



NETWORKING

A MySpace for Job Seekers

While interviewing with the CEO of a top Silicon Valley e-commerce firm, Scott Langmack got the idea for a company of his own. Langmack, a PepsiCo and Microsoft veteran, was a shoo-in for the position of chief marketing officer. But then the CEO complained that his headhunters had scoured thousands of resumes and that he'd spent three months interviewing shortlist candidates. A lightbulb went on in Langmack's brain, and he turned down the job.

Instead, he spent his own money creating **Blue Chip Expert**, a San Mateo, Calif., startup launching this month. Blue Chip is designed to make the kind of match Langmack's interviewer was seeking—but in hours, not months. Think of it as a MySpace for top-level job seekers, except Langmack is offering thousands of dollars to any user who makes a successful referral. As he says, "viral networks don't have to happen by accident."

Rather than operating a generic job board like Monster or CareerBuilder, Blue Chip focuses on free agents, the roughly 12 million contract workers in the United States. Langmack wants a lock on the high end—software engineers, creative directors, consultants. "The cream of the workforce never posts resumes on the big job boards," Langmack says, which is why companies have a hard time finding them.

Once you create a Blue Chip profile outlining your skills for hire, you can invite friends to the site. If one gets hired for a project, you'll be rewarded with a cut of her project fee. A \$200,000 gig, for instance, would net you \$4,000. But as with Amway, the fees extend across degrees of separation. If one of your friends' contacts gets a \$200,000 project, you'll get \$2,000. The incentive is designed to quickly build critical mass for a national talent bank. When employ-

ers search for prospects, Blue Chip's algorithms offer a menu of rankings according to the pedigree of, say, former employers or universities (GE outranks Tyco, for example, and Stanford is better than the University of Colorado). The worker's payment is sent to Blue Chip—along with a 25 percent fee.

For headhunters, the site could mean significant royalties. "We get 50 resumes a day, most of which we can't use," says J.W. Ferneborg, who runs a boutique search firm in Silicon Valley and advises Langmack. "It's going to be golden to refer them." The Association of Executive Search Consultants, an umbrella group for headhunters, recommends the site to its members. Langmack badly needs such an ally. His startup must register thousands of users in the first few weeks or competitors could quickly copy his idea. In that event, Langmack may soon find himself back in an interviewee's chair. — PAUL KAIHLA