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October 03, 2015

Smart bosses reveal their secrets to hiring

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By CASSIE WALKER BURKE |

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Photo by John R. Boehm

Sandstorm Design CEO Sandy Marsico says one great hire has a "domino effect" on your business.

If you're a small-business owner in Chicago, your glass probably looks half-full compared with this time last year. The regional economy is slowly recovering from its stumble, more banks are showing enthusiasm for lending and consumer spending is up. Enough of you are confident that, in a survey earlier this year conducted by the

Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, 71 percent of you plan to grow your small businesses over the next 12 months.

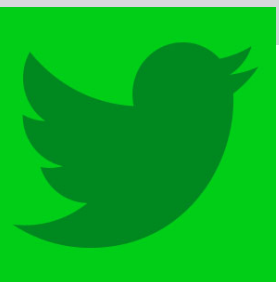
For many, that translates to hiring. But hiring can be a daunting prospect for small-business owners—that's because every person you sign on plays a crucial role. It can be a challenge to find the right person who can juggle multiple tasks *and* not disrupt what's often a tightknit, family-like company culture.

SPECIAL REPORT: HOW SMALL BIZ CAN WIN THE TALENT WAR

GREEN = ATTRACT TALENT **BLUE** = HAVE SMART INTERVIEWS **YELLOW** = OUTMANEUVER COMPETITORS
ORANGE = TACKLE TOUGH QUESTIONS **PURPLE** = KEEP YOUR BEST PEOPLE



Smart bosses reveal their secrets to hiring



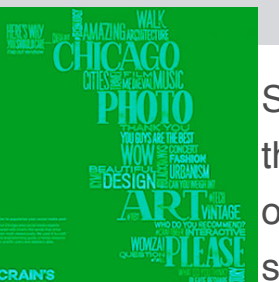
How one small biz won on Twitter



How one small biz won on Facebook

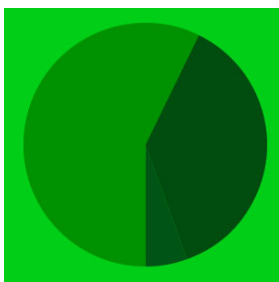


How one small biz won on Instagram

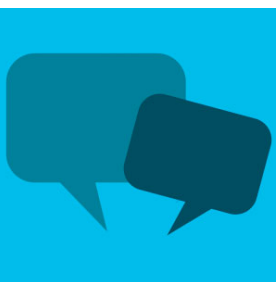


These words will popularize your social media posts

So what are the secrets of the smartest bosses? To compile this in-depth report, Crain's conducted a survey of small-business owners that netted 200-plus



40 percent of you don't do background checks?! And other surprises from our survey



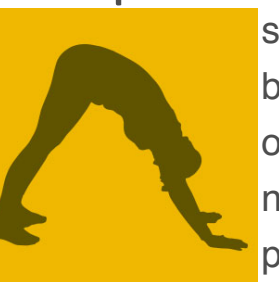
25 no-fail interview questions



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Is it a jerk move to

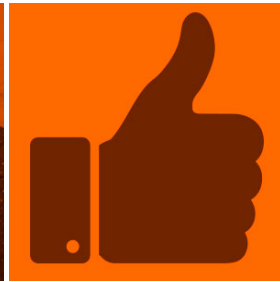
break a hiring tie using Facebook?



When it's time to outsource the accounting (and other stuff)



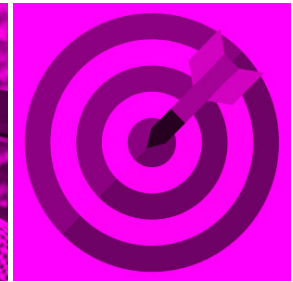
When it's time to replace yourself as CEO



My View: You have to triage to find top talent



Your onboarding program probably stinks. How to fix it.



Five tips for retaining talent

respondents. We also interviewed human resources experts who specialize in working with companies with fewer than 250 employees

and reached out to dozens of business owners throughout the Chicago area. We

weren't shy, either. We asked such thorny questions as whether it's good business to check out potential hires on Facebook and when—gulp—it's time for a company founder to hand the reins to someone else. The result is this comprehensive, 19-page guide that delves into every stage of the process: from marketing to social media to sealing the deal when you find the ideal candidate. Because we are confident that you will.



Secrets of 12 small-business owners who are succeeding in the talent race

As told to Monica Ginsburg



"We look for people who have all the engineering skills and they just need the compliance and regulatory training (for the LED lighting and manufacturing industry). We've built out a training program that's half-school, half- mentoring so we can provide the industry education. It's easier than trying to compete with larger, mainstream companies for talent."

Kirby Corkill, founder, Jarvis, Chicago



"To get some more visibility, last year we started our own career day, and we have a 90 percent success rate of hiring from that. After a prescreen at our booth, we invite about 15 college students to come in for a full day and see every facet of the business. We have an open floor plan, there's music playing, it's a casual environment, and it gives them an idea of what it looks like to work here. It also gives us a full day to evaluate the candidates."

Tim Zelasko, president, Redwood Logistics, Chicago



"About a year ago, we opened an office downtown, and that has been a huge lever for talent acquisition. There's a perception that advertising and marketing is a downtown industry. You can work at both offices; you're not permanent to one or the other."

Stanton Kawer, CEO, Blue Chip Marketing Worldwide, Northbrook



"We've brought in some nurses in a part-time capacity. This allows them to dip their toe in the water, and it lets us learn about each of them and what they're passionate about. Nursing is a pretty stable profession, so it can be a culture shock to come to a startup."

Shawn Ellis, president, Zest Health, Chicago



"We have a seven-person office in Champaign, so we're well-dialed into the talent that comes out of that university. We're very visible. We lead sessions, speak, judge competitions and promote entrepreneurship. We had seven interns this summer, and three have accepted offers upon graduation."

Will Scott, president, Lextech Global Services, Downers Grove



"We work directly with career centers at local law schools. I went to John Marshall, so I always reach out there, and we can handpick certain candidates because of our relationship. The industry is saturated, and we're getting law students who are graduating at the top of their class and have been bypassed by bigger firms because of the market. They're hungry and eager to learn. We offer them immediate hands-on experience. They're going to court on a daily basis, taking depositions, working one-on-one with clients, trying cases in their first year. We automatically saddle them with a great deal of responsibility,

and I think they like that."

Jared Staver, managing partner, Staver Law Group, Chicago



"We host an open-hack tech group that meets here monthly, and we've recently hired two employees and an intern out of that. It's a very low-key way to get exposure to talented people in the tech world. It was started by an employee to bring together developers and coders who wanted to work together and share ideas. It's hard to compete with the downtown atmosphere of many tech companies, but we've found there's a lot of good talent in the western suburbs."

Mike Justice, president, Grid Connect, Naperville



"Recruiting starts with a goal, and like any goal, you have to budget against it. We have a sophisticated program with a fairly large internal recruiting team, and we use outside recruiters and media. You also have to assess how good you are at hiring. When we were starting out, I was doing a lot of the interviewing. I found out quickly that I wasn't very good at it. Rather than leaving it up to a few questions, we changed our method. We developed an analytics exam that every candidate has to pass before they can even get an interview. Our industry is data-driven and very competitive, and this has been effective at helping to bring in the right people at the right time."

Jon Morris, CEO, Rise Interactive, Chicago



"Hiring great talent comes with a price tag, and we have to be extremely competitive when it comes to salaries. Money talks. There's still the stigma that you have to go to big agencies that win big awards. The multicultural candidates who have degrees and experience are very coveted. We've started to look outside of Chicago for candidates. Of our past four hires, one came from Miami, and we moved one here from Dallas."

Marco Lopez, partner, ElementoL2, Chicago



"If we find someone who we think is great, but they're not perfect for the position we have open, often we can create a position for them. We've found that it's important to not only target a skill set but to surround yourself with like-minded people. About two and a half years ago, I met a great candidate with a marketing background through a mutual friend. We ended up bringing him on in an executive-level position that we created for him. As a small business, you're betting on people, and sometimes you have to go with your gut."

Amit Gauri, president, Black Dog, Chicago



"For the past two years, we've developed a virtual internship program with Kent State University that teams up students from the university's journalism school with some of our employees to work on national research projects. We try to immerse them into the agency and connect them into client work as well. Four students have participated, and we hired one on this year as a full-time assistant account coordinator. This program points us in the direction of finding fresh talent, and that helps everybody."

Liz Brohan, co-CEO, CBD Marketing, Chicago



"Once we started to identify top talent, it snowballed. Good people tend to know other really good people, but it takes time. You need to hire that first really strong person who has a network, and then it's like a domino effect. We're always interviewing and building relationships before we have the role. It's super-casual and not about a particular job. We have our wish list of people. Someday we will be ready."

Sandy Marsico, CEO, Sandstorm Design, Chicago

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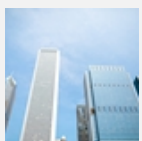




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