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## Tech startups scramble to find experienced workers

### Dearth of candidates blamed on offshoring and dot-com bust

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Unlike companies during the dot-com bubble, technology start-ups today can no longer sit back and wait for talent to come knocking. Instead, they must market themselves almost as heavily as job candidates do, according to both startups and recruiters.

"It's extremely difficult to find the right talent for our company," said Alex Beletsky, CEO of Sentri Inc., an IT services and business technology company that launched in 1999 without venture capital backing.

The Westborough-based company has 23 staffers — it will likely double in the size by the end of the year — and is searching for several customer relationship management and voice over Internet protocol consulting positions, as well as a new president.

The combination of business savvy and deep technology expertise has proved elusive for Sentri, which used to post jobs on online recruiting sites including Craigslist, Monster Worldwide (Nasdaq: MNST) and technology job board Dice before hiring Talent Retriever LLC in Burlington to handle all of its recruiting.

"We would get 200 or 300 résumés, but only one candidate would be suitable," said

**'[Companies] need to build an employment brand — create a positive buzz about the company. If they do that, half the battle is behind them.'**



Beletsky. "I'm marketing my company to them as hard as they market themselves to me, if not harder. The problem with the technology industry is it's changing all the time. You have to update your skills every 18 months. It's very stressful, and if you're not staying on top of it, you get behind."

Most tech companies are seeking employees with a minimum of three to five years of experience, and the dearth of those employees is likely a combination of the dot-com bust and companies sending technical work offshore.

Companies need to take steps to invest in quality talent, according to **David Barbato**, president and CEO of Talent Retriever.

"They need to build an employment brand — create a positive buzz about the company. If they do that, half the battle is behind them," said Barbato. "The second is identifying someone who will champion the process. The third is communicating expectations internally and externally."

Two-year-old Allurent Inc. in Cambridge, which also uses Talent Retriever, has found

hiring a challenge but feels optimistic about the future. With 22 employees, the startup hired 12 this year and is looking to move past the 30 count before the year is out.

"It's the first time we've had to hire in relative volume," said Paul Shorthose, COO of Allurent. "There was definitely a quiet period from 2001 to 2005. But over the last 12 months we have seen a lot more energy in the market. Many people we've talked to say they have been treading water for three to five years, but we've definitely seen a bigger interest in people willing to move to startups. Some are not convinced the market is strong, but a lot more are willing to take risks now than a few months ago."

Woburn-based e-commerce startup Demandware Inc. gets plenty of applications but sees few from young talent fresh from universities like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The 50-person company, which hopes to reach 80 staffers by the end of the year, plans more outreach to local universities.

"We have no complaints in terms of general volume," said Demandware CEO Stephan Schambach. "But we would like to see more young talent. When we started the company in 2004, we hired experienced people who could mentor — now it's time for us to bring on graduates from MIT."

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