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CHATROOM

Experience gives IT staffer an edge

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When it comes to filling job positions in the world of information technology, more than just bits and bytes matter.

Deborah Vazquez, who runs **ProTech**, an IT staffing company in Miami, believes her firm has managed to thrive even after the Internet bust of recent years because she comes from the IT world herself. Vazquez, 39, started out as a programmer.

Most of the eight people on her staff have similar backgrounds. So, they can speak the lingo of a client company's chief information officer or its CEO.

"We can decipher between someone who is truly qualified for the job" and someone with minimal experience, says Vazquez, who started the firm in 2000.

Now Miami-based ProTech has survived the downturn in the economy, the rash of corporate scandals, and a war.

Funded with \$100,000, ProTech grew by 53 percent last year and is on track to double its growth in 2003. Vazquez also added two minority investors this year.

ProTech's focus is filling IT jobs in any industry. The firm has clients in financial services, healthcare, media, and software. The talent the firm finds usually comes from South Florida.

ProTech has amassed a large database of local talent. Those in the database have already been interviewed and their references have been checked. So when ProTech gets a job requisition, it can more quickly present a list of viable candidates to a client. Vazquez says about 95 percent of the placements come from ProTech's own database.

Since the beginning of the year with the economy picking up, Vazquez says more companies are hiring. Right now, the biggest demand is for database administrators and systems and network engineers.

There's less demand for security engineers, which had been the hot job after Sept. 11.

Vazquez also says contract workers are being hired permanently.

Despite the increased hiring, she still sees a lot of resentment from workers. "Many people feel overworked and underpaid. Companies are doing more with less," says Vazquez, an active member of the South Florida CIO Council. "Companies are trying to produce the numbers for shareholders, so they have to cut corners and cut costs."

With the pressure to trim expenses, Vazquez is seeing increased consolidation and outsourcing of IT

positions among companies in South Florida.

The consolidation also has spilled over into Vazquez's own work. When she started the firm, she says, there were 15 to 20 other companies providing the same services she was.

Now, the number has dwindled to less than five.

To paraphrase Martha Stewart, less competition is a good thing.

ProTech plans to open an office in Broward County next year.

BIG GAINS EXPECTED

Right now, there's no major out-of-state venture capital firm with offices in Florida.

Sure, firms like Atlanta-based **Noro-Moseley Partners** travel throughout the state often, visiting the companies they have already invested in and looking for new deals. But none have set up an outpost in the Sunshine State.

But **Les Croland**, an attorney at Edwards & Agnell in Fort Lauderdale who works with start-ups and venture capital firms, expects this situation to change once **The Scripps Research Institute** has set up a branch in Palm Beach County.

With a cluster of bio-tech companies being spun off as the research done by the Scripps scientists eventually is commercialized and brought to market, Croland expects venture capital firms finally will have good reason to plant permanent roots in this state.

"The VC find it hard to get their arms around what's in Florida. [All the companies] are so spread out through the state," says Croland.

In the San Diego area, where Scripps is based, some 300 to 500 companies have been spun off from the institute's research.

The start-ups also should come from work by scientists from some of Florida's own universities who will work in conjunction with Scripps researchers.

Like many others in Florida's business, academic and government communities, Croland is excited about Scripps' impact on the state and its economy.

"It will change the landscape of South Florida and the entire state," he says. "This is the biggest thing to happen to Florida since Disney and NASA."

TV SHOW DEBUTS

TodoBebe's Spanish-language TV show for expectant and new parents debuted on the Telemundo network last Saturday.

The half-hour weekly show is produced by the Hallandale Beach-based company that got its start in 1999 as an online retail and information website on pregnancy, birthing, and child-rearing in Spanish. The show will be seen on Telemundo stations in Miami, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Houston and Orlando.

AOL Latino, an arm of America Online that's focused on the U.S. Hispanic market, has signed as the show's online sponsor for its initial launch.

TodoBebe, which produces a weekly radio show, also partnered with several medical associations and hospitals for the show, including Miami Children's Hospital, and Pediatrix Medical Group, which cares for high-risk pregnant women and babies in intensive-care units around the country.

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