

Corporate recruiters turn to networking sites to find executives

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With the Valley's continued low unemployment rate, corporate recruiters are having a difficult time finding executives. So some have turned to social networking Web sites for help.

No, they haven't started scanning the personal pages of MySpace or Facebook, which are more apt to include memories of drunken trips to Mexico or lists of favorite bands.

They have joined business-networking sites such as LinkedIn, Spoke and Jigsaw in the hope of finding talent, especially executives who are not on the market but could be a perfect fit for a position.

LinkedIn, probably the best known of the sites, was founded in 2003 and claims an online network of 8.5 million users representing 130 industries.

The company, based in Palo Alto, Calif., connects workers with former colleagues, clients and partners. Users invite contacts to join their network. "Your network consists of your connections, your connections' connections, and the people they know, linking you to thousands of qualified professionals," the company says,

The site is free to join but charges customers for expanded tools to find contacts, which cost between \$200 and \$2,000, said Kay Luo, the company's director of corporate communications. Corporations pay between \$10,000 and \$100,000 to be on the network.

"We finally hit a critical mass where the people that you want to reach are actually available," she said. "A network is only worth the people that are in it."

Chris Brockway, managing partner in the Phoenix office of executive search firm Lucas Group, describes LinkedIn as an "electronic handshake."

"We've had some success in building relationships with people we might otherwise have never come across," he said. "As we become more of the electronic society like this, it's just one of the ways we reach out and touch people."

New ways to recruit

Allen Plunkett, president of Phoenix Staff Inc., said the company started using LinkedIn about two years ago but began reaping the benefits within the past year.

Before such sites, "networking was probably more word-on-the-street, a little more really knocking on more doors than you necessarily have to now," he said. "Being able to network with people or choose to not network with people you don't want to network with is an unobtrusive way of making new contacts."

Finding new ways to recruit is becoming critical as the Valley suffers from a severe shortage of qualified executives, various recruiters said.

Reasons range from a small applicant pool because of the lack of headquarters to higher housing prices making it difficult to attract candidates.

"Phoenix is not a headquarters town, it's an oasis for small and medium-sized businesses," said Scott Smith, managing partner at TowerHunter, a national search firm based in Phoenix. "When companies do need someone at a certain level with certain skill sets, Phoenix can sometimes be tough to find that particular candidate."

Another tool in the box

While a social-networking site can seem like an expansive and targeted way to recruit candidates, most recruiters said it is just one tool in the process.

For some, LinkedIn has lost its cachet because of its increasing volume of users.

David Bruno, vice chairman in DHR International's Phoenix office, began using the site about a year and a half ago when it was unique but recently stopped because it became too crowded and impersonal, he said.

"I prefer to take the time and call my friend and say, 'Who would you recommend?' or do nothing more than to catch up with them," he said.

John Sullivan, professor of management at San Francisco State University, said the best source of finding top candidates comes in the form of old-fashioned referrals or at events. Wooing high-level executives takes months, if not years, of tailored persistence.

"What you find is that (top executives) generally don't go on a LinkedIn or those sites because of the volume," he said. "After a while you can't take it anymore because of people you've let in (to the network) that you don't even know are contacting you."