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MAPLEWORKS GIVES MX LOGIC EFFECTIVE WAY TO LOCATE HARD-TO-FIND, HIGH-TECH TALENT

In today's economic climate, there is a great deal of concern with consumers and businesses alike and several industries have suffered great losses as a result.

And then there's the high-tech arena; look there, and you'll see a very different labor picture. Marc Haverland, Executive Vice President for Engineering and Operations for MX Logic, the largest independent provider of managed e-mail and web security services in the world, knows that picture firsthand.

"Overall the high-tech industries still enjoy a relatively low unemployment rate, despite the country's economic problems," said Haverland, who oversees the Denver-based company's technology teams, including software development, quality assurance, and threat management, among others. "When we've needed to hire software developers or engineers, we have often found it difficult, on a local basis, to find the skill sets that we require. At least on the technology front, it's a very tight market.

"Consequently, we knew we would have to broaden the geographic region to locate the skill sets necessary to augment our internal development teams."

Of course, as in almost every complex labor situation, there were other factors at work. While MX Logic is constantly seeking to grow internally, the company has, in recent years, been intrigued with the outsourcing concept – lured, like many businesses, by the potential cost savings and increased output, as well as allowing in-house employees to focus on core competencies. But it was the flexibility of outsourcing that Haverland found especially attractive.

“If we had a source that could supply workers with a base of skills that were appropriate to us, we could potentially ramp up quickly for a new project, perhaps a project that was not expected to last forever, but was extremely focused and needed quick turnaround,” he explained. “So when the work was there, we would have the people necessary to handle it. But when it wasn’t, we wouldn’t be incurring overhead and labor costs. It would give us an element of flexibility, greater than we would have with just a base of our own employees.”

Of course, when one thinks of outsourcing, it is generally the offshore version that comes to mind. While there are clearly cost savings to be realized by outsourcing to countries like India, China, and other Far East locations – most notably in the area of labor cost - there are distinct advantages to the “onshore” version (defined as utilizing resources from the same continent). For MX Logic, looking to North American outsourcers would yield a myriad of benefits: better protection of intellectual property; elimination of language barriers; a much higher degree of political stability; location that is close enough to facilitate on-site visits when necessary; and despite the somewhat higher labor expense, a lower overall project cost, due to fewer mistakes, less expensive travel, and more effective project management.

With the benefits of onshore outsourcing firmly in mind, Haverland then had to address the obvious question: who to use? There were a few crucial criteria that would be reviewed to evaluate potential partners.

“First, we needed to identify a company that could provide us with the skill sets we needed to implement our products,” he said. “Those skills are not especially unique, but they are very focused in terms of technology background. We also wanted someone with whom we could develop a long-term relationship; we weren’t interested in continually training new people. And naturally, we looked for someone who could do all this in the most cost-competitive manner possible.”

MX Logic began searching in earnest about 18 months ago for a company that could fit the bill. After putting out multiple requests for contacts and sources across the network of companies that MX Logic associates with, MapleWorks was one of the many options that emerged. Actually, MapleWorks’ name popped up from some of the members of MX Logic’s board of directors who had previously utilized MapleWorks’ services.

One of the most attractive features of MapleWorks services, Haverland quickly discovered, was its access to a large pool of talented high-tech professionals.

“As I went into the evaluation process initially, geography, cost, and skill-set were all on equal footing as criteria” Haverland said. “But we quickly found that the skill set base that MapleWorks had access to was impressive.”

“Impressive” might be an understatement. MapleWorks’ development center is situated in the Ottawa Tech Region, which gives it access to a deep pool of best-in-class engineering talent, as Ottawa is home to 82,000 experienced technology workers and the campuses for RIM,

Nortel Networks, Alcatel-Lucent, IBM, Mitel and more. Thus, MX Logic can now access the Ottawa Tech Region's talent supply, as well as Denver's

MapleWorks developers initially began working about on "core" projects, all related to the managed service, email filtering, web filtering, and email archiving services that comprise MX Logic's "bread and butter." While the expertise of the developers was unquestioned, MX Logic wanted to ensure that they were employed to best advantage.

"We've run through a couple different scenarios in terms of how to best leverage the MapleWorks people," said Haverland. "We run multiple project teams here; we've got 3-5 teams running in parallel, and we started out thinking that we could increase development capacity by adding one or two MapleWorks engineers to each team.

"Soon, we found that if structured things just a little bit differently, we could gain even greater efficiencies. We did some minor reorganization so that the MapleWorks folks were a core team – comprised of 4-6 developers - all working in the same area, which allowed them to trade ideas more efficiently, get up to speed in a more timely fashion, and generally move the projects along faster."

The logic behind the move was obvious: people who have worked in tandem for an extended period of time have generally grown accustomed to each work habits, nuances, and strengths.

"The MapleWorks developers had worked together on other projects for other companies and were just used to each other's procedures," Haverland said. "The way we run our projects is a fairly high communication model, a lot of rapid communication back and forth between developers and testers. We wanted to make it a little easier for the MapleWorks developers to get the same gain.

“They still coordinate with a team lead on our end, someone who continually clarifies the functional requirements of the project. In this way, they don’t get separated from the rest of our local team, but we get the advantage of them working together in a more coordinated effort.”

The expertise, functional level, and work ethic of the MapleWorks developers, Haverland observed, are superior.

“We’ve certainly seen, on an individual level, all of the developers MapleWorks has introduced to us are top-notch, solid engineers that do good work. Skill set-wise and in terms of applicability to our needs, the fit is very good.”

Some of the developers have a background in areas that may not exactly match MX Logic needs but are very complementary.

“Clearly, a background in telecom and high-volume messaging systems is a key benefit to us,” he said. “But security is a key part of the offering that we have in our product, so a background in security is a plus as well.”

Based on the positive performance evaluation, Haverland expects that his company will continue to utilize the MapleWorks engineers for the foreseeable future – and beyond. Specifically, the expectation would be to keep using the same core 4-6 people rotated on different projects; if additional resources are needed, they will look to MapleWorks for supplemental assignments.

No doubt, Haverland views the MapleWorks relationship from a long-term perspective. “Our goal is a long-term engagement that allows MapleWorks developers to build up a solid working knowledge of the internal MX Logic systems,” he said. “We want them to be a core part of our team for a long time.”

“It’s an investment on the part of any MapleWorks customer to get a team up to speed on the complexities of a company’s operation. We don’t want to make that investment over and over again. We want to leverage the investment over time, which means keeping the current people on board and adding to that core team as needed.”

Ultimately, MX Logic knows it can look to MapleWorks to evaluate candidates and their skill sets and pair them up with the technical qualifications for virtually any project that may arise. Better yet, MX Logic can now pull from two distinct geographic talent pools, and do so more efficiently by leveraging MapleWorks’ recruiting bandwidth.

Long ago, someone said, “There’s no place like home.” Apparently, when it comes to hiring high-tech talent, there’s a place that is actually better than home, MapleWorks.

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