



New Media

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New-Media 'techies' seek different rewards

It's no secret that Philadelphia-area employers, like those around the country, are desperately seeking technical professionals. New-media companies may be even more deeply affected.

There is no shortage of pundits or possible reasons attempting to explain the lack of an adequate technical workforce. I'd like to join that chorus and suggest a reason of my own: the "techie" is just a new breed of professional.

When companies are trying to create incentives to attract technical staff, they need to understand what motivates the techie. The usual incentives -- money and other material perks -- don't seem to be doing the trick. Here's a short list I call the Four F's:

Freedom. I believe the most important value of the new technical worker is autonomy. We're a remarkably independent lot, and for many of us, the thought of becoming a worker-drone in a large IT department is little different than a jail sentence, regardless of the income and job security. The solutions: consider subcontracting (the best are often self-employed), give workers an environment shielded from corporate politics and give small teams and individuals a sense of ownership of projects.

Flexibility. For the techie, the thought of spending 9 to 5 in a suburban office park is like doing hard time. Think outside the box when it comes to hours and location of employment. Allow for flexible hours, telecommuting and other ways to accommodate your employees.

Facilities. Or maybe more importantly, where are your facilities located? Techies, who spend so much of their life in virtual space, don't abide rush-hour traffic and bland office parks. Consider opening an office in the urban locations more desirable to your more youthful technical workers, or at least spruce up your existing work space. Understand that your location could be a negative factor, and make up for it in other ways.

Fun. Most techies I know will work 18 hours a day if they can stop to play Quake or strum their guitar periodically. They like their toys and a workplace amenable to them. Take down those cubicles and put a basketball hoop on the wall. Create a "chill room" with sofas and snacks so coders can take a break in comfort. Value overall productivity over an artificial (albeit traditional) separation between work and personal time in the office.

Of course, it's good to remember that money isn't a *non*-factor. Salary is still the one objective way of telling your techie employees that you value them. Good luck in your search.

New-Media Notes

IPO watch ... The stock of **VerticalNet Inc.** (www.verticalnet.com) tripled in its first day of trading on Feb. 11. The three-year-old Horsham company specializes in e-commerce for business-to-business in specific industries, a segment that the Dow Jones Newswire touts as "the next big thing on the Web." Businesses are expected to spend \$300 billion over the Internet next year, dwarfing the \$30 billion in purchases expected by consumers. From \$16, the stock, which trades as VERT on the Nasdaq, spurted as high as \$55.44, before closing at \$45.38. VerticalNet's largest stockholder is venture-capital firm Internet Capital Group of Wayne, which owns 38.4 percent of the company.

Co-founders and St. Joe's roomies Mike Hagan and Mike McNulty are Philadelphia-area natives. Their shares of the company are 3.8 percent and 3.1 percent, respectively. VerticalNet, which the market valued at \$737.8 million, lost \$8.3 million in the nine months ended Sept. 30 and expects to lose money for the foreseeable future, according to its SEC filing.

Moving and shaking ... Internet-services company **US Interactive** (www.usinteractive.com) is still settling into its new King of Prussia headquarters, but that hasn't stopped it from making waves around the world. Its E-Roadmap -- a proprietary development system for deployment of electronic-enterprise solutions, including Intranet, extranet and e-commerce -- has helped it attract such clients as Dairy Farm International Holdings Ltd., a \$10 billion East Asian holding company; Unim, the world's largest group disability insurer; Royal Caribbean International; Pioneer Electronics, and Toyota Motor Corp.

Philly puts Hollywood online ... Image Refinery Productions (www.refinery.com), a Southampton Web-design company, is one of a growing number of area companies doing work for film studios. Recent projects include sites for October Films' *The Last Days* (www.octoberfilms.com/thelastdays), Sony Pictures Classics' *Tango* (www.spe.sony.com/classics/tangomovie) and two Shockwave games for Eyemark Entertainment's *Pensacola: Wings of Gold* (www.pensacolatv.com/pensacolawog/recroom/).

Other clients includes Sony Large Format, Rysher Entertainment (*Highlander*, *Nash Bridges*), Cablevision (Madison Square Garden, N.Y. Rangers). The *Tango* site is the Refinery's 50th Web site for Sony Pictures Classics.

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