

IT

RECRUITER

Benchmarks and strategies for hiring, compensating and retaining information technology professionals

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Hire With Succession In Mind

Investing in employee development is a smart move that can attract talent and increase retention. Identifying management material early on is the first step in establishing a successful long-term strategy.

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A new survey by Watson Wyatt shows that more employers are listening to their top performers and implementing non-monetary and performance-based rewards.

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Cherry-Picking Among The Pink Slip Crowd

DC-area Networking Party Draws Eager Recruits And Recruiters

HOLIDAY DECORATIONS sparkle from the ceiling of a hip warehouse-district coffee house. Nearly 300 partygoers laugh and talk loudly enough to be heard over the music and announcements. Free food and drinks move almost as fast as the slick business cards — but about half of these partiers just got canned from their high-tech jobs. Why are these people smiling?

No one was even the slightest bit grouchy or Grinch-like at **Netpreneur.org's** first Pink Slip Party, held the week before Christmas in Herndon, Va., a suburb of Washington, D.C., that's located in the middle of one of the nation's hottest high-tech corridors. Netpreneur.org was created in 1997 to advance the success of technology entrepreneurs in the Washington, D.C., area and is a venture of the **Morino Institute** — a non-profit organization that studies the new economy and the Internet.

"We looked around at the state of the tech sector and decided to do something for folks who had lost their jobs and maybe didn't have an office holiday party to go to this year," said **Mitch Arnowitz**, business and community development director for Netpreneur.org. "This is just part of our continuing effort to be there for the tech industry in the area, and to give those who have been laid off some sense of a support group as well."

Happily "Getting Mugged"

Partygoers who could show their pink slips — evidence that they were unemployed — were treated to free drinks and the constant attention of an equal number of those searching for talent. Blue name tags identified those who were looking for a job, and it was rare to see them standing by themselves. "I felt

like I was getting mugged — but in a good way,” said **Kevin Duffey**, formerly the chief technology officer at a local tech firm.

And thanks to all of the attention he garnered from the recruiters at the party, Duffey said that he left the party “pumped up” and very positive about his prospects for a new position. Even though the party officially ended at 9:00 pm, “I ended up staying and talking to recruiters

and employers until nearly 10,” he added. Far from being annoyed by recruiters’ attentions, most partygoers seemed buoyed by the enthusiasm displayed by the recruiters and employers.

Recruiters could stroll the floor, talking to potential candidates, or take a few steps to a small stage, grab a microphone and announce their available jobs. Even if they didn’t get to speak to every jobseeker in the room, their

Vultures Or Angels?

HOW RECRUITERS approach and recruit dot-com veterans can make the difference between a good hire and a poor fit.

Despite market jitters and numerous layoffs in the high-tech sector — the industry pink-slipped more workers than any other in 2000 — tech professionals are not clamoring for jobs. In fact, many are wizened by their failed dot-com experiences and will be eyeing new opportunities extremely carefully and selectively. And many are ready to get back on that start-up horse.

According to **Paul Villella**, president and CEO of Reston, Va.-based **HireStrategy**, technology job candidates have changed their career strategies: “They’re no longer looking to take a position for six months, get rich and then move on. They’re focusing their search on strong, well-financed companies with sustainable business models and proven track records. What was a ‘sprint’ just a few months ago has turned into more of a ‘marathon.’ Employees and candidates are looking at a commitment of two to three years now. They’re looking for an opportunity to build their career skills and help their company be successful,” Villella said.

Skip The Hard Sell

But like vultures, short-sighted recruiters have been circling poor earnings reports and dialing around companies hoping to lure skittish workers away from their posts.

Ed Thorp, a senior software engineer in the

Nothorn Virginia offices of Internet consulting firm **iXL**, said phones have been ringing since the company started downsizing a few months ago. Although iXL has laid off about a third of its workforce worldwide since September, Thorp is not swayed by the cold calls.

“I’ve had a number of experiences where a recruiter will call and try to interest me in a job, yet they won’t say who made the referral, who the client is or the terms of the job.” Even after Thorp explains that he is happy where he is and plans to stick things out, “This individual is trying to talk salary, promising they can get me x percent more than I’m earning now, without even knowing that figure.”

Michael Sawin, executive vice president and founder of **Benchmark HR** in Salem, N.H., can relate. His business is to provide onsite outsourced HR solutions for start-ups in the digital economy. His clients’ candidates report that “What they are hearing from cold-calling recruiters is, ‘I have five opportunities, and I can’t tell you what companies they are, but send me your resume.’”

Datapoints

The best recruiters, he said, “can give potential candidates really strong datapoints about the opportunity to make sure the person and the position are a good fit.”

Sawin calls the first point “setting the mental landscape.” During this conversation, “You effectively get real. Let the candidate know you understand the market, the competitive

message got out. As well, a local software company, **iKimbo, Inc.**, created an on-site database where job hunters entered information about their interests and skills.

Even Recruiters Need To Party

While some jobseekers complained that there seemed to be an inordinate number of "head-hunters" and not enough people from the actual

companies looking for talent, and many recruiters felt that they were bumping into a few too many of their own at the party, both sides of the employment equation agreed that valuable connections were made during the evening — and not just between recruiters and candidates. Even recruiters looking for their next gig, and people looking to hire recruiters, were trolling the room.

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environment and where your product fits in. You must be able to articulate the company's product or service concisely; if you can't project that as a recruiter, how can you think they would be interested?"

Second, "Get honest. Let candidates understand exactly what they are getting into. If there is risk involved, tell them. And if you make promises — about the work environment, telecommuting, fringe benefits — make sure you can keep them." If you are a start-up operation, candidates will also need to know your exit strategy: Is the plan an IPO? A buyout? A merger? Be candid about how you will execute your ultimate business plan. Recruiters and hiring managers also need to be able to enlighten candidates about expected changes in the marketplace, and how the company will react. "The dot-com veteran will want to know how a management team reacts to shifting winds — right now the whole market is like that."

The third datapoint to hit is management and leadership. "If your management isn't necessarily a 'dream team,' tackle that issue head-on," said Sawin. "But explain exactly why your VC or investors invested in the company in the first place."

Making Your Move

When approaching a dot-com castaway — or one who is soon to be — you want to avoid the vulture mentality and present yourself instead as an angel of opportunity. "We are not head-

hunters," explained Sawin. "We are partners with many entrepreneurial companies, and we know hiring managers. When a company is troubled, we contact the hiring managers first — not the workers — and appeal to their sense of taking care of their employees." That way, hiring managers can point the staffer toward Benchmark's client opportunities. "It's not outplacement; we bring something better to the table. All we care about is getting people into the right job. We are in it for the long haul, and the candidates, their former employers and our clients appreciate that approach."

But don't be surprised if the quarry you seek is simply not interested in making a move, even as their co-workers are collecting pink slips. "For me and most of my close colleagues, it isn't all about money," Thorp confirmed. "I like my job because of the innovative products and cool technology I get to work on. I've had a great personal experience here so I'm not going anywhere unless they kick me out."

Thorp noted that there are two recruiters he does speak to frequently, because they understand and respect his situation. "They have a high level of integrity, and are knowledgeable technical people in their own right. There's a lot of mutual respect there." His recruiter contacts will check in with Thorp regularly, offering intelligence about the industry and making suggestions about hot skills to sharpen. It's this personal relationship that assures them that when Thorp is ready to look around, they'll be the first to know. ▲ —MFB