



You can outsource job search

Local start-up hires workers in India to help American clients

12:00 AM CST on Monday, March 13, 2006

By KATHERINE YUNG / The Dallas Morning News

In a novel twist on the practice of outsourcing work overseas, a Bedford-based start-up is hiring workers in India to help Americans find jobs.

JobSerf Inc. has hired a team of 13 young, low-wage workers in Vizag, a port city on India's eastern coast, to apply for jobs for U.S. customers, using the Internet.

"It's the first example of a net positive, when it comes to outsourcing," said Jay Martin, JobSerf's chairman and one of its founders. "We're not taking away anybody's job."

The firm officially launched its business Feb. 1. So far, the company has attracted only a few customers, but it has yet to spend heavily on advertising and marketing.

One customer, Melissa Kunde, 39, said JobSerf has enabled her to spend more time preparing for job interviews, meeting with potential employers and networking.

The so-called serfs have applied for more than 300 jobs on her behalf, she said.

Ms. Kunde, who lives in Portland, Ore., has been looking for a job in marketing, communications, business development and sales.

Normally, it would take her all day to apply for 10 jobs online. But with JobSerf, she gets an e-mail message every morning telling her how many jobs the serfs have applied for, with a listing for each position.

Ms. Kunde started seeing results after three weeks, with more than 10 companies calling to interview her.

"This is by far the best choice I ever made," she said.

How it works

JobSerf charges \$98 for 20 hours of work during the first week of enrollment. After that, customers can

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From left: Philip Miller, Jay Martin and Gary Blum are all involved in JobSerf. Mr. Martin is the company chairman. He and Mr. Blum are JobSerf's two largest investors.

continue at that rate, or pay \$49 for eight hours a week.

Customers also need to upload their résumés and cover letters to JobSerf's Web site. The serfs use technology that makes it seem as if the e-mail they send originates from the job applicants' own computers.

JobSerf's debut comes as U.S. companies are quietly moving an increasing number of jobs to India, China and other low-wage countries.

"It's increasing in size and scope," said Ron Hira, an assistant professor of public policy at Rochester Institute of Technology and the co-author of a book about outsourcing. "It's starting to hit lots and lots of industries."

JobSerf isn't for everyone. Although a plethora of job listings abound online for some occupations, that isn't the case for others, such as contract consulting. In addition, some experts caution that the chances of finding a job online are usually small.

But JobSerf could help older people who don't know much about online job searching, said Jim Stewart, founder and chief executive of Executive Smarts LLC, a Plano consulting firm. He has been testing the service and has no affiliation with JobSerf.

"You probably are not going to find a job on the Internet, but it takes you away from the labor so you can spend your days networking," he said.

Getting started

JobSerf is the brainchild of Mr. Martin, a 38-year-old former consultant who has worked in India. He teamed with David Micek, chief executive of Houston-based Eagle Broadband, and Philip Miller, who runs CFO Ventures, a Richardson accounting firm.

Mr. Martin and Gary Blum, a Dallas financier, are JobSerf's two largest investors. The company's advisory board includes, among others, Robert Neff, the former chief of Web operations at the United States Mint, and Peter Gudmundsson, a former chief executive of Jobs.com.

JobSerf also enlisted an Indian partner, NuNet Technologies, an outsourcing firm with an office in Bedford. NuNet hired and trained JobSerf's workers in Vizag.

Calling these workers "serfs" has raised some eyebrows.

"My initial reaction was that a serf is a slave, and I didn't like the connotation of that," Mr. Stewart said. "I've gotten over it."

The company said its name was chosen only after much deliberation. Mr. Martin said he asked many Indians whether they would be offended by the name but everyone just laughed.

"Serf is not a commonly used word in India and carries no connotations here," said Subbarao Jayanti, NuNet's chief executive.

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