

Beyond Recruiting

9 creative ways
companies are
hiring in
competitive
technical fields

Beyond Recruiting: 9 creative ways companies are hiring in competitive technical fields

Edited by Christopher Wink

Christopher Wink is a cofounder of Technical.ly, the local technology news network. He oversees editorial content, event programming and leads development into new markets for the company. Previously, Wink worked for a homeless advocacy nonprofit and was a freelance reporter for a variety of publications. He writes regularly about news innovation and best business practices on his personal blog.



With reporting by Brady Dale, Juliana Reyes and Andrew Zaleski

Several of the firms sourced for this report, including Aol, MeetMe, Aweber, Comcast, Mindgrub and Monetate, have sponsored Technical.ly in the past. When appropriate, this is referenced more specifically in the report, but any such support is unrelated to this reporting.

Connect with our community

BUSINESS



Brian James Kirk
Business Director
brian@technical.ly
215-253-4259



Peter Erickson
Business Development
Manager
peter@technical.ly
(267) 244-7014



Your hub for local technology news, events and services.

Philadelphia • Brooklyn • Baltimore
Delaware • Washington, DC



Marketing

We'll help your company tell its story and share your culture with potential recruits through display advertising and sponsored content.



Events

Join Technical.ly at an upcoming event that brings together technical professionals with companies that are recruiting.



Services

Technical.ly offers an affordable connection to local talent in the Northeast corridor through our jobs board and company directory.

<http://technical.ly>

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

[Page 5](#)

THE COMPANIES

[Page 8](#)

1. NETWORK IRL

[Page 9](#)

2. TEACH NEW TRICKS

[Page 14](#)

3. BUILD THE MINOR LEAGUES

[Page 18](#)

4. GET THE WORD OUT

[Page 23](#)

5. PLACE A BOUNTY

[Page 27](#)

6. WORKPLACE TREATS

[Page 30](#)

7. HANG WITH THE COOL KIDS

[Page 33](#)

8. OPEN NEW DIGS

[Page 40](#)

9. WORSHIP COMPANY CULTURE

[Page 42](#)



I



Introduction

Photo: A hackathon hosted during Technical.ly's Philly Tech Week 2013
Credit: Neal Santos

Broad trends have made hiring in STEM careers one of the most competitive recruiting environments in recent memory.

In 2013, nearly 90 percent of roughly 750 entrepreneurs said it was either extremely or somewhat challenging to find workers with the skills they need to grow their business, in the national Startup Outlook Survey that is put together annually by **Silicon Valley Bank**.

Why have things changed?

Everybody has a startup

A post-recession entrepreneurship boom has made innovation and disruption fashionable, fueling speculation into software and other technical projects, products and companies, backed by a Silicon Valley-educated tech entrepreneurship diaspora, many of whom have promoted a focus on company culture, further narrowing the talent pool.

Every company is a technology company

The maturation of Web 2.0 businesses that connect the web and build digital solutions that will bring previously disconnected areas of commerce together, dubbed the 'Internet of Things,' have conspired with declining costs of entry into software development, to spark new investment into these fields by a wide array of industries.

Every new worker should be a technical worker

The flow of new technical talent into the economy has been slowed because of (a) a nationwide degrees mismatch in which colleges have not responded to changing skills requirements as quickly as industry norms have and (b) federal immigration policy has not been updated to an increase demand in high-skilled and education foreign nationals.

Despite a sluggish post-recession jobs market, in the era of the technologist, companies in all industries will need to work harder and more creatively to attract, build and retain top notch technical teams. If the belief is technical needs will only grow over time, businesses should invest now in what their pipeline for talent will be.

“It’s a game of inches,” an Etsy recruiter told us. “And every little bit could have significant ripple effects that yields hires down the road.”

This is in large part why in cities and states throughout the country, there is heightened awareness and celebration of local technology talent. Over the last five years, it has become all too common to hear from legacy newspapers and economic development groups of a new local tech scene, often clumsily tacking the word “Silicon” onto some geographic distinction: Silicon Valley, Silicon Prairie, Silicon Bayou, Silicon Slopes, Silicon Gulch, Silicon Mountain, Silicon Beach and, perhaps worse, Philacon Valley.

That’s also why businesses most active in hiring technical workers have taken to experimenting with new ways to source talent, extending beyond traditional recruiting firms that have developed an unsavory and inauthentic reputation among core technology communities — despite the best intentions of savvy technical recruiters.

The companies

This report is informed by our reporting on dozens of various firm recruiting strategies over the last five years. We particularly highlight these businesses located in the Northeast U.S.

Aol/Advertising.com

The digital marketing division of the media giant has more than 200 employees at its Baltimore offices.

Amplify

The edtech division of News Corp. with more than 600 employees in Brooklyn.

Azavea

The GIS and geolocation software firm based in Callowhill, Philadelphia has almost 50 employees.

Aweber

The online marketing service founded in 1998 outside Philadelphia has a staff of more than 100.

Brolik a creative agency and video production firm with a dozen employees in the Northern Liberties, Philadelphia.

Comcast

Of 150,000 employees that make up this media company, more than 4,000 are in technical fields.

Curalate

The 40-person image analytics firm based in Philadelphia and with offices in Seattle and New York.

Etsy

The maker ecommerce company with 375 employees in NYC.

Flocabulary

An edtech company that has 16 employees, 24 expected by the end of 2014.

Huge

The design agency with 500 employees in Brooklyn, and offices around the world.

MeetMe

The publicly-traded social network based in suburban Philadelphia has nearly 200 employees.

Mindgrub

The mobile development firm with 50 employees in Locust Point Baltimore.

Monetate

Cloud-based ecommerce optimization company with more than 200 employees, most in its HQ outside Philadelphia.

Genius

Formerly 'Rap Genius,' the lyrics annotation site with 25 people.

Red Owl Analytics

The business optimization firm with more than 20 employees in offices in Baltimore and Brooklyn.

RJ Metrics

The enterprise business analytics dashboard company with more than 70 employees in Center City Philadelphia.

SEER Interactive

The 80+ person search marketing firm based in Northern Liberties, Philadelphia with an office in San Diego.

SmartLogic

The contracting web dev firm based in the Canton neighborhood of Baltimore city with a dozen employees.

NETWORK IRL

Photo: A meetup in Brooklyn | Credit: Brady Dale

If you've wondered why there's always food, and often good beer, at every event that brings together technologists, then you haven't fully considered how actively firms are seeking out talent.

Sure, many firms will cite a hunger to give back locally and collectively grow a community, but embedded in even these mission goals is a need and desire to match make companies with open roles and technical talent seeking new opportunities.

Sponsoring events and speaking at them and, often better yet, hosting them too, is seen as a key element to recruitment plans. It brings possible recruits to see offices and culture. It gives staff a chance to shake hands and meet talented people who might make good hires.

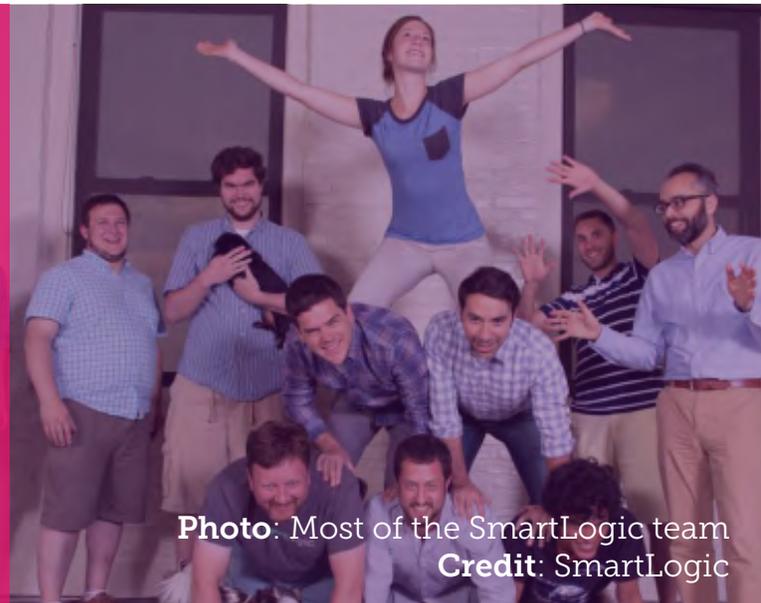
In DUMBO, the cultural heart of tech startups in Brooklyn, space has become a premium, following real estate trends pushing elsewhere in New York City. So it's no wonder that **Huge**, the design agency that served as one of the borough's first tech-infused businesses and has more than 500 employees across multiple offices, uses its space on Jay Street as home to several regular meetups and a constant flurry of events.

The firm has a staff person dedicated to managing and coordinating their events calendar, which is seen as added benefit for their existing staff and a clear pipeline for future talent. One afternoon in summer 2014, **Fern Diaz**, who had recently taken on the events manager role, spoke about the recent Portfolio Night, in which they hosted dozens of designers for a judged competition: they had already hired the event's winner.

In 2011 and 2012, seen by some as an important year of connection for the Baltimore tech scene, Canton-based web dev firm **SmartLogic** kept meticulous track of what founder **Yair Flicker** thought might be the best metric for analyzing his firm's community outreach effort: pizza.

In 2011, they bought 224 pies for technical meetups throughout the year; a total that nearly doubled in 2012. Flickr estimated that event attendees in 2012 ate 3,288 slices bought by Smartlogic, presumably under the guise of community support and recruiting.

Event attendees in 2012 ate 3,288 slices of pizza bought by Baltimore's Smartlogic.



In early 2014, for about \$6,800, SmartLogic was able to organize BohConf, a one-day, stand-alone conference for developers and programmers that coincided with a city-wide arts festival. Between the cost of tickets — marketed as a decidedly discounted rate of \$40 — and outside sponsorship, company founder and lead organizer Flickr said the event itself just about broke even. Flickr has been active in the Baltimore tech scene for years and celebrates the growth in the number of developers who attend such events, but it has a clear business benefit for him too: as he's added team members to take on adding

consulting work, he has a network to pull from.

Many of those Baltimore events that Flicker and others host happen at the offices of **Aol/Advertising.com**, which for much of the last five years has used its flexible space on the **Under Armour** campus to offer as a setting for community events – by summer 2015, their Baltimore offices will have moved to the Canton neighborhood, but the strategy will remain the same. Often they are volunteer efforts of technical user groups.

Sometimes recruiting manager **Paris Pittman** has budget to cover pizza, other times different tech companies sponsor the food. For special opportunities, Aol/Advertising.com becomes a financial sponsor of larger events that bring either more people or reach into different communities. For example and as a disclosure, Aol/Advertising.com was a sponsor of the 2013 and 2014 **Baltimore Innovation Week**, which **Technical.ly** organizes, including a conference focused on attracting more women to technical fields.

“We have to take lots of different approaches to build relationships and grow the Baltimore scene,” said Pittman.

Technical.ly Case Study: Trellist

Trellist[®]
MARKETING | TECHNOLOGY

51-200 employees
Wilmington, DE

Trellist offers high-level strategic consulting and tactical design and development across multiple divisions offering a wide range of marketing and technology solutions as a full-service agency or resource management organization.

Problem: Trellist was looking for access to talent and business connections in Philadelphia and Wilmington.

Solution: The company sponsored Philly Tech Week to gain significant connections in the local tech community and show thought leadership in the industry.

Outcome: Trellist hired multiple staff members met during Philly Tech Week. The event also provided a touch point in an existing relationship that ultimately resulted in Trellist acquiring a local firm.

Trellist wanted to establish a presence in the Philadelphia marketing scene for recruiting and business development.

“Technical.ly was able to acutely understand what equates to value for organizations like ours. They were able to introduce us to the movers & shakers,” said Trellist’s Chris Wallace, Social Business Leadership. Wallace felt that sponsoring an

event like Philly Tech Week raises the profile of the local tech scene, and in turn raises Trellist’s profile, as well.

“Philly Tech Week is one of the greater single opportunities in the region given the field we work in. I have no reason to believe that value is going away. In fact, I think it’s increasing,” Wallace said.

TEACH NEW TRICKS

Photo: Development workshop hosted by Technical.ly | Credit: Aidan Un

Mike Matranga was tired of selling cell phones at the Franklin Mills Mall in Northeast Philadelphia. He wanted another job. So when he found a curious Craigslist ad describing a position for someone who would run errands and, during down time, learn how to build software, he jumped at it. Why not? "I like computers," he said to himself.

The company that posted the job, software firm **DmgCtrl** based in Old City Philadelphia, hired him at just above minimum wage, part-time, in the fall of 2010. He kept his sales job, too. By summer 2014, Matranga, 33, was a lead developer at the firm, running projects at the company, which has since merged with (and is now called) **Tonic Design**.

The South Philadelphian was the first “minion,” as the team calls them, but there have been many since: more than one-third of the nearly 30 DmgCtrl team members have been, or are currently minions, said cofounder **Jason Allum**. They are former youth ministers, servers, art students.

The apprenticeship program, as Allum explains it, is three solutions in one. It helps the firm recruit from a diverse pool of talent “that everyone is fighting over,” he said. It helps save money (instead of losing billable hours when a developer needs to wait for the cable guy, why not send a minion, who’s still learning, to do it?). And it proves that building software isn’t some untouchable skill that only a select few can reach.

Brooklyn-founded handmade ecommerce giant **Etsy** gained praise in 2013 for pursuing its need for technical talent while also addressing widespread concern of the relatively small number of women who work in technical roles — roughly three-quarters of the 1.7 million people working in U.S. computing jobs are men, according to Census data shared in spring 2014.

To do that, the company facilitated junior women in the company to move into engineering roles by way of mid-career education. The choice was largely motivated by diversity goals, said CEO **Chad Dickerson**, but it had the added benefit of drawing from a candidate base that the company already knew worked well in its environment. In 2013, Etsy hired 25 women as engineers, some of whom went through external hacker schools. It also conducted workshops on unconscious gender bias, in order to help insure they stay. Etsy has also launched and beefed up its intern program within Etsy Engineering to attract and retain more who come through there.

The internal UX School run by Dumbo design agency Huge is an aggressive

**In 2013,
Brooklyn-based
Etsy hired 25
women as
engineers,
some of whom
went through
external hacker
schools.**



Photo: One of the Hacker School gatherings
Credit: Etsy

program that is focusing on training the talent it needs, rather than just discovering it. Staff get hired to learn the job the agency needs them to do. Huge's director of East Coast recruiting **Hannah Lindsey** said the firm has since copied the model to create a Huge Project Manager School and a Huge Tech School.

In late 2013, adtech startup **Staq**, based in the partially-gentrified Hampden neighborhood of Baltimore, hired four of five people it brought on in its Ruby apprenticeship program. For almost six months Staq's five temporary hires were paid \$20 an hour by the startup to expand their Ruby programming knowledge while doing simpler work for the company — Staq hired three full-time after the program.

These programs require extensive time to be institutionalized. Sometimes they are one-off trials that essentially become extended interview processes. For other companies, they're relying on outside groups to do training for them. Take for example **General Assembly**, the New York-founded skills-based education powerhouse with increasing focus on technical skills. In January 2014, it hosted another of its Junior Developer Meet and Greets, in which 45 graduates of a recent 12-week web development course demoed projects they made, while potential employers were on hand in a sort of meetup-jobs fair mashup. Nearly all were hired, reported GA organizers, including many who had limited technical background before the class.

3

BUILD THE MINOR LEAGUES

Photo: Nafis Bey of Jarvis Innovations
Credit: Juliana Reyes

Nafis Bey didn't want to go to college. Instead, the soft-spoken West Philadelphia native decided to become an IT apprentice at the city's **School District**, where he learned how to fix computers and became one of **Science Leadership Academy's** resident tech specialists. During his apprenticeship, his mentor also taught him how to code.

Two years later, at 20-years-old, he had a full-time job as an engineer at his mentor's web development firm. He is one of two Philadelphia public school graduates who work at the eleven-person Northern Liberties web dev shop **Jarvus Innovations**. Both of those Jarvus employees graduated from the Philadelphia School District's Urban Technology Project apprenticeship program. Hungry for impact on underserved communities and for their own technical talent pipeline, they formed a connection with a local apprenticeship program and hope to institutionalize the process.

For Bey's mentor and Jarvus cofounder **Chris Alfano**, who is also the organizer of the Philadelphia Code for America brigade, the prevailing philosophy when it comes to recruiting talent should be 'the sooner, the better.' College, he believes, isn't necessary if you're looking to work in technology. "This isn't an industry that you can hide from for four years and come out prepared for," said Alfano. It changes far too quickly, he said.

The recruiting team at News Corp. subsidiary **Amplify**, an edtech division with offices in Brooklyn, also is trying to build in "career paths with opportunities for advancement and learning new technologies," so its existing team members can move into roles they are more in need of, said senior recruiter **Matt Yardeni**. Its field research for its classroom tablet programs can also be a way to inspire young students to think of technology as a viable career path.

News Corp.'s Amplify tries to inspire young students who could be potential job candidates in the future.



Photo: Students at an Amplify user-testing session
Credit: Brady Dale

Yardeni said the firm is always building a portfolio of potential future candidates and staying in touch with them, said Yardeni. It's an extensive relationships process that can sound like a scouting system for professional sports.

Columbia, Maryland-based IT consulting firm **Sofiac** hosts free Software Development Working Groups, in which members of their team organize skill development Saturday events for small groups over seven-week periods. They also host a similar program in system administration. Between the two classes, more than 150 people went through the program in 2012 and 2013, said spokeswoman **Lauren Anderson**. "We do this to help sharpen the skills of

students and IT professionals through one-on-one teaching of these specialized topics," said Anderson. Though the groups first launched back in 2007, they've continued to evolve and with a heightened IT hiring crunch, the importance has grown too.

The program has a set curriculum and take-home exercises but the real goal is the interactive, collaborative project work on open source projects, said Anderson. Their classes do work in areas like Linux and revision control.

High school students and established professionals have participated but the focus is on existing college students, hoping to prepare them for professional internships and a pathway to IT jobs in the Baltimore region — Sofiac has hired 16 of its class members, more than 20 have gotten jobs with partner companies, in addition to others.

Other mission-minded youth technical education groups, like ScriptEd and **NYU Polytechnic's STEM Program** in New York, the **Digital Harbor Foundation** and **Code in the Schools** in Baltimore and **TechGirlz** in Philadelphia, are doing it on behalf of this industry.

Technical.ly Case Study: Chariot Solutions



51-200 employees
Fort Washington, PA

Chariot Solutions is an IT consulting firm specializing in application development and systems integration using Java and open source technologies.

Problem: Chariot Solutions wanted to build a stronger relationship with the community from which it was actively hiring and doing business.

Solution: Chariot Solutions has sponsored Technical.ly annually, through events and services.

Outcome: Chariot has significantly grown its connection to the local tech scene.

It's very important for **Chariot Solutions** to be close to the local tech community, says **Tracey Welson-Rossman**, the company's Chief Marketing Officer.

As a result, Chariot Solutions has sponsored Philly Tech Week continuously since 2011, focused on the week's dev track, which lets companies show off their technical prowess and shares professional development

opportunities with the technical community.

Those events let potential recruits know about the company and help it develop relationships with potential clients.

"Technical.ly Philly has a better chance of drawing the type of clientele that would buy our services or become employees than any other outlet in the city."

GET THE WORD OUT

Photo: Technical.ly's Signature Event in 2014 brought together 1,200 at Comcast HQ | **Credit:** Technical.ly

When creative agency **Red Tettemer O'Connell + Partners** was hiring in early 2014, the Center City Philadelphia creative agency built a paper website to get candidate attention. Paper website? Yep, it features "responsive design,"—you can fold the piece of paper multiple times and still get the same, er, effect—and "Internet Explorer compatibility" in the form of a miniature bottle of gin. Get it?

The Center City Philadelphia-based enterprise business analytics firm **RJ Metrics** has used its data proclivities to solicit attention. Cofounder **Robert Moore**, who writes a small business column for the New York Times, releases regular viral-ready reports — from evaluating different cities by how active their meetup communities are or analyzing engagement on a new social media platform from a Twitter cofounder — which get nationwide coverage, linking to their website, which promotes their open hiring needs.

MeetMe, a location-based social network based in suburban Philadelphia, has experimented with sponsored content, over traditional advertising, including with, full disclosure, **Technical.ly**. When **Ashley Chiazza** joined the firm as a recruiting manager, she was looking for ways to tap into an existing technology community and expose them to their workplace culture. As much as a quarter of its 40 million users are reported to be teenagers, so despite its consumer-facing mission, Chiazza said there was a goal to have potential hires learn about their work from a trusted source among a technology community.

That kind of underwritten content, in which a technical firm pays for coverage that still meets editorial standards but can be focused on company culture is something mostly mid-sized to larger businesses pursue when they want new ways to diversify their approach. This tactic has been deployed by companies as large as **Comcast** and **AT&T** to smaller enterprise IT consulting firms like **SevOne** and **Brand.com**.

In spring 2014, digital marketing agency **Brolik** had several openings to add to their 10-person team. Their existing process of on-boarding and slowing developing interns to full-time ready staffers wasn't going to work for the timeline they wanted, so they looked toward the social web on which they built their consulting business. They promoted the offerings on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, hoping to find new pockets of web and technically-ready professionals, according to company founder and CEO **Jason Brewer**.

Their Facebook ads ran for 47 days, spending just shy of \$440, Brewer said. They targeted the ads to people within 10 miles of Philadelphia who had an interest in SEO, SEM and other digital marketing areas. The ads reached about 12,000 Facebook users and drove 173 clicks to our website at \$2.54 per click.

“Social media allowed us to get a larger volume of quality applicants.”

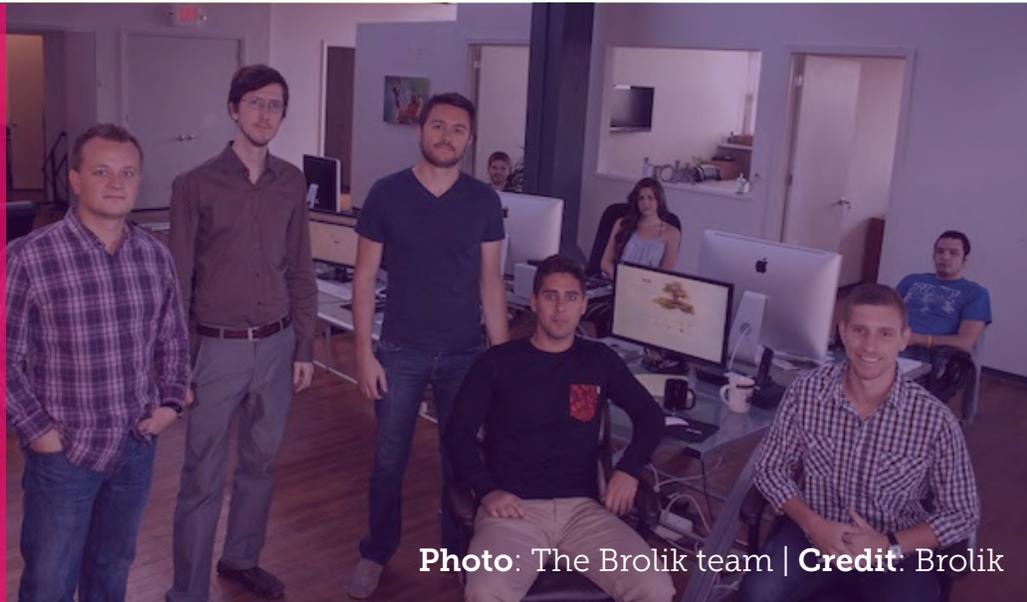


Photo: The Brolik team | **Credit:** Brolik

Their Twitter ads ran for 53 days, spending a total of \$505.69. The Twitter ad platform has a unique targeting approach called @username targeting, which allows you to reach users with interests similar to followers of selected accounts. They used this approaching to target industry specific accounts such as Google's Matt Cutts, Moz's CEO Rand Fishkin and the Google Analytics Twitter account. They also targeted similar users to individuals that work at digital marketing companies in the Philadelphia area. The result was 57,400 impressions and 802 engagements. 230 people clicked through to their careers page at a cost of \$2.19 per click.

On LinkedIn, the firm utilized the job posting platform rather than the advertising tool. With this tool, users pay to post a job for 30 days at a time, which costs \$295 for one listing. This campaign reached 2,344 users. At the end of the campaign, they accumulated a total of 56 applications from LinkedIn at a cost of \$2.63 per application.

Overall, the Brolik careers page had about 1,500 unique visitors during this time, a 320 percent growth over the previous period. Brewer said he received 88 quality resumes for a total cost of \$1,093.19, which is a \$12.42 cost per application. "In the end, we sent out one offer to an applicant via Facebook and three offers to applicants via Twitter," he said, though not all of the three they hired were exclusively tied to the social outreach. "Still, the promoted social media posts allowed us to get a larger volume of quality applicants."

PLACE A BOUNTY

Photo: Monetate's digs | Credit: Monetate

In fall 2013, **Monetate**, an ecommerce optimization company based in suburban Philadelphia, needed to fill 60 positions by the end of the year. To get it done, they re-launched their bounty program, in which they offer a hefty prize to anyone who is responsible for a technical recruit they hire.

If you referred someone before the end of October who Monetate eventually hired, the company rewarded you with \$5,000, said Director of Special Projects **Britt Miller**. In November, the bonus lowered to \$4,000, and in December, \$3,000. Though Monetate didn't disclose exactly how many hires were associated with bounties, they hit their hiring goal, and several Monetate staffers themselves report having made introductions, in part motivated by the award.

DUMBO design agency **Huge** has a standing offer to pay its employees \$4,000 for every employee referred who gets hired. One of their staff members has referred 11 employees that made it through, said one representative.

Etsy also has an employee referral program, a representative confirmed, without giving a specific amount, and we've heard engineers talk about it at events we've covered.

If you referred someone who Monetate eventually hired, the company rewarded you with \$5,000.

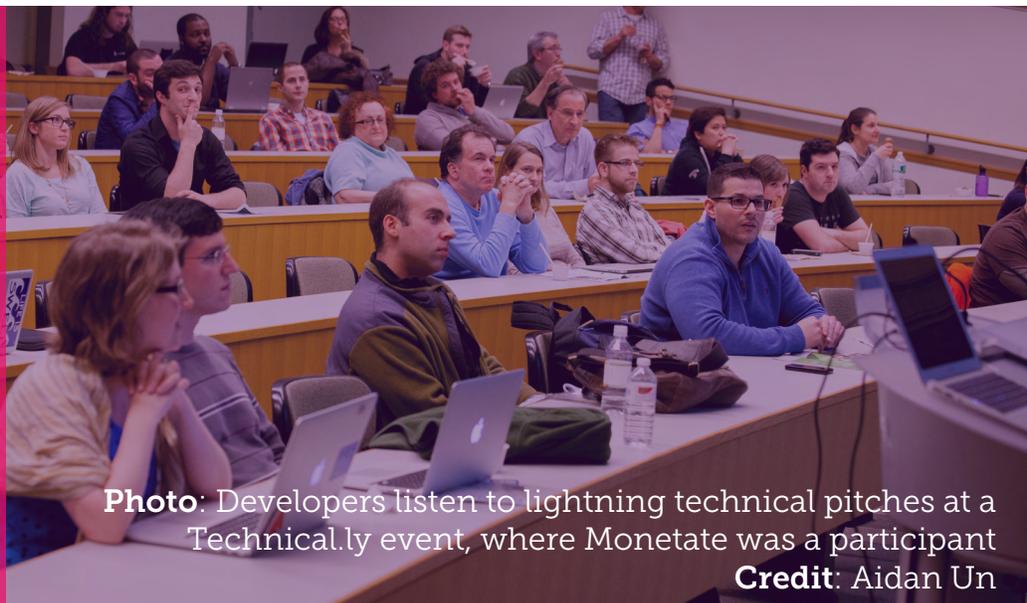


Photo: Developers listen to lightning technical pitches at a Technical.ly event, where Monetate was a participant
Credit: Aidan Un

Technical.ly Case Study: Monetate



201-500 employees

Philadelphia

Monetate empowers marketers to create, deliver and measure personalized marketing campaigns across all touchpoints—at scale.

Problem: Monetate was looking to expand its employment brand awareness as a growing mid-size tech firm.

Solution: Monetate sponsored Technical.ly's Net/Work Job Fair and Philly Tech Week 2014

Outcome: Monetate found job candidates that fit the company's needs.

Monetate participated in Technical.ly's **Net/Work tech jobs fair** in 2014. The company was looking to meet technical and non-technical candidates with a strong entrepreneurial bent who were interested in joining a growing company.

"We were able to find folks who were interested in working in the kind of environment we've built. The candidates fit the right profile," said Sr. Technical Recruiter **Liz Palmer**.

Palmer said that Monetate also supports Technical.ly events and its broader operations because, its mission helps incubate a larger talent pool in Philadelphia.

Would the company sponsor again?

"Absolutely. Technical.ly does a great job in covering news stories and fostering community," Palmer said. "They're a great community partner."



WORKPLACE TREATS

Photo: Philadelphia's 50onRed, Leadnomics and RightAction are hiring like crazy
Credit: 50onRed

On the metaphorical (and, often, literal) ping pong tables of startup culture, we have found that in today's climate, nearly every company has them — in one form or another, whether it's Waffle Wednesdays, catered team lunches, or arcade games.

The logic is rooted in new age ideas about workplace dynamics, including the value of a cheerful, social staff, and extended by an arms race of firms competing in the challenging technical hiring work environment. It's a kind of 'I'll take your kegerator in the kitchen and raise you a weekly foosball tournament.'

It's worth noting that there is already push back by some. A marketing manager of one of the most widely known web firms in Brooklyn told Technical.ly that those responsible for recruiting and retainment at the company want to undermine "the fetishization of startup culture." They wanted to hire people who wanted to work on their mission, not absorb the cool. Most of the respondents to this survey told us something similar.

Though the quirks have become so synonymous with tech startups that they are sometimes called gimmicks, they are part of a broader industry strategy to attract and retain talent.

In truth, stepping away from your work for a moment can actually allow your subconscious to work out a solution to a problem behind-the-scenes. It's worth stopping to play some Xbox or with Nerf guns (like at the Baltimore Locust Point headquarters of mobile development firm **Mindgrub**). More importantly, though, this larger theme of the weird things tech firms do to make life inside their offices a bit more of an experience tells of a sector seeking talent.

“The fun is also just a way people get to know each other. They work better together then,” said **Shervonne Cherry**, who is on the marketing team at Mindgrub, which has fewer than 50 employees, but plays a recruiting role as a familiar face at Baltimore technical events.

In Brooklyn, online video service **Livestream** offers free breakfast daily and discounted lunch from its in-house kitchen. **Groove**, an ecommerce optimization firm in Baltimore has a bar built into its mixed-use space, where craft beer is always on tap.

Inside the Cira Centre offices of three co-located firms in University City Philadelphia with similar founding teams (**50onRed**, **Leadnomics** and **RightAction**) with roughly 100 employees between them, the kitchen is always well stocked, like many other firms named in this report—overflowing bowls of avocados on one day and full refrigerators of drinks and other snacks. The views are beautiful and sweeping and the walls are colorful, adorned with local art and snappy slogans of the moment. The firms are transitioning to new University City offices in part due to employee growth.

“You try to make a place people want to come to,” said **Wellington Wu**, who manages recruiting for 50onRed, which is an analytics and software provider aimed at advertisers and publishers.

HANG WITH THE COOL KIDS

Photo: Render of Comcast's new skyscraper, with its "old" one in the background | **Credit:** Comcast

When **Comcast** announced plans for its new \$1.2 billion skyscraper that would be the tallest in Center City Philadelphia, it was in part to be a magnet for its recruiting efforts. "We're competing for talent with Silicon Valley," Comcast Executive Vice President **David L. Cohen** said in January 2014. "We want to have a building and a facility and a feel that is competitive with that."

Planned to be finished in 2017, the building will house most of the Fortune 100 company's technical talent. Of 4,000 employees there, more than 1,500 will be new hires. When a technical team is that large, it's easy to assume the facility is for Comcast employees only. But Chief Business Development Officer **Sam Schwartz** wants the space to be dynamic, filled with external events and featuring incubation space that can house partnering companies or independent technologists.

In the past, when a hot commodity like technical talent was in high demand, a company might have hid away in some bland business park to protect its assets. But in today's collaborative environment, influenced by open source culture and the social web, the better connected you are, the more able you are to source talent.

To be sure, many of the largest IT firms and technical teams are still on independent campuses or otherwise living more traditionally 20th century work-life structures: drive a car from home to work, do work, then drive a car from work to home. If in the 1990s technical firms were often located near investment because IT building was so expensive, than in the first quarter of the 21st century, these teams are being built where the knowledge workers want to be, because with declining development costs, the real expense is great talent. Today, that has meant clustering this talent. The era of the technologist just might prove to also be an urbanist one.

What do you do as the recruiting director for a large firm that has an established presence and staff based in the suburbs or otherwise distant from a network of other technical talent? You just might open a small satellite or 'gateway' office wherever the talent you want to hire wants to work.

In the first half of 2014 alone, **Technical.ly** Philly reported on nearly one new or expanded satellite office a month, including ones from Conshohocken-based design agency **Think Brownstone**, South Jersey-based healthcare firm **Bayada Home Health Services** and Delaware-based IT management firm **SevOne**. For the firms, all of which list recruiting as a primary reason why the expense of an additional office was valuable, they serve as a 'gateway' into their companies — often they require occasional visits to their headquarters and try to foster team building.

So they
changed their
strategy: they
followed the
talent.



Photo: Attendees of a Technical.ly event focused on tech's impact on local economic development | **Credit:** David Ohl

The team behind **Traffic Safety Store**, a West Chester, Pa. manufacturer and retailer, couldn't find tech talent who was willing to commute to their suburban office. "You could not pay people enough to get them out there," said vice president **Nick Eubanks**.

So they changed their strategy: they followed the talent. Their software development team began working out of Old City coworking space **Independents Hall**, where Eubanks had been a longtime member. What's helped, Eubanks said, is how Indy Hall is now one anchor in a growing corridor called N3rd Street along, yes, North Third Street, that includes other coworking spaces and collaborative technical firms.

The explosion of colocation facilities — coworking spaces that cater to community-minded individuals and incubators that focus on small teams and early-stage companies — has provided another option for firms of various sizes: let someone else take the lead in bringing together smart people your technical talent will want to be around.

For **ZeroFox** (founded as Riskive), a Baltimore cybersecurity firm, their approach to hiring was to look different than many of the more buttoned-up cyber firms that dominated northern Virginia and Maryland. They launched inside Federal Hill incubator **Betamore**, replete with an eclectic group of smiling 20

and 30-somethings, regular events and big windows. As they outgrew the space, they occupied a lower floor of 1111 Light Street, which had been renovated near the Cross Street Market in the last five years. Another software company called **BTS** also established offices there. This single building quickly became a known innovation hub, as technologists met over drinks at the many crowded Federal Hill bars.

In real estate-crunched north Brooklyn, coworking has become a necessary step in the growth of technical firms. Many startups there will start at coffee shops, then advance to a few desks at a place like **Dumbo Startup Labs** and then if they can't find offices in the nexus of John and Jay Streets near the East River, they'll go to another nearby neighborhood – fretting over transit and proximity to tech events.

“You have to be where someone wants to go,” said **John Coghlan**, the DSL founder.

Sen. Charles Schumer has been promoting an idea to add new ferry and rapid transit lines to connect the most popular places to live and work for the New York tech community, such as Dumbo, Williamsburg and Roosevelt Island. It's his 'Nerd Bus' route plan. The idea that a technologist could pick between different firms on the same transit line doesn't seem to worry anyone.

“We’re more connected than ever,” said Schumer at an event organized by a coalition group called the **Brooklyn Tech Triangle** aiming to market their own technical density.

When **Livestream**, the popular online live video company, moved its 75-person team from Manhattan to 30,000 square feet in East Williamsburg that once housed the Bushwick-branded 3rd Ward maker space, cofounder **Phil Worthington** was worried about how easily his talent could conveniently make it to work.

So what of the natural logic that connecting technical talent makes them more mobile and therefore a threat to recruiting and retaining strategies?

“That’s not how the world works,” said **Paris Pittman**, a technical recruiting manager for **Aol**, who works at their **Advertising.com** division in Baltimore. When she’s selling an opening to a potential hire, she said that the speaking, event attendance and community coworking that she promotes is often among the more attractive qualities of the job.

“I talk about the growing tech scene [in Baltimore], how we are involved in the community and how we don’t want our engineers cooped up,” she said. “We want them out and about, learning and sharing.”

Technical.ly Case Study: Fame House



11-50 employees
Philadelphia

Fame House helps artists and entertainers manage their digital presence, reach new audiences, and connect with their fans through unique digital campaigns.

Problem: Fame House wanted to reach local technologists to fill technical and marketing positions.

Solution: Fame House posted open positions on the Technical.ly jobs board.

Outcome: Fame House was able to hire a candidate using the service.

Fame House utilized the **Technical.ly jobs board** because the site's news content and digital services reach the right people.

"The readership is made up of professionals that Fame House is recruiting," says Business Development Lead Sam Huntington.

Huntington says he was able to interview and hire a candidate

that reached out via the jobs board within a short time frame, avoiding costly recruiting fees.

"Fame House received a ton of value," he said.

Huntington says he plans to continue working with Technical.ly, as a way of raising awareness about Fame House's brand in the local community.

OPEN NEW DIGS

Photo: Technical.ly's Future of Digital Marketing event at SEER Interactive's "Search Church."
Credit: Stephen Metzger

Before **Allison O'Brien** moved from Florida to Philadelphia to work for **SEER Interactive**, her future coworkers offered to look at apartments for her. That's what it's like to work at the Philly-based online marketing agency, said O'Brien. The firm has more than 80 employees — most in their headquarters called the 'Search Church,' but they have a growing contingent on the West Coast.

“It’s a way to tap into a new talent pool,” said SEER founder **Wil Reynolds** at a City Council hearing on the ‘innovation economy’ held during Philly Tech Week 2014. “That and an excuse for me to fly to 70-degree weather in the winter.”

Huge, the Dumbo Brooklyn design agency anchor also has offices in Atlanta, DC, London, Los Angeles, Portland, Rio de Janeiro and San Francisco. Traditionally agencies have developed offices to expand their client portfolio. For Huge, the lure is as much about a pipeline to new talent, some of whom will move across markets.

Baltimore-based **Red Owl Analytics** has a Brooklyn office for creative talent. Philadelphia-based Image analytics company **Curalate** has a Seattle presence, led by their VP of Engineering and two other developers, all of whom came from Microsoft. Both have fewer than 75 employees. Curalate’s Manhattan office is now also adding technical talent beyond sales.

“What you’re seeing here is a reflection of tremendous demand for Curalate and the number one growth constraint affecting high growth startups today—people,” said spokesman **Brendan Lowry**. “As a result, we’re opportunistically adding people where we can.”

WORSHIP COMPANY CULTURE

Photo: A designer at Huge plays with the company's "H" branding | Credit: Huge

Company recruiting managers say, again and again, in a variety of ways, that what they want in every hire is to make the next hire easier. In that way, it's something distinct than the Nerf guns and free meals that firms also offer to lure candidates. Company culture matters most.

Blake Harrison, Flocabulary cofounder, told us, “Every great hire makes the next great hire easier since smart people want to work with other smart people.” **Huge’s** East Coast Director of Recruiting, Hannah Lindsey, wrote to us about a company-wide culture of recruitment and creating an atmosphere of “collaborating beyond just their project responsibilities.”

Often a company’s ‘culture’ — a hallowed term among tech business leaders— reflects its founders, how norms and quirks are first established.

Makerbot, the digital fabrication giant that was founded in Brooklyn by proudly self-styled hacker **Bre Pettis**, has celebrated a culture of risk-taking and a return to blue collar manufacturing’s impact on communities. College may be the way many students get access to technical tools, Pettis has said, but action matters more than school grades. When applicants apply for roles with Makerbot, Pettis said he wants to see examples of experimental coding projects and entrepreneurial ventures. Tell a story about yourself.

“We read the cover letter,” he said, “If the cover letter is good, we want to meet people.”

For **Robert Cheetham** the founder of **Azavea**, the well-respected GIS software firm based in industrial Callowhill in Philadelphia, his priority is to build and retain a team of civic-minded technologists, who do the best work on their

mix of open data, government-orientated and geolocation projects. After six months, staff members are encouraged to take on a research project, an experiment relevant to interests and work focus that can take 10 percent of a staff member's time. It's a perk, but it's also a way to build their culture of thinkers.

Silicon Valley companies with local footprints like **Instacart**, the on-demand grocery shopping mobile app, and **Uber**, the ride-hailing app, have detailed rollout strategies when expanding to a new market. With aggressive outreach through a local city's creative class and tech scene, their expansion and marketing team aim to define a new kind of experience that builds hype. Leveraging momentum from earlier work, they often focus on hiring people with existing networks.

In all, the best way to attract and retain talent appears to be selective, particularly early on, to form a personality and culture that will then make future employees come to you.

That's something that privacy-minded search engine firm **DuckDuckGo**, based in suburban Philadelphia, knows. Founder **Gabe Weinberg** has held hackathons where technical fans who believe in the mission of this small for profit business to not track users can work on internal projects. Their team keeps in contact with many contributors to their platform—their director of marketing and

community **Zac Pappis** was heavily involved himself and graduated to part-time work before taking a full-time role in 2012. “If you want to work with us, we find that the most motivated people come directly from the community,” he said.

Fundamentally, all these companies want people who buy into their mission. **Flocabulary**, the Brooklyn edtech firm, even tries to reflect that in its fun side. It has a monthly program called The Quarterdeck, where one staff member does a presentation for other staff on a topic that fascinates her.

In much of the culture among technology firms is this belief that their work is improving the world—by making an industry more efficient or creating an entirely new one. **Amplify** recruiters often push their role in impacting K-12 education as a selling point to talent — no matter any glib references to its role as a subsidiary to media giant News Corp.

“This is a thrilling time. There are amazing things happening in technology, many of them changing our lives,” said Amplify recruiter **Matt Yardeni**.

“Sure it’s competitive, but when I step back and admire the companies that are truly transformative, and the people we hire and get to work with who bring ideas to life, it’s such a great opportunity to be a part of that.”

Published by

Technical.ly
Better cities through technology

Philly Tech Week 2013
Credit: Neal Santos

What's next?

We'll write about your organization

Share your company news with our reporters in each market. Visit <http://technical.ly/about> for our full staff list to find your local contact.

Try the Technical.ly jobs board

Use the discount code "beyondrecruiting" for 25% off jobs posts at <http://technical.ly/jobs>

Sponsor or attend a Technical.ly event

We organize events throughout the Northeast corridor. Email sales@technical.ly for more.

Market your activities

We can create an impactful campaign for any budget. Email sales@technical.ly to learn about sponsored content and display advertising.