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## Valley appeal helps recruiters land top execs

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Phoenix, despite its lack of major corporate headquarters, is becoming an easier sell for executive recruiters as the professional placement industry here makes a comeback.

Being big while acting small, coupled with the relatively low cost of living, is exactly what is luring some of the best and brightest to the Valley, these executive headhunters say.

"There is still some of that backwater image out there," said Terry Hindmarch, a managing partner with TowerHunter executive search firm in Phoenix.

A recent recruit shows how that image can fade away. The Terry person's initial thought was Hindmarch Phoenix is "all brown with no trees," Hindmarch said. But one visit and the deal was clinched.

"At the end of the day, I would say we are ahead of the other markets in getting people to come back, then to stay," he said.

And that's a plus, as the recruiting industry has seen an upswing in recent months.

"We see it as signs of an improving economy," Hindmarch said.

But the situation is far from perfect.

A recruiter for the health care industry said the Valley's growth can be a drawback to Swartz some candidates who express concern about the city's sprawl.

"We're a very large city now, and some fear its continued growth," said Frank Cummins, vice president of human resources for Sun Health Corp. in Sun City.

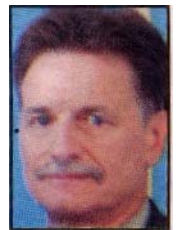
In addition, the health care industry here and across the nation is growing so fast some positions are hard to fill. Doctors and nurses are in short supply, and other medical executive positions are very competitive.

The Phoenix area is perceived as friendly and welcoming.

William Swartz, a partner with Highland Partners executive search firm in Scottsdale, said his company lured top executives to the Valley who want to get in on the ground floor of an industry niche.

"Arizona is ideal for individuals who want to build a large presence for themselves, but don't want to take 20 years to do it," he said. "In other major cities, it takes decades to work your way up to the short list of truly influential individuals."

Swartz and other recruiters say the health care, high-tech, biotech and manufacturing industries are hot spots in the Valley for executive recruitment.



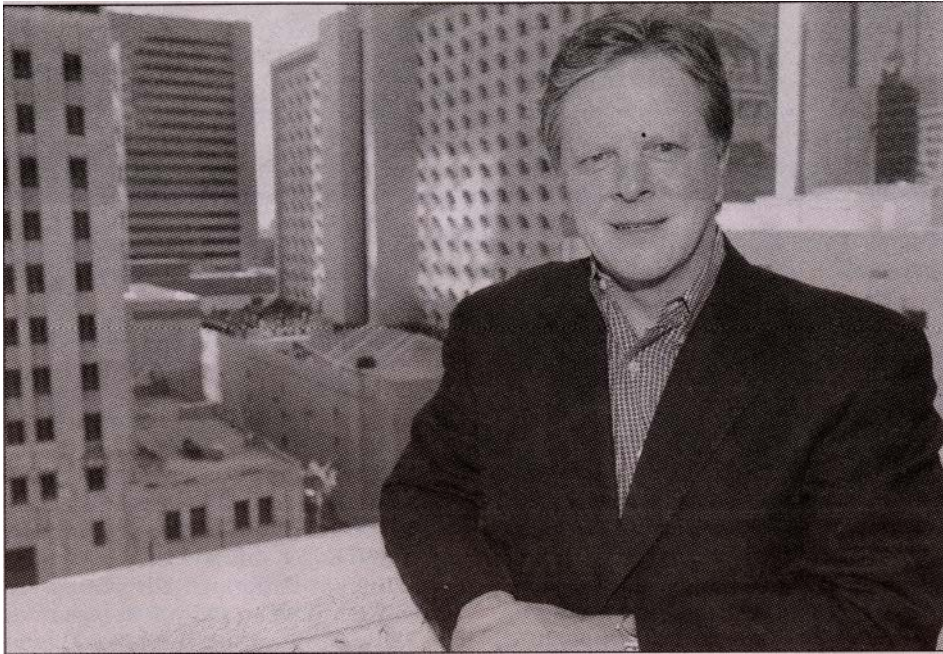
**Terry  
Hindmarch**



**William  
Swartz**

In the past year, Highland Partners placed a senior vice president of worldwide sales at the ITax Group; a chief operating officer at Poore Bros. Inc., a snack food manufacturer and distributor in Goodyear; a chief executive at Motorweb.com, and two other high-level executives at Vcommerce.

Tom Chuckel, who recently joined The ITAX Group, a tax-incentives software firm, has lived in corporate big-league cities such as Chicago, Dallas, and Washington, D.C. That was when he used to believe that for his career to go anywhere, he had to be in a major corporate center.



**Thomas Chuckel, executive vice president of sales and marketing for the ITax Group, was recruited to Phoenix from Chicago. He said he targeted Phoenix because executive talent is embraced here.**

As he grew jaded by the hustle and bustle of the bigger cities, Chuckel started to look to smaller markets such as Phoenix.

"I began to see the two as the most progressive cities," he said. "They were environments that embraced new companies moving in, and embraced the growth of their local talent."

He saw big opportunity in coming to Phoenix with his "world-class" software sales and marketing experience and in helping a young company such as ITax.

"I believe that I have taken our company to the next level probably much quicker than the local talent pool might have been able to do," he said.

Chuckel said he and other successful executives also are drawn to the Valley by the lifestyle, which has a strong element of the outdoors. He lives in McCormick Ranch in Scottsdale and loves it.

This growing interest could help take Phoenix from its minor-league legal status to an upper-tier hub in line with Atlanta, Dallas and Houston, say some recruiters.

Emphasizing the interest in Arizona, TowerHunter's Hindmarch said executives from other states are contacting his firm.

"A lot of candidates who may not be qualified for the positions open are contacting us simply because they want to come to Arizona," he said.

Development of downtown Phoenix also is helping recruiters because many of the candidates come from big cities with active urban cores.

One trouble spot, though, is cultural diversity, Hindmarch said, referring specifically to the low percentage of blacks in the Valley.

"They know Phoenix doesn't look like that yet. The more multicultural we can be, the more success we'll have in attracting diverse populations," he said.