

## BUSINESS

☆ PAGE 27A | SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2008 | EDITOR: POLLY SMITH | 312-321-2841 **Let's get into it.**

**LAST WEEK:** 322.59 **DOW INDUSTRIALS** fell 2.79 percent to 11,220.96 111.64 **NASDAQ COMPOSITE** fell 4.72 percent to 2,255.88 40.52 **S&P 500** fell 3.16 percent to 1,242.31

# Linking jobs, young talent

**SCI-TECH SCENE | Brill Street's search even takes it to Facebook and MySpace**



SANDRA GUY

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Facebook, MySpace and other social-networking sites are earning a new role in the business world: the latest tool to find entry-level workers with unusual or hard-to-find skills.

"In 24 hours, we found a number of qualified students through a combination of Facebook, MySpace and electronic postings at eight local universities to fill a position in Chicago that required marketing education and a medical background," said Gilles Tanneur, CEO of Chicago-based Brill Street. Brill Street uses social networking as just one of its communities to fill a networking void that causes college students to complain they can't find good jobs; company executives to fume they can't get good entry-level people, and college officials to regret that it's so difficult to find resources for kids when they graduate.

The idea is not to become another "job board" but to instead attract highly qualified students and groom them for success, and provide companies and colleges with a combination of high-tech and high-touch ways of finding the best people for the job.

Brill Street, started by husband and wife team David Frej and Nancy

Lerner, is named for "Brill," the English slang term for brilliant, and the idea that a street is an active, vibrant place.

"We like the idea of a name that implied a cool, smart place where things happen," said Lerner.

Frej and Lerner weren't paralyzed by a fear of entrepreneurship because they have run their own marketing and design agency, Otherwise Inc., for 20 years. The couple invested \$200,000 in the Brill Street venture, which got its start in February 2006. They raised \$825,000 in the first two rounds of angel investing, primarily from seasoned investors and businesspeople, plus \$2.75 million in a venture capital round that closed last November.

Indeed, Brill Street "hired" Otherwise Inc. to design the company's brand experience, including a Web site that funnels job candidates to an online application form that is integrated with a proprietary Web-based database tool. The candidate management tool lets Brill Street's recruiting team pre-screen, rank and categorize the candidates, make notes and schedule the candidates for interviews.

The applicants receive acknowledgements that their resumes have been filed, and they receive coaching, mentoring and other support to prepare them for the professional work world. Brill Street synchronizes their interests and work experience with their career goals.

Brill Street ends up accepting about 60 percent of the young people who apply. The criteria include positive



Brill Street co-founders David Frej (left) and Nancy Lerner and CEO Gilles Tanneur say the demand for outstanding young workers will only grow as "tens of millions of baby boomers retire." | CHRIS SWEDA/SUN-TIMES

references, a 3.0 GPA or higher, the online application, an initial telephone interview, and a transcript review.

Brill Street does "live" interviews, either face to face or using video chat technology, with candidates before it introduces them to clients.

Brill Street makes money by charging the client a \$25- to \$35-an-hour rate and covering the employer's portion of the payroll taxes and workers compensation. It also generates revenue by charging flat fees for placing recent grads into full-time jobs.

Polly Kitzinger, director of human resources for A.M. Castle & Co., a Franklin

Park-based metal distribution company, said the company hired a team of four student researchers through Brill Street. The team developed a market survey and researched market possibilities in the high-performance auto market — the kinds of cars used in NASCAR races.

A.M. Castle hired the lead researcher, Lauren Fenema, after she graduated from DePaul, and promoted her to head the setup of business processes in a new computer system.

"If I am making decisions in a company, and I wanted short-term help and really bright students, I would go to Brill Street," Kitzinger

said.

Tanneur, the CEO who was recruited from human-resources giant Addeco in October 2007, is overseeing Brill Street's expansion into three to four new markets this year and another four to five new territories in 2009. The goal is to grow Brill Street from \$1.15 million in revenue in 2007 to \$8 million to \$9 million by 2009.

The growth stems from a growing need for capable young employees.

"There will be a big talent war in the next 5 to 10 years as tens of millions of baby boomers retire," said Tanneur, who recruited four new talent managers who are

fresh college graduates.

"I wanted our clients to see that everything is possible with young people," he said.

Richard Singer, co-founder and CEO of Raise-Capital.com, a Long Island, N.Y.-based Web site that connects entrepreneurs and investors, said some companies report they have generated 14 percent of their business from referrals originated on social networking sites.

"You are able to get in front of people who normally would never have heard of you or your venture," Singer said.

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