

Boston Business Journal

July 23, 2007 Monday

Focus on values is key in attracting women to IT jobs; Study: Women account for just 32 percent of workforce in IT

BYLINE: Jennifer LeClaire

LENGTH: 645 words

Recruiters who hope to persuade women to help curb the information technology worker shortage have to go beyond the typical sales pitch that beats the job promotion and job security drums. So says a Pennsylvania State University research study of 92 female IT professionals.

Human resources pros need to recognize that women have diverse values and motivations throughout their careers, the study indicated, and that getting their attention demands a tailored approach to recruiting and retention.

"You can't classify women by a single category, whether that category is desire for technical competence or organizational security," said Eileen Trauth, professor of information sciences and technology in the College of Information Sciences and Technology at Penn State.

Women represent almost 60 percent of the workforce, Penn State estimated, but account for only a little more than 32 percent of the IT workforce.

Although recruiters were reluctant to offer any insights that could be perceived as stereotypical, study after study reveals that there is a stigma of sorts among women when it comes to IT jobs. Female IT pros earn less than their male counterparts, for example, and some women still complain about a "good old boy network" in the industry.

Brigid Oliveri Siegel, a partner at Framingham-based executive search firm Polachi & Co., suggested minimizing the "good old boy" network perception by proactively communicating a company's pro-diversity values. "We actively network with women IT executives to have a working knowledge of the general population and where they are," Siegel added. "And we stay in touch with situated executives to keep our finger on the pulse of the rising stars."

Along those same lines, Kip Hollister, CEO of Hollister Inc., a full-service recruiting firm in Boston, said women work for companies with values that align with their own, be they ethics or family or career rewards. Hollister said women often desire a strong emphasis on work-life balance.

"Women can be the breadwinners of the family but still want to get to the kid's ball game and go back online at 10 o'clock to finish their work," she said. "Day care, free parking so they can get in and out quickly and mentoring programs are attractive perks to female candidates."

Tracy Cashman, a partner in Boston-based staffing firm Winter Wyman's IT group, agreed. "We don't generally see employers making a distinction between male and female candidates," she said, "though some companies will go above and beyond to emphasize flexible hours and work-life balance options."

Chris Egizi, senior vice president for the eastern territory of TAC Worldwide, a staff augmentation firm in Dedham that specializes in IT and engineering, said he doesn't think of recruiting in terms of gender. "People want different things at different stages of their career," he said, "so we take a customized approach to recruiting no matter whom we are speaking to."

Michelle Ventress, national recruiting services delivery manager of the Boston branch of Technisource, also does not recruit according to gender. Like other recruiters, she cites work-life balance as an important value but doesn't believe that's unique to women.

"We look for the best talent for the best positions and women are equally as qualified as men," Ventress said. Still, there are fewer women in the field to choose from.

Attracting females to technology needs to begin long before college, recruiters say. Hollister is among those calling for more workforce development programs that focus on getting grade school girls interested in technology so that the industry has plenty of candidates 10 years from now.

"Concierge services and day care may attract women to IT positions today, but the bottom line is getting more women interested in technology to begin with," Hollister said. "We need these skills in tomorrow's economy."

<http://www.bizjournals.com/boston/stories/2007/07/23/story10.html>