

Vermont Technology Job Recruitment Plan

The Opportunity: Vermont Tech Companies Need Employees

Tech companies in Vermont are hiring or plan to hire, but are having difficulty finding the employees they need to fill the job openings they have. Vermont Technology Alliance members consistently report that attracting employee talent to fill their job openings is a top concern. A survey conducted by the Vermont Technology Alliance of 35 businesses participating in the fall 2014 Vermont Tech Jam found that these companies alone had 400 open positions to fill in 2015.

While tech companies do hire from within Vermont, including college graduates, there are more jobs available than potential candidates to fill them. Many of the positions are for experienced professionals. For many tech businesses, this means attracting employees who want to relocate to Vermont. For some companies, finding the right staffing will determine how much and if they can grow in Vermont – or whether they'll grow and stay in Vermont at all.

These are the kinds of jobs that build the economy: tech positions can pay up to twice the Vermont average wage, generate higher than average income taxes, and lead to the creation of additional non-tech jobs in areas such as sales, marketing, and administration. Attracting a tech workforce to the state represents an economic development opportunity that benefits Vermont. It's worth reinforcing that these economic benefits accrue to all of Vermont, as tech businesses face these issues statewide.

The Challenge – Vermont's Image vs Reality

Vermont is a unique place with a great quality of life. However, the state's rural, agricultural image and brand can be a barrier to recruiting tech talent, as well as attracting new tech businesses and customers. Perceptions about Vermont's economy and job opportunity can make it difficult to attract professional employees for job openings.

Vermont is famous for its farms, cows, maple syrup, skiing and tourism. In many ways, this is a compelling selling point. Yet the state is not as well-known for its vibrant technology business sector. This is the result of the image we've created for our state as an escape from the modern world, which works well for selling food items, craft products and attracting visitors from fast-paced urban areas. The historical volume of this messaging, coupled with the lack of an alternative message about the vibrancy of our many tech and science related businesses, has inadvertently created a perception that tech career opportunities are limited or non-existent, keeping employees from looking and applying for jobs with Vermont tech firms. These companies are often

smaller in size, with innovative products and services that have dynamic growth potential, but they do not have the name recognition and awareness to attract employees from a national pool.

Objective: Attract More People to Fill Tech Jobs

To address the opportunity, a recruiting and marketing campaign is proposed using multiple approaches to communicate tech job openings and opportunities, primarily to candidates outside the state. The objective of the campaign will be to increase the applications and candidate pool to fill at least 20 percent of the tech job openings over a 12-month period, creating at least 50 jobs and likely more.

The program will work to change the perception that Vermont is too rural for tech by spotlighting the job openings and the vibrancy of the sector as a whole, letting job seekers know that they can find opportunities if they come to Vermont to work in tech. The overall message is that you can not only play here, but live and have an exciting career in tech here as well. The campaign's success will expand Vermont's tech workforce while helping Vermont's tech businesses grow and prosper, adding to the creative and economic vitality of the state, and generate economic activity and tax revenue.

Additional benefits from this effort are attracting new tech businesses and entrepreneurs to the state, attracting investors in Vermont tech businesses and helping retain businesses that are here.

Advantages:

Vermont has a number of advantages that can be highlighted:

- Broad range of tech jobs within a broad range of tech companies
- Innovative culture with an excellent track record of growing and scaling entrepreneurial tech businesses
- Career growth provided by our firms' more intimate scale, which provides opportunities for employees to contribute and make a difference – they're not just a cog in a larger corporate wheel
- Quality of Life – proximity to unparalleled recreational opportunities, including: skiing, outdoors, scenic beauty, arts, downtowns, restaurants, locavore movement, craft beer
- Great communities and public schools which make our state a great place to raise a family
- Placement within a vibrant North American tech triangle formed by Montreal, Boston and New York.

- A strong and supportive business network, coupled with a Legislature and Congressional delegation that provides intimate access to decision makers (with real national clout)
- Fiber-optic broadband connections in many communities
- Strong partnerships with institutes of higher education

Obstacles:

- Historical and on-going media and marketing communications that paint a picture of Vermont as a beautiful, verdant, rural yesteryear to recreate in, whose main economic base is agrarian in nature
- Taxes and other costs of living that make Vermont less affordable when compared to other locations (cost of housing in Burlington/Chittenden County is a particular challenge)
- Small population size that lacks ethnic and cultural diversity
- Lack of fast broadband in all communities
- Attracting employees to parts of the state other than Burlington, because cultural amenities are less widely available
- Winter -- it's not for everyone

Audience

The target audience is tech professionals and graduates who have a connection to, affinity with, or interest in Vermont. Those who have lived in the state, gone to school in the state, or have family or friends in the state are strong candidates, as are those who are familiar with the state's benefits and are looking to now raise children. A survey completed last year by University of Vermont researchers found that people primarily leave Vermont for job opportunities, and that a majority miss Vermont and would like to return. Other candidates are tourists and others who love to visit Vermont, and those who are interested in Vermont and what it has to offer, but may not be aware of the career opportunities here. Some audience examples include:

- People who have left Vermont – and who want to return to Vermont
- People who may select Vermont as a location for their technical studies
- College alumni
- Graduating college seniors
- Professionals who visit or vacation in Vermont
- Professionals with family or other Vermont connections
- Professionals who work remotely and can choose where they live
- Spouses/Partners of professionals relocating to Vermont
- People whose avocations or interests coincide with Vermont's rich offerings, including skiing, craft beer culture, mountain biking, climbing, kayaking, etc.

- People wishing to raise a family in a nurturing community environment with strong educational offerings
- People who have an affinity or interest in Vermont as a home
- People in large metropolitan areas looking for smaller, less harried environment

Tactics

The campaign will use a number of approaches to define the opportunities, tell the Vermont tech story and attract employees.

- **Phase One: (Homework & Research Phase)**
 - **Research and analysis** based on input from recruiters and business owners to understand hiring needs and techniques. Understand practices used by Vermont companies to communicate job openings and attract candidates.
 - **Compile job openings and skills required** from tech and other businesses needing tech skills.
 - **Conduct an economic impact study or analysis** on Vermont's technology business sector, looking at factors such as employment in tech and non-tech Vermont businesses, revenue, taxes and other economic impacts.
- **Phase 2: (Assemble the core team)** of agencies, businesses and other stakeholders that will be critical to leverage the campaign's success. This might include:
 - **Tech and other business representatives** who are actively recruiting employees, including HR representatives.
 - **Universities and colleges** that can connect us with their alumni, particularly those with graduates from IT programs. Look to create content that might be placed in Alumni organization newsletters and publications. Explore the opportunities that alumni databases represent.
 - **Economic development officials** who can provide insight, contacts, and resources.
 - **Tourist industry representatives** who can provide support and locations to reach visitors.
 - **Real estate firms** who have insight into the needs of relocating employees and information resources.

- **Phase Three (Narrative Development Phase)**
 - **Craft the compelling narrative** that provides a new vision for how we're talking about the Vermont brand -- one that is future oriented, and full of the vibrancy we see in tech sectors around the state.

- **Phase Four: (Disseminate, Promote & Evangelize the Narrative)**
 - **Create a Website** to highlight and promote the Vermont tech narrative broadly, and job opportunities specifically. Include job listings, company profiles, videos, information on Vermont, testimonials, and resources. Example: www.talentscotland.com. Coordinate effort with vtTA site and Great Jobs in VT LinkedIn site. Existing Vermont websites do not help the state overcome perceptions that it is not tech savvy. See, for example, what Ireland is doing here:
 - website: <http://www.idaireland.com/> (be sure to watch the video, which shows what a powerful "fusion" (nature + tech) narrative can do).
 - **Provide recruiting assistance** and advice to smaller firms that do not have human resources staff. Assist smaller firms with enhancing their recruiting and human resources capability. Areas of specific focus should be website development for recruitment purposes and awareness of and training in use of online recruitment tools (jobs listing scraping to sites such as Indeed.com, Dice.com, etc.).
 - **Prioritize Public Relations** (vs. mass media) focusing on the surprising number of recruitment opportunities, touting the results of the above economic impact study. Includes media outreach in and outside Vermont, social media, speaking opportunities. Think you know Vermont? Surprise: there's a whole tech environment (top 10 lists, tech hub designations, most patents per capita, etc.).
 - **Map the Jobs** by creating an online map highlighting the many locations where tech companies and jobs are located. This should be part of the larger website we create. (See the graphic at 0:41 into the Ireland video, linked above).
 - **Use Social Media** to reinforce and support the effort. Use vtTA and other state vehicles, or create new ones.

- **Target tourists and visitors with information** at hotels, ski resorts, visitor centers and other locations – the “Gideon’s Bible” approach. Create short print documents or other informational material that can be distributed to our many travel and tourism partners. Use as a basis the hard work done by the vtTA in creating three existing *Tapping Tech* publications. Develop the narrative for electronic distribution in kiosks/monitors in our tourism centers. Coordinate efforts with the Agency of Commerce and the “Make Vermont Home” effort.
- **Participate in Trade Shows and Conferences** where tech employees and job seekers gather. Develop booth or trade show materials promoting the narrative, and linking to the jobs listing website.
- **Phase Five (Create Topspin, should the money allow)**
 - **Develop a College Internship Program** connecting tech companies with juniors and seniors in Vermont colleges. Partner with college career centers and with the Vermont.Internships.com site created by the Vermont Technology Council.
 - **Promote the Vermont Strong Scholarship** to provide economic incentives for graduates of Vermont colleges to work in Vermont.
 - **Organize tours or visits** to Vermont tech firms for small groups of candidates.
 - **Organize a “Welcome Wagon”** within the tech community, to support recruiting, relocation and integration into Vermont, to include networking, information sharing, mentors, and contacts.

Partners and potential in-kind support

The success of this campaign depends on the support and cooperation with other Vermont organizations and businesses. Partners may include:

- Agency of Commerce
 - Economic Development
 - Tourism and Marketing
- Vermont Chamber of Commerce
- Regional Economic Development Corporations
- Vermont Department of Labor

- Vermont HR Association – recruiters
- College career development centers
- College alumni offices
- Hickok and Boardman – relocation, videos
- Route 802 – Visitor Center media, travel app
- Hen House Media – video footage, interviews
- Technical Connection – recruitment advice and information
- Brandthropology – marketing, digital assets
- Other Tech businesses and organizations

Organization

The program will be coordinated by the Vermont Technology Alliance, staffed by the Executive Director and part-time assistant, with support from the vtTA board and tech company volunteers. It is expected that additional staff will be needed for each tactic, either via contracted work or short-term employment. It is estimated that 10 to 20 hours per week for a year may be required to support this campaign.

Budget

Staffing	\$80,000
Economic Impact Study	\$10,000
Meetings and Events	\$25,000
Narrative Development & Copywriting	\$10,000
Public Relations	\$25,000
Graphic Design and Print	\$25,000
Video Production	\$35,000
Website/social media	\$30,000
Travel	\$5,000
Supplies	\$2,000
Miscellaneous	\$3,000
Total:	\$250,000

Timetable

July 2015 to July 2016

Measurement

Measurement needs to be considered in the broader scope of the 'conversion funnel'. The classic recruitment model parses success into four stages: Awareness, Acquisition, Engagement, and Conversion. They are linked to each other:

- Awareness Measures:
 - Media coverage (placements, estimated audience)
 - Tradeshows attended
 - Gideon's Bible pamphlets distributed
 - Percent penetration of messaging & materials in Tourism Centers
- Acquisition Measures:
 - Employer: Total number of participating organizations providing job postings
 - Employer: Total number of jobs posted
 - Consumer: Total traffic driven to the home page of the website
- Engagement Measures:
 - Total traffic to the recruitment section of the website
 - Time on site, video views on site, gallery views on site
 - Total number of jobs viewed on site
- Conversion Measures:
 - Total applications completed by applicants
 - Total applicants deemed as qualified applicants by participating firms.
 - Total number of employees hired as a result of the campaign