

CEO of recruiting software company focuses on diversity

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At first glance, Jon Bischke would seem an unlikely spokesman for diversity.

He's white, 40, blonde - and the CEO of a tech company, an industry that's been knocked for providing few opportunities for women, African-Americans and Latinos. But for Bischke, diversity's not only an important value, it's an increasingly important part of his business.

Entelo, the company Bischke founded and runs, helps other companies find and target job candidates by combing through public websites to find professional information about potential hires. Among its customers are UPS, GE, Cisco and Facebook.

Two years ago, San Francisco-based Entelo added on a new service that helps its customers specifically search for candidates who are women, veterans, African-Americans or Latinos. More recently, the company has added data that can help companies find candidates with disabilities and it's hoping to expand to help find members of other underrepresented groups.

Bischke recently spoke with The Mercury News about his company and how its software might help solve the diversity problem. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: How did you get into the business of helping companies with diversifying their hiring?

A: We were talking to customers. They said, "We're struggling right now to hire people from different, underrepresented groups." We determined that with a pretty high degree of accuracy we could identify members of those groups. And then we spent some time with the employment lawyers to say, "Hey, is this something that we can do?" And they said, "Well, if you structure the product right, in a way that it can't be used for discriminatory purposes, then absolutely."

And so when we got both the legal and the technical clearance, we started building the product, and we launched it in 2014.

Q: How does Entelo Diversity work? How do you determine somebody meets one of the diversity categories?

A: At the high level, it's an algorithmic approach to identify who's a member of an underrepresented group that also might have the right skills, the right experience for a job that a company is looking to hire for.

Now, it's interesting, because I can't actually share the specific things that we look at. The companies that we've worked with have actually said to us, "We would prefer if you don't tell us everything you do."

But a few of them that are helpful are things like memberships in certain groups, where somebody went to school. So, if someone went to a women's college, we're going to go out on a limb and we're going to algorithmically guess that that person is a woman. If somebody attended a historically black college, again, we'll go out on a limb and likely assume that they're African-American. So, that's the type of thing that we'd look for.

Q: What portion of your client base is using Entelo Diversity?

A: If I were to give you a rough guess, I'd say about half. Generally speaking, the tech companies tend to be the ones that are most interested, because there has been so much scrutiny in technology.

Q: Why not just include Entelo Diversity with your main product, rather than selling it as a separate add-on?

A: Not every company is comfortable using the diversity portion of the product. Usually when someone adopts the diversity portion of our platform, it has to go through some sort of legal clearance, someone has to sign off on it. And if we basically forced everybody to have that part of the platform, I think it would slow down a lot of customer adoption.

And I think, to be honest, the notion of algorithmically identifying people, of characteristics like race and gender, is still controversial. There's still a lot of folks that view things like that as reverse discrimination.

In Silicon Valley, it's pretty easy to say, "Everyone loves diversity!" I don't know that every single customer feels the same way. And so we wouldn't want to impose something on somebody that may or may not be in line with what they're looking to do as a company.

Q: Are you helping companies find older candidates also?

A: There are areas that I would like to do that we have not been able to do. One of them is people with disabilities. Unfortunately, the notion of algorithmically identifying someone who has a disability is really hard to do.

We do index a few websites that are opt-in, where people can say, "I'm a person with a disability, here's my skill set." But we don't do any sort of algorithmic prediction, because the cost of getting that wrong is just too

high. Same thing with LGBT. We get that question a lot: "Can you help us find more LGBT employees?" And we just don't do that for the same reasons.

Age is a tricky one. It's one that we're certainly looking very closely at. We don't do it today. It's something that I wouldn't rule out for the future. One of the challenges is for most of the people on our platform, we don't have very concrete information about how old they are.

I'd like to be able to do it. I think the issue of ageism in Silicon Valley and other places is real. We just haven't gotten enough confidence yet that from a technical perspective we could do it. And we're also a little bit concerned about, again, some of the legal stuff if we get it wrong.

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Jon Bischke

Age: 40

Birthplace: Saint Paul, Minn.

Position: CEO, Entelo

Previous jobs: Founder, eduFire; founder, Zaadz; founder and CEO, The 2000Tutor Network

Education: MBA, UCLA; Bachelor of Science in Business, University of Minnesota

Family: Married, with one daughter and one son.

Residence: San Francisco

Other interests: Golf, reading/learning, meditation, family

Five things about Jon Bischke

1. His first "real job" was teaching GMAT prep classes while he was still in college.
2. Declined an invitation to attend Harvard Law School to instead create a web startup that was acquired by a publicly traded [company](#) three years later.
3. Has traveled to Africa three times: To climb Mt. Kilimanjaro in 2003, to do volunteer work on his honeymoon in 2010, and with President Clinton as part of a delegation to witness humanitarian aid projects in 2013.
4. After his startup eduFire was acquired, he joined the advisory board of Udemy, formerly eduFire's chief rival.
5. One of his biggest pleasures in life is fixing breakfast for his daughter, 4, and a son, 18 months.

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