

Executive-screening firm shifts to front-line, hourly job profiling

BY CATHERINE CONLAN
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Two phone calls sparked Carla Bainbridge to transform her company.

In 1999, the longtime entrepreneur became CEO of Predictive Profiles, a company that uses "psychometric tools" to screen candidates for jobs. Psychometric tools measure mental traits and processes, and they help employers predict the potential workplace behavior of job candidates.

"The traditional business is doing online assessments for larger companies," Bainbridge said. "It will predict quite accurately if a person is good for a position. It can predict the likelihood of someone with the potential to be a CEO, or be in a customer service position; will the person generate or maintain revenue, and so on."

Predictive Profiles was founded 25 years ago. Most of its business was screening executive candidates for corporate customers. But at the beginning of 2002, Bainbridge got two phone calls that made her launch a new specialty.

"One call came from Wells Fargo, the other from Buffets Inc.," she said. "In the same week they asked for the same thing. I figured it was a sign."

Wells Fargo, based in San Francisco, is one of the nation's largest banks, and Eagan-based Buffets operates a huge chain of buffet restaurants with 400 locations in 36 states.

Both companies wanted to know if Predictive Profiles could set up a program

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CEO, Predictive Profiles

that would screen hourly, front-line positions — cashiers, cooks, janitors and similar positions.

"I said, 'We don't have it now, but we have the knowledge,'" she said.

Predictive Profiles has a pool of researchers that developed the program to screen front-line workers, Bainbridge said. Within three months, they struck a deal with Buffets — Predictive Profiles needed test cases, so they asked Buffets to be the pilot in Minneapolis.

Now, anyone applying to Buffets fills out a Predictive Profiles application. "It can be faxed in or done online," Bainbridge said. "We automated the application process, so there's no paper involved unless the company wants it. Applicants fill out an applica-

Turning Point

PREDICTIVE PROFILES

City: Bloomington

Business: Job-candidate screening and trend analysis

Revenue: Wouldn't disclose

Turning point: After clients suggested it, the company added rank-and-file profiling into its core business of executive profiling.

tion, which is also a screening tool, and if their answers fit the profile, then they go on to the assessment."

The hiring manager then receives a color-coded report on the applicant, showing whether or not the person is likely to do well in the position. It also lists suggested retention information — what motivates the applicant and what a job needs to offer.

Bainbridge said that the Buffets pilot program taught her a lot about the process.

"With restaurants, I didn't understand that their turnover is 150 to 200 percent," she said. "While the hiring manager gets this cool information about an applicant, the byproduct is that the corporate office can see who's applied by region, by time, by demographics, or other criteria."

"Mining the data can give them all sorts of information. The way it is now, someone walks in the door and they're hired if they show up on Friday. Restaurants just want someone. But about 40 percent of their revenue is due to repeat business, and that's tied to service, so if they can get good people in there, it's a good investment."

Michael Shrader, a spokesman for Buffets, says that Bainbridge talked to every manager in the restaurant chain to develop the company's screening program.

While Buffets is still in the process of testing the program, Shrader said he believes it will have a big impact.

"We feel it will streamline the application process and result in better retention," he said. "And in the end, that has an impact on our guests."

Most of the questions on the Buffets application are standard background questions — education, job history and so on. But some of the questions are less typical, and Bainbridge says that those are the ones that can provide insight into an applicant's motivation and suitability. "What do you consider your current weekly earnings to be? (Excellent, above average, and so on.) How many previous positions have you had in customer service? How adequate is your current income level? Please rate your expected proficiency working in a service environment."

Bainbridge says that there is a large opportunity for her company to expand, especially in a struggling job market.

"More people are applying for hourly jobs," she said. "It gets to a point where a company can't manage the information on



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Carla Bainbridge, CEO of Predictive Profiles, says that the firm's move into screening front-line employee positions has helped it quadruple its growth.

their own, especially if they're dealing with paper applications. This is a way for companies to use technology to boost their revenue."

She said many other companies use similar tools. "The market potential is huge," she said. "You see those kiosks in Target that they use for applications. You have to be on-site to apply for a Target position through one of those. Ours can be set up online."

"Different people will take a run at it," she said. "But we have a long history."

Most of the quarter-century-old firm's customers are Fortune 1000 companies. According to its Web site, the research and profiling program it uses is called POP (Personal Orientation Profile). The profiles are routinely analyzed, enhanced and updated by the Self Management Group, a Toronto-based organization that researches indicators that provide the information hiring managers need.

"And it's not just for the hiring managers," Bainbridge pointed out. "On the candidate side, if they have their information in a database, they can have another company

reference it. Essentially they can manage their own résumé online. More of that kind of opportunity is down the road."

Can this kind of work eliminate hiring managers altogether? Bainbridge says no. "But it screens out who the hiring manager should meet face-to-face with."

"And it's not just for hiring. We provide support and trend analysis. It's a tool for managers to make their businesses better. Why are people staying? Why are they leaving?"

Bainbridge said she would like to focus more on the "front-line" profiles, because of the potential. "We're quadrupling our growth," she said. "There's a lot of growth in this area."

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