulty juggling academic coursework, involvement in student clubs and other campus activities, and their job searches. You need to carry your weight on team projects and maintain good academic standing, but if you do not have time to update your resume or go on interviews then you need to reassess priorities—and your time management. Work with your campus career center to plan a job hunt calendar for yourself that is aligned with the hiring cycle of your industry.

Understand that learning to manage your career is part of your education.
Chances are, whatever you do right after you finish your MBA will not be what you do for long. Business is volatile, and part of being an MBA is knowing how to manage change and upheaval in your career. Stay connected with your school, keep up on trends in your chosen field, and always be willing to help others with their own career transitions.

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