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Talent shortage

Interactive companies scrambling to fill key positions

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A growing demand for interactive services — like Web development and search-engine marketing — is feeding the growth of local agencies that offer those services, but it's also causing a shortage of employees with interactive skills and stiff competition between agencies looking to attract those professionals, some

insiders say. Dave Claunch, president of Liaison Resources, a creative services group with a staffing division, says he's definitely seeing a tightening of the market for creative professionals.

"There are more jobs than there are qualified candidates right now," says Claunch. "We haven't seen this type of market since right before the tech bust."

While the biggest demand is

for those with Flash development skills, there is also a need for every position from Web designers to interactive designers and online database developers to writers, he says.

Gene Kincaid, senior lecturer at the University of Texas' College of Communications, says that for students graduating with interactive skills, the job market is white-hot.

"Because of the dot-com bubble there is a huge backlog. The market contracted and people were thrown out of jobs. The [companies] left are looking for qualified candidates to fill vacant positions," Kincaid says.

At UT's advertising department, interactive classes are just starting to return to the size they were before the tech bust, he says. Those UT graduates with interactive skills are reaping higher rewards straight out of school, Kincaid adds.

In a recent telephone survey of about 30 to 40 employers, Kincaid found that advertising professionals with an interactive skill set were earning a 10 to 20



ABJ FILE PHOTO

Kyla Kanz, owner of Olive Interactive Design and Marketing, says the competition is stiff for new talent.

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Span heads for Pflugerville

Move prompts developer to launch business park expansion

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Span International plans to consolidate its Austin-area operations into more than 100,000 square feet at a new Pflugerville industrial park, prompting the park's developer to begin construction on the next phase.

A Toronto-based provider of third-party logistics and manufacturing services to the electronics industry, Span International has leased 128,000 square feet, or the majority of the first building, at Verde Springbrook Corporate Center. The compa-

ny plans to relocate operations from three area warehouses to the new Pflugerville site in early 2008.

Verde Corporate Realty Services announced plans earlier this summer for the \$50 million industrial park that could eventually total up to 1 million square feet. Set on 63 acres southwest of the intersection of State Highway 45 and State Highway 130, the park's proximity to the crossroads of two emerging transit corridors isn't the only draw that developers and economic development officials are counting on.

SPAN INTERNATIONAL

WHAT IT DOES: Manufactures, stores and ships components primarily for the electronics industry

FOUNDED: 1981

EMPLOYEES: 800-plus; 20 in Austin

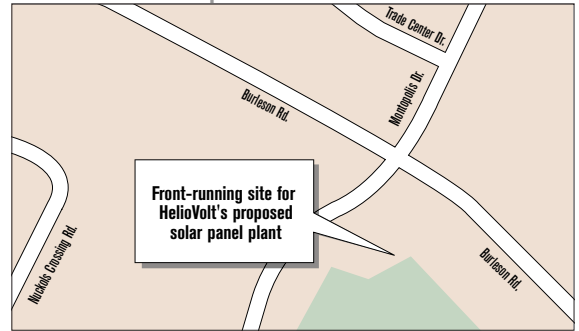
LOCATIONS: 10 in the U.S., Canada and Mexico

WEB SITE: www.spanitd.com

In August, the Pflugerville City Council approved the creation of a triple freeport tax-exemption zone that extends across most of the city. Under

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EXPO BUSINESS PARK



HelioVolt plans heat up in Austin

Company may head for Expo Business Park

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With city of Austin incentives on the table and the potential for more coming from Travis County and the state, HelioVolt Corp. is close to inking a deal that would put its new \$80 million manufacturing plant in a newly constructed shell building in Southeast Austin, sources say.

The Austin-based company that has developed technology to make highly efficient solar-energy panels has been debating whether it would build the new plant in Central Texas or take its operations to another city in favor of a stronger incentives package.

John Langdon, vice president of marketing for HelioVolt, says the company will wait until the Travis County Commissioner's Court votes on an incentives package — now slated to happen on Oct. 30 — before making an official decision on its future home.

"That's the piece that we're waiting for," he says.

If those incentives are approved, sources say the company is already poised to lease the 122,400-square-foot Expo 8 building that Trammell Crow Co. recently completed at Expo

Business Park near Montopolis Drive and Burlison Road. With its 24-foot-high ceilings, shell condition and location in the city's desired development zone, the building appears to be a good match for HelioVolt's needs, sources say.

Earlier this month, the Austin City Council approved an incentives package valued at more than \$600,000 that would provide HelioVolt a decade's worth of property

tax abatements. To get the incentives, HelioVolt would have to invest a minimum of \$80 million in its new plant and corporate headquarters, as well as create and maintain at least 168 full-time jobs. The company is also seeking similar property tax abatements from Travis County in addition to a grant from the state's Texas Enterprise Fund.

The company now has about 40 employees at its current office at 8201 E. Riverside Drive.

HelioVolt CEO B.J. Stanbery has been vocal about the options placed before his company — saying that



Stanbery

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A look at Texas A&M's most successful grads.

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PEOPLE

Taking baby steps

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When Aruni Gunasegaram sold her software company in 2002, she thought she would never again embark on another similar venture.

The stress of owning a business and coordinating the demands of investors and customers was tiresome.

Plus, she and husband Erin Defosse had just started a family. She wanted to stay home during the crucial early years of her children's lives.

"I wanted our kids to know that we're here," she says.

Soon after the birth of her son a little over five years ago, an idea for a tool to help new parents took a strong hold and pulled her back to the business world.

Gunasegaram, 37, is one of the few women — and mothers — on the Austin tech scene.

Growing up in Lubbock, she had a paper route by seventh grade and rode her bike through dust storms and over ice.

She wasn't saving for anything in particular. She simply had the itch to work. "I was adamant I wanted to do that," she said. "I don't know why I did it. It was painful because you had to wake up really early."

She guesses her entrepreneurial drive is in the family genes.

Her grandfather, who was a doctor in their native Sri Lanka, sold baby formula and opened a pathology lab and medical college.

"I think we had similar personalities," she said. "When I think back, that's probably where I got some of the interest in creating things."

While in business school at the University of Texas, she and Defosse founded Isochron Data Corp. as a class project. The company, which created software to manage vending-machine inventory and repair, raised \$15 million in venture capital.

Defosse is currently the director of wireless and information technology at the Austin Technology Incubator and chairman of the Austin Wireless Alliance.

They sold the company to a group of Silicon Valley investors in 2002 and began their family. They have a 5-year-old son and a daughter who is almost 3.

Gunasegaram's experiences as a new mother led to the creation of Babble Soft in 2005. The company created a program that helps parents manage their babies' schedules and milestones through mobile technology or online.

"With Babble Soft, my goal is I really want to help parents, new parents," she said. "It's a challenging time and the world has changed so much with family all over the place."

She announced her first two large clients and nanny agencies — Mom's Best Friend and Nannies from the Heart — earlier this month. She also writes about parenthood and entrepreneurship at her blog, *entrepreneurMusings*, almost daily.

"I've tried to do the best I could by keeping one toe in the tech world at the same time really making it about my family," she says.

Aruni Gunasegaram

Founder/president
Babble Soft Inc.



THE Q&A

Q: What is your greatest strength?

A: "Connecting with people and trying to find or navigate my way with people in the business. It's a different kind of network. It's a building a relationship or a rapport. Even if you never see that person again, they'll remember you."

Q: What lessons have you learned from your children that are useful in the business world?

A: "It's funny, because I did a high-tech company before, and then I had children. I think that in the experience of having children, you really learn what endurance means. There's no sleeping. You've doubled and tripled what you have to think about when you have kids. Having them

has helped me put things in perspective. I guess I've learned to be able to do that a little bit better. When you have kids, they force you to take a break."

Q: How is Babble Soft benefiting from lessons learned while running your first company, Isochron Data Corp.?

A: "I learned how to deal with things and people differently. I've learned about taking money. I've learned who are the people I'd take money from and who I wouldn't. Once you take other people's money, that's a serious thing. [My clients understand that] if my kids are sick, I can stay home. That's the kind of partner I'm looking at, one that understands my perspective."

WHAT OTHERS SAY



Many entrepreneurs are not coachable, but the best ones are. Aruni is an exceptionally effective listener. She bounces ideas off her advisers, evaluates the feedback, then makes an informed decision.

Gene Lowenthal
Former investor in Isochron and a board member

I really admire Aruni's ability to tackle and resolve difficult issues by breaking them into their component parts and working on each component until the problem is solved. She's a master at figuring out the most direct path to get to a desired result, then doing whatever it takes to get there.

Kathy Lindauer
Former attorney for Isochron, former Association for Women in Technology board member



IN DETAIL

EDUCATION: Bachelor's in accounting and MBA in entrepreneurship and information management from the University of Texas

WORK HISTORY: Adjunct lecturer on entrepreneurship at the University of Texas McCombs School of Business, former founding President/CEO of Isochron Data Corp., staff accountant in the audit department of KPMG Peat Marwick, and senior in audit services department at Dresser Industries Inc. (now Halliburton)

COMMUNITY: Board member of the Association for Women in Technology from 1999 to 2007, participant in the Herb Kelleher Center for Entrepreneurship at the University of Texas at Austin, faculty adviser to the Venture Capital Investment Competition MBA team for the past two years

Q: How do you make time for family while running a business?

A: "My kids go to care. I don't have a big commute. I can spend more focused time on what I'm working on, everything from research and development to accounting to managing the Web site. I don't have any hard-and-fast rules, but when [my kids are] here, I try hard to pay attention to them. Otherwise, I work during their naps. I think if you set hard-and-fast rules, then you'll be upset if you have to break them."

Q: What is more difficult: raising a startup tech company or raising two children?

A: "In a nutshell, giving birth to and rearing kids is by far more challenging than starting a company," Gunasegaram wrote on austinstartup.typepad.com. "I'm not sure how many people can say they have done both, but considering that the world of high-tech startups is dominated by men, probably not many. I learned a ton while finishing my MBA and starting Isochron at the same time, and that was hard. But taking care of a 5-year-old kid who still wakes up at night and a 2-year-old is even harder, and the responsibility is greater. I have learned oodles about negotiating with a 5-year-old and now I'm ready to jump back into the startup fray to see if any of my newfound negotiation skills will get me anywhere. If you make a big mistake with your kids, they can be affected for the rest of their lives. If you make a big mistake with your startup, the worst that can happen is you lose a customer, your investor/board member yells at you, your employee sues you, or your company goes under."