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## BUSINESS

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# Small firms battle heavyweights

## Anything goes in the fight to recruit the best, brightest

Vito Pilieci

The Ottawa Citizen

Ottawa's tiny technology companies are duking it out with some of the biggest names in their field during a two-day career fair at the Corel Centre.

In order to attract employees, Ottawa's smaller high-tech companies say they must shout louder, work harder and find innovative ways of attracting attention from the often overwhelming and eye-popping displays by industry giants, such as Alcatel, Nokia and Lucent Technologies.

"When you look at the big players, from a financial perspective we can't always compete on their level," said Colleen Walsh, human resources manager for KyberPass Corporation.

"From an environment perspective and what's in it for the employees, I think we far exceed what you are going to get from a big organization."

In today's booming market for technological talent, companies are climbing all over one another to attract the people they need to develop their products. High-tech companies are flooding newspaper employment ads, filling Internet chat forums and fighting for space at career fairs, trying to attract the best talent available.

"We want the creative person, we want that person to think outside of the box, we want that person that isn't guided by structure," Ms. Walsh said. "We want to attract the creme de la creme."

KyberPass, which has 75 employees, said it is using shock marketing to make sure its booth does not go unnoticed.

The slogan is: "Meet Buffy, he is the 17-year-old cheerleader you have been chatting with on the Web."

In fact, Buffy is a slovenly older man who tries to take advantage of children over the Internet. KyberPass creates Internet security solutions designed to stop real-life Buffys from taking advantage of others over the World Wide Web.

"Our main focus when you come to our booth is Buffy," said Ms. Walsh. "I don't think that many people are going to go by our booth without saying, 'Oh my goodness!' and then taking a second look at Buffy."

"We have had huge successes with Buffy," Ms. Walsh said. "At any trade show we have been to,



John Major, The Ottawa Citizen / Kim Pilon, left, director of operations at Kyberpass, and Colleen Walsh, the company's human resources manager, have turned a few heads at the high-tech career fair at the Corel Centre with Buffy, their mascot.



we have run out of posters of Buffy within the first day."

While not employing a dirty old man to turn heads, Ottawa's Cogency Semiconductor is another small company competing for employees at the Corel Centre fair.

Cogency believes that when competing for talent at a career fair, location is everything.

"We are on a corner, which is very fortunate for us so we actually get the traffic from both sides of the aisle," said Cindy Stockdale, senior manager of human resources for Cogency Semiconductor Inc.

"We want to show what our technology can enable in the home ... and show people what it is our technology can do."

Cogency, with a staff of 50, designs semiconductors that allow a home to be networked through existing power lines. This allows two or more computers to share one Internet connection by plugging them into a standard wall outlet.

To showcase the company's work to potential employees, Cogency is using its prime real estate to show off some of its goods.

"We have an Audrey, which is a little Internet device ... made by 3COM, and it is something we will be putting our chip into," said Ms. Stockdale. "We will also have one of those Kodak Internet picture frames; it's all about showing what our technology can do."

BitFlash is another small Ottawa operation casting its nets in the Corel Centre with hopes of landing workers to help the company provide rich graphics to mobile devices. BitFlash, which has close to 100 employees, believes the best way to draw attention from the big booths of the industry leaders, is to provide potential employees with work they can talk about.

"We can actually give people the opportunity to leave an imprint on the way that graphics will be seen on mobile devices," said Sandii Paquette, a recruiter with BitFlash Inc.

All of the recruiters said potential employees should bring their resumes and come ready to be interviewed.

The career fair will be open between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. and between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. today.

That is something that everybody can relate to because everybody has a mobile device, or knows someone who has a mobile device."

However they go about attracting attention to their company, smaller businesses attending the career fair believe many high-tech workers will be attracted to a smaller company because of the more personal, "home-town" atmosphere, a small company can provide.

For instance, Zenastra Photonics Inc., which will also be attending the fair, can offer perks to its employees such as the Z-bus, to drive all Zenastra employees to and from work.

"I would never switch to a big organization," Ms. Walsh said. "Our CEO knows everybody here. That is something that doesn't happen in a large organization and there are a lot of people that have worked in big organizations but now like the small ones because of the environment they offer."

With more than 90 companies in the Corel Centre yesterday and today, numerous high-tech positions are up for grabs.

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