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About RDA

RDA builds custom software and web-based applications to solve complex business problems for mid-market and large-scale companies. RDA's senior engineers work collaboratively with clients using a detailed business analysis and proven process to deliver successful custom business solutions through technology.

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Supplying The Demand: RDA Recruiters Stay Busy

If you're a high-technology company that makes it a point of pride to hire only the very best, and the very best have just about all the opportunity out there that they could ask for, well, to say that you have your work cut out for you would be an exercise in understatement.

"A few years ago, I heard that 26,000 graduates were leaving the college community with technical degrees," said Bill Ambrose, RDA's Senior Vice President for Recruitment and Retention, "and one company, Arthur Anderson, had vacancies for all of them."

The marketplace is always demand-driven, and the high-tech marketplace is a sea of demand

these days. Baby boomers are leaving the scene faster than GenX'ers can replace them. There has been a steady drop-off in signups for technical curricula at

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RDA Corporate Recruiter John Barksdale surfs the internet for candidate prospects.

RDA Atlanta Leads The Charge Wireless, Wireless Everywhere...

In the last issue of The Edge we took a look at how wireless technology just might change the way we all do business...and maybe even the way we live. RDA's Atlanta office has taken a step into the future, meanwhile, getting itself "wired for wireless" in September. A wireless access point was installed in Atlanta's lab, and now employees can take their laptops from room to room around the office without constantly having to plug into a different cable everywhere they go. "This is all part of our continuing effort to both build up our local wireless expertise and also to work toward making the RDA Atlanta branch a showcase to our clients of our

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Business Development, Customer Service RDA Sales Staffers Meet In September Jam Session

Account executives and sales associates from all five of RDA's offices got together at the Mt. Washington Conference Center in Baltimore in September as Corporate and Branches worked together to focus on what business development priorities should be as RDA moves into the immediate future.

"Strategically, we're all on the same page," said RDA president/CEO Don Awalt, who took part in the meeting. "This group gave us valuable input on what we need to do to execute these strategies."

Customer service and satisfaction were spotlighted as the group of 26--24 men and two women--engaged in some intensive moderated discussion and then broke itself down into groups to discuss and

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the nation's colleges and universities. And then there's the ubiquitous and ever-growing internet, creating more jobs constantly, with not nearly enough people available to fill them.

In other words, it's a seller's market in the high-tech world if what you're selling is yourself and your skills. High-tech companies have to stay on their toes all the time to identify and acquire the right people. And RDA, well-known for having among the highest standards in the industry as regards the qualifications of the people it hires, has to stay even more on its toes than most.

"Raiding"

But it wasn't always that way. For years, said Ambrose, companies staffed their vacancies by going out and hiring external agencies that would "raid" other companies for a fee. Human resource departments focussed

not on recruitment, but on such areas as career development and benefit administration. Even RDA followed this standard paradigm in its early days. But within just a few months of his coming to RDA in 1992, Ambrose said, he and company president/CEO Don Awalt realized that the HR function was separate, and that recruiting was going to be a key element to the company's success.

In effect, Ambrose said, RDA created its own, in-house recruiting agency.

Similar Approach

"Our approach is similar to the way an agency would recruit for a client," he explained. "But we have a different level of integrity than the agencies do. RDA is a very difficult client. In fact, if I were an agency, I probably would not recruit for RDA. They would be a source for me." Why? "Because of the quality of the

individuals we look for at RDA," he said. "The bar is very high. Much higher than other agencies might look for."

RDA, with offices in five cities, obviously has to address this situation with a great deal of planning.

"All of the branches have their own goals in terms of the number of hires," said Angie Willey, Recruitment Manager for the Baltimore/Washington offices. "We come up with a plan that we think we can achieve as a team, then executive management comes up with their plan, and we come together in terms of the number of hires we'll need that year. We have statistics that say, 'If you want to hire this number of people, this is the number of people that you need to bring into the interview process.'"

"Why? "Because of the quality of the individuals we look for at RDA," he said. "The bar is very high. Much higher than other agencies might look for.".."

A Job In Itself

And finding people is obviously a job in itself.

"We don't just have a requirement and then go out and find a person to fill that hole," Willey said. "We are out there recruiting ev-

ery day, proactively, so that when the projects come, we've got a bench full of really good people.

"The recruiters spend their days sourcing in a variety of ways; there's some cold-calling, and we recently got a list in the mail anonymously from one of our competitors," she went on. "All of the recruiters are in lots of news groups that talk about layoffs in the area, or about companies that are downsizing."

Do they ever encounter resistance?

"It depends on the day," Willey explained. "If you happen to get the recruiting manager of a company on the phone, it could be a problem. Sometimes when you're calling a company, you don't know who you're getting on the other end. But our recruiters have very high ethics. They're not, for example, going to call a company and pretend to be someone else."

Of course there are a great many high-tech companies out looking for people

now.

"And everybody says 'we only hire the best,' " said VP Ambrose. But we [RDA] actually have statistics to support the claim that we only hire the best. Last year we conducted 760 technical phone interviews, and we hired 54 people. Rest assured, all of those 760 people found jobs. Given the shortage, given the demand, they were hired, and they're making good money.

Demand vs. Quality

"But they weren't good enough for us. Why? That's our culture," he said. "We want quality, and it doesn't necessarily go without saying that everybody wants quality. I've been in consulting firms where they were purely driven by demand and not by quality, places where, if you could bring in someone who could handle SQL Server and put them on a project at \$65 an hour, that was good enough."

RDA, by contrast, stresses always that it is looking for people who are looking to improve, to add to their skills and get better all the time, not just people who want to come in, work eight hours and go home with a fat paycheck.

Willey agreed, adding that comments from job candidates support the claim that RDA only seeks the top of the top.

The feedback I get from new-hires is that this, RDA's, is the best interview process," she said. "They say 'It's tough, it's hard, I was intimidated at times, but it's really good.' And we're not operating in a vacuum, because our interviewees are also interviewing with our competitors and telling us what they encounter there.

"The thing is, we don't have a beautiful, plush product to sell," she went on. "We have only our services to sell. That's what our sales group is selling and that's what our clients expect, so that's what the recruiting organization has to be able to deliver."

It's a tall order. But VP Ambrose stressed that RDA's reputation is a factor in making the process work.

"The beautiful thing is, we have a great story to tell," he said. "It's OK to just come through the door and talk about our business that piques the interest of the candidate on the other end."

(WIRELESS, continued from p. 1)

wireless expertise," said Managing Director Todd Fine. He added that the first results of the experiment were "much better than expected."

"Everything installed like a breeze and worked as advertised," he said. "This is like getting high-speed DSL at home." Technical Director Chris Schaich sounded equally enthusiastic. "We're getting the latest and greatest stuff," he said. "We just thought it would be cool to have wireless connectivity throughout the office. Its usefulness here is mostly for laptop users, but it can also be useful for desktops because you can use it without a network drop."

The wireless connectivity works with Windows 2000, Schaich explained. First you install the wireless access point, which costs about \$1300, and then the software, and then a \$200 wireless PCMCIA card in your laptop, and you're "good to go." "We haven't seen any bugs yet," he said. "It's pretty straightforward."

Meanwhile, the wireless front continues to move forward, with the next generation of wireless devices almost here. At a recent personal communications show in Chicago, vendors were showing off some soon-to-be-released goodies. Handspring had a slick one--

the Visor, a PDA which looks just like the Palm and runs the Palm OS. What they've added is the VisorPhone, a compact expansion module that snaps into the Springboard expansion slot on any Visor handheld computer so people can use Visor to make and receive phone calls. VisorPhone combines two mobile products into one, creating a single integrated product for all voice and handheld computing needs.

Four leading GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) carriers in the U.S., Bell South DCS, Pacific Bell Wireless, Powertel and Voicestream plan to provide comprehensive service plans for VisorPhone that can be purchased directly through Handspring.com. The



How Sweet It Is--RDA's Michael Sparks takes his laptop wireless.

VisorPhone is expected to ship by the end of this year.

--RDA consultant Ray Barley contributed to this report.

VIP Days RDA Set to Sponsor Corporate Workshops

RDA will be sponsoring a series of workshops this fall aimed at sharpening high-technology business executives' skills for making custom software projects succeed. RDA VIP Days will be held in Chicago, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Vienna, Virginia at the end of November and in early December.

Invitations will be sent out in October; RDA hopes to see a tight-knit group of 15-20 top-level executives attending in each of the five city locations. The seminars will address issues relating to the fact that while the internet and technology are revolutionizing and reinventing every business process, at the same time 60% of all custom software projects fail. While this has been going on, RDA has maintained a 100% success rate on projects ranging from \$500,000 to \$5 million.

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Information Is Power: Why RDA Does So Well In Financial Markets

Note: Last January RDA's President/CEO Don Awalt circulated a list of RDA's five top vertical markets from January 1998 to 2000. They were ranked in order of revenue generated, and Financial came out on top, with 60% of total revenue spread over 11 accounts. [The Edge](#) recently asked Don, and Vice-President for Business Development Steve Landsman, to explain some of the reasons why.

The Edge: "So what is it that's special, for our industry, about financial markets?"

Don: "In the financial services area, one of the big ways you get competitive advantage is through information and data. That would imply at the macro level, 'I want to be automating certain processes in the company so that I can generate information about them to make them better. I want to capture lots of information about my customers, and about the things my customers care about.' It's not like you're building anything; it's all about information and service. Service industries are always ones in which automating can be "big-ticket."

The Edge: "Does RDA's reputation for focusing on mission-critical applications have anything to do with it?"

Don: "Oh, absolutely. We're naturally a better solution for somebody the more important the benefit of an automation project would be. The more mission-critical it is, the better value we are. If you get into an industry where good access to information and tools to be able to use that information to competitive advantage are important, we're just going to have a natural good partnership there."

The Edge: But if the information-intensive nature of financial markets makes them a "natural" for the custom software industry, how does that translate into an advantage for RDA? There's a lot of competition out there."

Don: "This is a huge, fragmented industry. There are thousands and thousands of alternatives to get help if you're a customer looking to do some automation projects: everything from training firms to body shops to firms like ours to inte-

gration firms. There are so many alternatives. What we're good at are the more complex kinds of solutions, and ones where you really have to go in with some restraints on cost, time-frame, etc. Because of that, those are the things that, when it's a mission-critical system it's typically going to be one that needs to scale to the business. It's going to be really important if it's late or over budget or whatever, so the things we build into our company to make us better at those things are why we come to be perceived as a good partner."

The Edge: "What you're also saying is, that would pretty rule us out for the 'small stuff.'"

Don: "Pretty much. If somebody's got a fairly simplistic kind of project, there are so many more alternatives, that what we are won't be so much of a value. But financial markets, and health care too, are big markets for everyone, just because they're such a big percentage of the gross national product."

Steve: "I would add that financial services companies also tend to have more money to invest in IT. It's kind of like that's where the money is. Almost on two levels: one, that's literally where the money is, and two, there's big financial services growth going on right now, expansion and consolidation, and there's a lot of money being made. What the [stock] market's done over the past ten years, that's real good news for banks and other financial institutions, so from that perspective, they have more to invest and it's important to them because of information being a competitive advantage."

The Edge: "That raises another question. Just who IS our customer here?"

Don: "Our definition of financial services is very, very broad. It includes markets, market exchanges, insurance companies, speciality financial firms...that makes the number bigger too. The financial world, also, is kind of logically networked together. Look at the way a dollar flows through. Insurance companies are using brokers to deal with individuals and policies, then using that money to invest in the investment markets...There's so much interconnection between companies and business, that if you're in the business of providing business-to-business commerce solutions, with the internet providing you a kind of publically-available network, that's just a natural for 'Gee, that can make our business better.'"

Steve: "There's another factor that helps us here. Since we've been in business as long as we have and have performed so many projects, it becomes like a snowball rolling down a hill—if you started doing some financial services projects ten or twelve years ago, and you've had the opportunity, since you've been in business so long, to leverage that with other, similar companies, to the extent that you use that and build on it over time, it broadens the experience base. With each similar project, you learn a little bit more about yourself and make yourself a little more valuable to the next potential customer that you approach."

The Edge: "And are the indications that this particular industry will continue to be a strong market for RDA?"

Don: "Absolutely! Any service industry has a pretty good forecast for the next five years, but especially the financial industry. It's hard to build widgets, and they're not making any more land, but there's always money to be had."

User Experience Workshop

New RDA Offering To Clients: Web-site Design Services

RDA has expanded its offerings to clients to include design services. We can take your next web site project from your vision all the way through to production. As is the case with everything we do, our design services are much more than web site graphics. We've created the 3 C's of RDA's Design Services to guarantee your next web site design project will be a success.

The focus on RDA's 3 C's of Design Services includes Creativity, Communication, and Continuity. Using these three concepts RDA can solve your design needs and provide you with a solution that does more than look good.

Creativity – RDA provides access to Design Consultants who contain the artistic and technical skills to bring your visions to life. Our design consultants are experts in the fields of graphics design and web site usability. They strive to build an appropriate web site image for your project and focus on creating diverse and unique imagery.

Communication – Our focus on communication comes into play as we lay the foundation for the design your web site. We focus on your site's ability to communicate and interact with your user community. This results in ease of use and ensures your users can find the information they're looking for quickly and efficiently. More over, it ensures the overall user experience is a pleasant one.

Continuity – As we mold and build your web site design, we also focus on continuity. Through this we ensure a consistency between the contents of the web site from page to page. We make sure that the layout and navigation selected are consistent throughout the entire site. We do this so your users expectations will be met as they move from page to page throughout your web site. Finally, continuity ensures the implementation of web standards. We continually study and implement the industry standards for web site usability.

We can implement these 3 C's of RDA's Design Services for you by meeting with you to discussing your next web site design project. When we meet we'll discuss your companies image, branding, marketing, sales, and technical direction. With our proven experience we'll weave the results of these conversations into attractive designs, intuitive layouts, and navigation that build the foundation for your web site project. We'll also work with you by reviewing our composite designs and usability reviews to incorporate your feedback. Time to market is a key facet in all of this. Our design consultants are skilled in taking your vision and achieving a final web site design.

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identify just which should be areas of concentrated focus. It was the first such "mass meeting" that RDA sales people had had together in about three years.

Also under intense discussion were the various factors that make a company like RDA "market-driven."

The question of RDA's continuing to lead in servicing its class of customer and its markets got particular scrutiny. Among the important points that came out of the discussion were that everyone in RDA, from the office assistants to senior management, has customer service responsibilities and should con-



RDA's Rick McCumber waits out a September shower on the 10th hole at RDA's annual golf tournament. Behind him, Marketing Director Kyle Berry and VP/MD Tom Cole also hunker down.

tinue to make customer service a priority.

Also stressed in the discussion was continuing to make it easy for RDA's customers to do business with us, and to add value to their businesses through creativity, involvement, flexible business development processes to improve efficiency and providing "thought leadership."

Who Are You? Let's See Your Thumb Biometrics Looks To Redefine Security In "e-Everything" Era

I went to check my email this morning. Naturally I had to log into my computer (username / password #1). Next I had to connect to my ISP (username / password #2). Then there's the Virtual Private Network (VPN) that connects me to my company (username / password #3). And these things – username / password combinations – have to be changed frequently.

I've got accounts at Amazon, LL Bean, US Airways and others. Everybody has a username / password requirement. Oh, how I wish they could all be the same and never change. I tried doing that, but at some sites my username was taken and at others my password did not meet their requirements. My next

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