

▶ NORTH AMERICAN MARKETS CLOSED FOR LABOUR DAY HOLIDAY

Facebook used to recruit employees

BY ROBERTO ROCHA
CanWest News Service

MONTREAL — Companies are increasingly hiring through social networks such as Facebook, turning web-sites meant for friendly banter into effective recruiting tools.

Talent seekers are finding that these online services, where members mostly share vacation photos and discuss weekend plans, have a terrific asset — it's full of people and they talk a lot.

Look at consultant giant Ernst & Young, which created a Facebook community showcasing the company with flashy videos and a Q&A section. More than 9,500 people are part of this group.

The group for Southwest Airlines, where one will find an ad for software engineers, boasts more than 50,000 members.

Even the CIA is luring aspiring spies on Facebook.

It gets people talking.

Robert Neel, a recruiter in Washington D.C. and blogger for Jobmatch-box.com, puts the Facebook allure in terms of numbers: "If you follow where people are online, the vast majority are on MySpace and Facebook, and it's increasing."

At last count, MySpace had more than 115 million users. Facebook clocks in much lower at 31 million. But recruiters are preferring the latter since it's a little cleaner, more organized, and the members more mature than MySpace, which found favour with bands and teens.

And since Facebook members volunteer tons of personal information, its search function can be a virtual gold mine for recruiters, Neel said.

"You can search for people by skills or by company or by job title," he said. "It takes you straight to the candidate."

As the ease and low cost of social networks becomes more apparent, innovative companies are finding creative ways to promote their brands. It costs nothing to create a Facebook group or to have employees who are members spread job openings among their contacts.

One of the more promising uses of Facebook is through applications. These are mini programs, made by anyone, that users can add to their profiles for free, expanding the functions to their once-static profile pages.

Popular applications involve movies and sharing music, but job-related ones are picking up. One application from website Jobster sends users alerts whenever a new position opens in the company and area of their choice. Big names like Nike, KPMG, GE, Merrill Lynch and Boeing have signed up.

Taleo Corp., a talent-management software maker in Dublin, Calif., is about to release its own application for recruiters. The application will make it so when a headhunter advertises a job, the post appears on the Facebook news feed of all their friends. But to use this application, a company must be a Taleo client.

"For smaller companies who don't have big brand, sourcing candidates is their No. 1 pain," said Jason Blessing, general manager of Taleo's small-business division. "And there are a lot of college students in Facebook. It's rich in talent. It's a good place to give customers a presence."



Darci Larocque of Swirl Solutions teaches business people "time-saving and cost-saving" ways to use their handheld devices.

Gerry Kahrmann/Canwest

Welcome to BlackBerry U

Deep training takes businesses beyond basics of device

BY WENDY MCLELLAN
CanWest News Service

VANCOUVER — When Darci LaRocque sees someone using a BlackBerry, she can't help watching them tap away on it, then asking whether they would like to learn a better way to perform the same task.

Her suggestions are always gratefully accepted.

"People think they know how to use their BlackBerry, but they don't know how much there is to figure out," she said.

LaRocque has read all the manuals, and after a couple of years teaching executives at one Vancouver corporation how to use the addictive little machines, she has launched her own business offering training courses to companies and individuals who want to learn how to use their BlackBerries more effectively.

"I live, eat and breathe BlackBerries," said LaRocque, president of Swirl Solu-

WIRED CANADIANS

Canadians are plugging in to technology with increasing frequency, according to a report published by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission last year:

- ▶ Nearly 75 per cent of households now have personal computers compared to 49 per cent in 1998
- ▶ A quarter of Canadians say they spend 25 hours a week on the Internet
- ▶ Sixty per cent used a cellphone in 2005
- ▶ Twelve per cent own an MP3 player
- ▶ Three per cent have a BlackBerry
- ▶ Worldwide, BlackBerry says about eight million people subscribe to its mobile e-mail service and industry analysts forecast the number will more than double by 2009.

tions. "I love training and watching people's eyes light up when they figure out how to do things."

LaRocque's passion for BlackBerries began three years ago when she was working in the IT department of a company that decided to give the wireless devices to 20 executives to see whether they were useful to people working away from the office. The pilot project was a

huge success and the number of users in the company quickly rose to 400.

The executives got the BlackBerries and LaRocque was responsible for helping them learn how to use them.

"They don't come with instructions any more, but you can go online and look up the 200-page manual," she said.

"Nobody reads the manual. Whenever I went in the office, executives would ask me about how to do things, so I decided to set up a training session on tips and tricks."

LaRocque expected perhaps two dozen people would be interested. But the day she sent the e-mail invitation, 200 signed up. And when she started talking to IT staff in other companies, she found that while many companies provided BlackBerries to employees, they weren't teaching them how to use the devices.

It was the beginning of her new business. LaRocque started offering training sessions part-time while working at her IT job. As well as teaching people how to use the devices more efficiently, she also helps companies find cost-saving measures and set up policies for BlackBerry users.

This month, she has turned her part-

time work into a full-time career.

"People seem to think BlackBerries are just like a cellphone — some think it's just for e-mail — but there's a lot to learn. I teach time-saving, cost-saving ways to use them, and save time for the company help desk too," LaRocque said.

Vancouver clinical nurse specialist Elaine Unsworth signed up for LaRocque's training after her employer issued her a BlackBerry.

"They just gave it to me. No instructions, just, 'Here you go,'" said Unsworth, a health consultant who is frequently away from the office. "I went online looking for instructions and found 200 and some pages — that's not going to happen."

She asked her company IT department for help setting it up, and when she heard about LaRocque's training sessions, she signed up.

"I thought I was doing fine, phoning and reading e-mails and updating my calendar, but in an hour I learned so many little things that made everything quicker."

"I love my BlackBerry — I don't know what I'd do without it. I'm not truly addicted. I can turn it off. But I have it with me all the time."

Canadians find affordable housing south of the border

CanWest News Service

VANCOUVER — Phil and Casie Laird wanted a vacation home for their young family. But after the Langley couple looked around British Columbia, they instead decided their best option was to try for a cross-border bargain.

They liquidated an Abbotsford investment property they owned and took out lines of credit to snap up a four-bedroom, two-and-half-bath rancher on a lot that backs onto a golf course and is a half-block from the beach in Washington's quiet Birch Bay Village for \$266,000.

"If we were to look at something like

that in the Okanagan, we'd be paying twice as much," Phil Laird said.

The house needed some work — new appliances, paint and a lot of landscaping. Still, Laird, whose day job is as an administrator at Trinity Western University, estimated "now is a good time to get in (to the U.S. market) because of the way the dollar is and the fact that the U.S. market right now hasn't grown, in terms of price, in the same way as north of the border."

And in U.S. markets on a downturn following the subprime mortgage meltdown, the bargains for Canadians are becoming more plentiful.

The Lairds, who bought the home with

Phil's brother and sister-in-law, plan to use the Birch Bay house as an income property for five years, renting it out until their children are a little older. Mike Kent, the Lairds' realtor in nearby Blaine, said his local market — Whatcom County — is faring better than other markets, with little of the subprime effect so far.

Average prices this year are up almost three per cent in the county, hitting \$331,499. "Most people who bought here bought properties to use, as opposed to buying condos in Miami Beach that they intend to flip," he added.

Still, Kent said fewer buyers from California, where markets have been harder

hit by the mortgage meltdown, are venturing north to Birch Bay than in past years. Canadians are a bigger presence, accounting for about seven of every 10 sales for his office.

"If it weren't for Canadians coming back, (our sales) would definitely be off," he added. Kent said the big equity gains Canadians have earned are still the biggest driving factor, and their greatest influence is on markets closest to the border.

Laird said proximity was another attraction of Birch Bay. Not only was it the right price, but depending on the border lineup, it can be as little as 25 minutes from his family's home in Langley.

Former Thow jet to medevac patients around globe

Chris Connor has paid \$1.6 million for a jet once jointly owned by disgraced financial adviser Ian Thow.

The Victoria entrepreneur and his wife, Trish, are in the process of taking over Life Flight International Inc., a charter medevac service his mother, Isabel Connor, has operated out of Sidney for 15 years.

Isabel Connor had leased the eight-passenger, 1979 Citation II Cessna from Thow on occasion to fly foreign patients out of Canada and to bring Canadians back home.

The jet, which can be modified to carry two patients and emergency medical personnel, had been mothballed in Vancouver for more than 18 months after the Thow financial scandal unfolded. Chris Connor bought the aircraft Aug. 10 with partners.

Thow, a former senior vice-president with Berkshire, took millions of dollars from clients and used it to fuel a lavish lifestyle of private jets, helicopters, mansions and boats. The former adviser, still under investigation by the RCMP, left the country in the summer of 2005 and



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set up home in Seattle after filing for bankruptcy. He left behind clients and creditors who claimed he owed them in excess of \$32 million.

Connor bought the jet from a former pilot who co-owned the aircraft with Thow, but refused to reveal the partner's name, saying the seller did not want his name associated with Thow.

Life Flight International has flown patients around the world, including Korea, Japan, China and Australia. Isabel Connor, 64, a critical care nurse for 33 years, wants to retire, said her son.

Chris Connor is also offering charter flights for business and leisure travellers.

The company employs three pilots and

30 contract staff consisting of doctors, paramedics and other medical specialists. Call 661-2183 or check www.life-flight.ca

Village Green Inn, the landmark hotel on Duncan's south side, is coming down. Reports in the Cowichan News Leader and Pictorial say the aging inn with a checkered past will be torn down in early next year to make way for new commercial developments.

The leasehold firm for inn, which sits on Cowichan Tribes land, said there will not be another hotel on the site, but a larger liquor store and White Spot Restaurant, which has a long-term lease, will be part of any new construction. Brett Large told the News Leader there is no truth to the rumours that London Drugs and Save-on-Foods will build on the five-acre site.

The Village Green, a fixture along the Island Highway since the 1960s, has been a thorn in the side of police over the years for fights and other altercations, including one murder. It also once housed a strip bar.

Black Press is going to war in the Seattle suburbs.

David Black's newspaper subsidiary, King County Publications, is launching weeklies in Issaquah and Sammamish — affluent, fast-growing suburbs already served by weeklies published by the Seattle Times Co.

The first editions appear Sept. 14 with a combined free circulation of 32,000 on Fridays. Black already publishes 30 weekly and twice-weekly newspaper in Western Washington, but had no presence in Issaquah and Sammamish. The new papers will compete with the Times' 107-year-old Issaquah Press and Sammamish Review, which publish Wednesdays.

Black, which owns Victoria's weekly papers, Monday Magazine and the Business Examiner, began its push in Seattle's suburbs by purchasing nine weekly papers and the King County Journal from Horvitz Newspapers last fall.

The Times said in the past four months, Black has started a new weekly in Sumner/Lake Tapps, bought another paper in Kirkland and weeklies in Marysville and Arlington.

Victoria-based tutoring agency, Smart Tutor Referrals, marked its fifth year of helping students make the grade last month. Owner Dahlia Miller matches students with tutors for in-home attention. "I couldn't be more proud of the support the business has had from schools, families and the community," she said. Call 544-1588 or click www.smarttutorreferrals.com

Ottavio Italian Bakery and Delicatessen on Oak Bay Avenue has come a long way in 10 years.

The popular bake shop and importer of European foods operated by Monica Pozzolo and Andrew Moyer has grown from two staff to 22 and from eight varieties of cheese to more than 230.

It is not only a popular spot for home chefs but for the professionals who shop there for olive oils, cheese, hand-cured salami and prosciutti and other hard-to-find foods.

Ottavio is a third-generation business for the Pozzolo family started in Torino, Italy and continued in Victoria in 1978 with the Italian Bakery. Call 592-4080.