

Training Resources

Where Do I Find the New Breed of Employees?

by Brian Regan, President, Semper International

We all know the industry has changed and many of the skills associated with printing have changed, too. None of these is more evident than in prepress. The new workflow solutions are often daunting to a company not versed in them—database management, mailing and fulfillment, and digital asset management to name a few. Where does a printer—who for years knew how to reproduce the best color work—now find the new breed of employee?

Who Am I Looking For?

Of course, the first requirement is for anyone to be able to handle prepress skills. (Even press operators have to be computer literate. All you have to do is look at recently introduced presses.) There are a lot of prepress skills that can either be taught, as long as a person is comfortable behind a computer, or already exist in today's job bank (in no particular order):

- **Color management.** Someone who can learn how to calibrate and monitor soft and hard proofing using color management solutions.
- **Design skills.** Whether a printer provides a design department for true creative work, or if the skills are required to fix existing files, it is always helpful to have a resource of people who can work their way around the Adobe Creative Suite or QuarkXPress.
- **Communications experts.** IT departments need people who can work

their way around the “pipes” of the company: The Internet, browser, the website, the internal network, firewall/security, and the other ancillary services.

- **Workflow experts.** These are the true, trained prepress workflow experts, who have both computer and prepress knowledge and skills. These are the architects and administrators of a prepress department.
- **Premedia.** As we all know, many printers don't focus on just print anymore. There's broadband and the Web, Web 2.0, and personalization that requires database expertise.
- **Programming.** C++, PERL, HTML, JAVA, PHP, and others. If you expect to build a competency, you likely will require some customization.

A State of Mind

What my company has also learned is that skills are just one piece of the puzzle. The other is, for lack of a better word, behavioral. Unless someone has been formally trained in a printing school or environment, you have to acquire someone who can do well with the correct skill set or training in the graphic arts.

What do we usually look for? Well, it's a wide set of traits. Someone who has good math skills is a start. An analytical problem solver is helpful. So is someone who can deal with multi-tasking. In positions requiring customer

interaction, we search for people socially motivated. In fact, we use a behavioral test to hire all internal Semper personnel. It helps us staff our locations with people naturally inclined to work well with others.

Then there are the personal skills. How does the person deal with stress? If the prepress system is down due to a malfunction, you'd better have someone who steps up to the challenge. The same with the ability to work well with a lot of different people.

Where Am I Looking?

Fact—our company looks for our own employees through the Internet, without any newspaper advertising (well, almost none). We believe that people who work in a sales office or are recruiters need to be able to use the Internet as a search tool. If they don't have the computer searching skills that are good enough to find us, we figure they won't be good candidates to look for high tech printers. This works for our inside positions as well.

The world—and not just the printing world—is a different place. The people who could be good fits for graphic arts/printing companies are not found just at printing schools or at other printing companies. A bit of creativity—and a sense of where prospects could be hanging out—can be helpful.

Remember, the printing industry is not the only place where technology has transformed the world.

So, where can I find these elusive people? There are a number of places:

Different colleges. I'm sure many printers have probably called or accessed schools like RIT or CalPoly for future candidates. A good suggestion would be to think outside of the box, and it's not only to find qualified candidates. It's for "thought diversity," too. I spoke with someone associated with a large investment/mutual fund firm, who said they always recruit from the same schools, with the same degrees, and the same GPA. What do you get? You can get ethnic diversity, but you also unfortunately get people who were educated in the same way, think the same, "look" the same, and act the same. You don't get a variety of thought and new ideas about how to do things. Recruit from the same schools for printing, and the same thing happens. There are certainly engineering schools, design schools, and capable universities that churn out intelligent, computer-capable, and ambitious candidates.

The Print and Graphics Scholarship Foundation (PGSF) is a not-for-profit, private, industry-directed organization that provides undergraduate college scholarships and graduate fellowship assistance to talented students interested in graphic communications careers. Currently, more than 240 students are receiving financial assistance through PGSF, at colleges, universities, and technical schools across the country, including Rochester Institute of Technology, California Polytechnic State University, Clemson University, Georgia Southern University, and Western Michigan University, among others. Approximately seventy-five PGSF scholarship recipients graduated this past year. What a place to find outstanding talent. Resumes of the participating PGSF scholarship recipients can be found at www.gain.net on the GAIN job bank.

Web 2.0 presents both a challenge to the old ways of doing business and an opportunity to gain tremendous lever-

age. What is Web 2.0? They are untraditional, social websites that involve the visitor and evolve with the visitor. There are many examples: Myspace, Jobster, LinkedIn, flickr, Spoke, YouTube, and others. And there are the blogs which cover every topic imaginable. To thrive, companies will have to figure out how to engage young people from all over the world. Companies can follow the trail of blogs and social networking sites to find and recruit young employees from every part of the world.

Business Week recently published a web article, "Children of the Web: about how the second-generation Internet is spawning a global youth culture—and what business can do to cash in." (see the video: http://images.businessweek.com/ss/07/06/0621-global_youth/index_01.htm.) How are younger people influenced? As the article remarks: "Consider Brazilian Fabricio Zuardi, 27. He grew up 180 miles from São Paulo and found a job via the Web with Silicon Valley tech startup Ning Inc. Zuardi now lives in Palo Alto, Calif., in an apartment he located on craigslist.org. He has no traditional phone, preferring Skype Internet-based service. He doesn't own a TV. In his spare time he posts items on his blog or writes software that he contributes to open-source development projects."

As noted, companies are using this technology to find new employees. Remember, if these people are using Web 2.0, they are already familiar with most of the skills you probably require in a prepress department.

It is essential to understand that social networks—as the name implies—are social networking sites. People who are savvy on the Internet, and who do not have inhibitions about using the Internet to develop relationships, are the ones who should manage or handle your social networks. I would go even further and suggest that depending on your company size, it is almost imperative to have one or more dedicated people handling this function. Like

technology, keeping up with all these networks and keeping your firm's message fresh, is a full time job.

Another form of Web 2.0 is the metaverse which is described in Wikipedia as a fully immersive 3D virtual space; an environment where humans interact with each other—socially and economically—using the metaphor of the real world, but without physical limitations. The most popular metaverse is Second Life.

Second Life is a user-created 3D virtual world that has many advantages over traditional websites. The power to incorporate people viewing the same content brings tremendous advantages to marketing and business applications—as does the opportunity to add a powerful collaborative tool for training, conferences, and recruitment. Residents make up the population of Second Life; characters that you can meet and interact with.

Second Life is filled with creative people and many of them are graphic designers involved in real world design projects. Some are registered with Semper International, and we use them in the real world for graphic design and programming. Others are very tech savvy and work on large projects for real world companies, who are creating their own visions, using the built-in scripting language (a poor "sister" to Java script). These people are approachable "socially" and relationships can be developed. As discussed above, you must have someone who is able to develop *relationships* with these people as opposed to aggressively and latently attempting to get them to help you.

Some companies are already using Second Life to recruit people. Remember, this is a world of computer-savvy people. Semper is an active recruiting force in Second Life, as are TMP, IBM, Cisco, Verizon, Microsoft, and others.

Social networks and the Metaverse are just beginning to be understood. However, the impact is quite powerful and worth reviewing and possibly using.

Go where techies visit on the Internet. My guess is that your prospective employees are not searching Monster.com. Just refer to the websites that would attract the people you are interested in. Follow blogs and other cyber links to find your most qualified candidates. Three print blogs (found with a very quick search) are printmode.net, printceoblog.com, and prepressforum.com (printworkers.com has a link). However, not all candidates are reading print blogs, but perhaps they are visiting blogs and tech forums that are specific to their skills. Visit blogs from other industries with fundamentally similar skill sets. How different is an X-ray tech from a prepress tech? What are the primary skill sets a person must have for your position? Could you find those primary skill sets in people from other industries? Sometimes you'll need a very wide net to capture the highest skilled talent.

Go to events and be seen where you share a similar vision of interests. These could be print trade shows, but perhaps there are other technology events that attract people with the skills you are looking for—or maybe there are just popular leisure time spots. People like to join firms with the same or similar vision of the world that they have. Get your company's vision publicized for people to buy in to. Designate a charismatic person from your staff as an evangelist to talk at events and present a solid message that people will listen to. Your goal is to get people in the crowd to subconsciously nod their heads in agreement.

Start Surfing

The technology world has opened up a wide variety of options to find and deliver messages to very competent technical help. The same creativity many printers have used to maintain their businesses will be required to find

More on Second Life

Interested in learning more about the Second Life metaverse? Check out the following links:

Location:

<http://slurl.com/secondlife/jacqueland/95/52/22>

To join:

<https://secureweb5.secondlife.com/community/referral.php>

talented candidates. They aren't visiting the old print haunts any more, but they're out there—and you don't even need to leave your office. Start surfing!

Brian Regan is President of Semper International, involved in recruiting operations for the company, and consulting clients about Second Life on behalf of Semper. Brian can be reached at bregan@semper-llc.com or visit www.semperllc.com.



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