

Technology companies on a hiring binge again

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The 20 recruiters sized up Scott Mersy as they would a star high school running back. But instead of timing his 40-yard dash or checking his percentage of body fat, they were interested in his stats in cloud computing and online marketing.

Prospective employers from Silicon Valley to New York lined up for the 5-foot-11, 225-pound Mersy, who weighed offers from several of them before settling on Service-now.com, a cloud-computing company in San Diego.

"It's as close as I'll ever get to feeling like an athlete of any sort," Mersy, 40, says, laughing. He joined as senior director of customer acquisition and industry marketing in February.

Tech workers like Mersy are coveted commodities as the high-tech industry undergoes its biggest hiring binge in more than a decade. Not since the dot-com bubble of the early 2000s has competition been so fierce. Would-be employees are being enticed with fat contracts, hefty bonuses and such freebies as iPads, meals, sporting events and shuttle services. These and other perks are in play to hook top talent in engineering, social media, website development, product design and management.

Many companies are going gangbusters with billboards in the San Francisco Bay Area - such as Groupon's "Do Something Massive" and Skype's "Embrace Your True Calling" - to attract talent. The signs

include links to available jobs.

[Google](#), [Facebook](#) and Microsoft are aggressively recruiting college students in hopes of landing them before they graduate, says Gayle Laakmann McDowell, a former Google software engineer and author of "The Google Resume: How to Prepare for a Career and Land a Job at Apple, Microsoft, Google, or Any Top Tech Company."

The jump in tech hires highlights what some economists see as a bounce-back in the \$805 billion U.S. tech industry that could eventually make a dent in the national unemployment rate of 8.8 percent. "The majority of the lost jobs in California were in construction and manufacturing, so gains in tech may help," says Doug Henton, CEO of market researcher Collaborative Economics. "The one sector where there is some hope is in construction in clean tech."

Nearly 150,000 tech jobs are expected to be added this year, says Sophia Koropecyk, an economist at Moody's Analytics. In February, there were about 6.1 million tech jobs in the U.S., up 2.4 percent from a year ago. Yet there's a lot to make up for: From the second quarter of 2008 through the first quarter of 2010, during the economic swoon, 308,000 tech jobs were lost.

A surge in tech hires in California could portend an upturn for the overall U.S. economy, says Jesse Harriott, chief knowledge officer at online job site Monster.com.

That's in part because what's good for tech will touch related industries. Areas such as wireless, computing and energy have an effect on "a substantial part of the economy, such as logistics, inventory management, enterprise coordination, even hybrid autos," says Shane Greenstein, a management professor at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.

Entrepreneurs and venture capitalists foresee growth in wireless apps, online gaming and clean tech, he says. "It is not a classic tech boom, led by a big new opportunity like (Internet) browsing or Web 2.0, but a mixture of a few big and unrelated trends," Greenstein says.

The job boom not only signals a potential reversal of fortune for the greater U.S. economy, but it also underscores just how hot the tech market is in the San Francisco Bay Area. The number of tech-related jobs in San Francisco is near its record 34,000 in 2000, the pinnacle of the Internet bubble, according to analysis by real estate consultant Jones Lang LaSalle. To accommodate so many hires, Zynga, Facebook and others are moving into larger facilities.

Brian Gorby and his partner wanted to move to San Francisco from Atlanta. So the two engineers applied for jobs, fielded multiple offers, accepted jobs and moved - all in less than four months.

"I was surprised by the speed of the process, especially among the bigger companies," says Gorby, 28. He declined to name those companies because he may end up working for one of them in the future.

Jobs are so plentiful in [Silicon Valley](#) these days that it's more eye-opening when companies are retrenching rather than expanding. Apple, Google, Facebook and others continue to hire, as they did during the worst of the economic downturn. During a recent earnings call, Google said it added 1,900 jobs in its recently completed fiscal first quarter.

"It's a money war for engineers," says Dave MacKeen, CEO of Eliassen Group, one of the largest tech-staffing firms in the Northeast. It works with Fortune 500 companies.

"Folks are coming out of nuclear winter into the spring," says Mark Hubbell, managing director at executive recruiting firm Vantage

Partners, which has placed upper management at Yahoo and start-ups, including Zynga. "If you are highly talented and risk averse, a major brand (Facebook, Twitter, Zynga) is where you end up," Hubbell says. "If you're talented and not risk averse, you start your own company."

Companies aren't just hiring at a furious clip. They are poaching one another's staffs for talented engineers and online marketers, he says. At the South by Southwest Interactive festival in Austin last month, representatives from the likes of Adobe Systems, Foursquare and eBay roamed the show floor, hoping to recruit workers.

Social-networking company Tagged offered limo rides from the Austin airport in hopes of landing hot prospects.

For the first time in years, the "power is with the job seeker and not the employer," says Matthew Henson, a spokesman for Monster.com, which has seen a steep rise in tech listings in the United States. The same is true with online classified ads giant Craigslist, says CEO Jim Buckmaster.

"Help wanted" in the tech sector applies to the biggest companies as well as start-ups in search of the next tech rock star.

Amazon.com, which recently added music storage to its cloud services, has thousands of openings for software engineers, product managers and others this year.

Auction giant eBay is bolstering its push into mobile commerce and other areas with aggressive hiring and acquisitions to add talent, says Mark Carges, eBay's chief technology officer. For example, it announced this month that it is buying the mobile commerce site Where.

Some companies are just on a huge ramp-up, such as storage-area network provider Virtual Instruments. The 110-person company plans to

double its workforce this year. Last year, it grabbed a key executive: former Symantec CEO John Thompson as its CEO.

"The biggest attraction is success," says Len Rosenthal, vice president of marketing at the privately held start-up. "And we got through the worst of times with success."

Larry Ellison-backed NetSuite, a cloud-computing company, plans to add 500 employees this year. "Companies around the globe are now moving their complex business processes to the cloud, and NetSuite is hiring like our hair is on fire to meet that demand," says NetSuite CEO Zach Nelson.

LinkedIn kicked off the year with about 1,000 employees worldwide, twice what it had in early 2010. It has plans to go public. "As we grow the company, we're always on the lookout for top talent," LinkedIn CEO Jeff Weiner says. "We also continue to attract talented technologists in both the engineering and data science fields."

The competitive climate for tech talent has prompted firms - many of whom slashed workforces and conserved cash the past few years - to now offer plenty of goodies.

ShareFile, a start-up file-transfer company in Raleigh, N.C., offers a laundry list of perks: stock options, a break room stocked with free snacks and drinks, company sports outings, happy hours, weekly pick-up basketball games, a game room filled with Ping-Pong and pool tables, a Wii, and more.

Mersy heard it all from corporate suitors.

Prospective employers alternately pitched themselves as "hot" promising start-ups, nestled in cool neighborhoods such as San Francisco and

bursting with venture-capital cash. But it was the combination of enterprise customers and the relaxed atmosphere of San Diego that persuaded Mersy, previously vice president of marketing at Genius.com, to join Service-now.

For Kristal Pollack, who snagged a job with social-networking service Yammer, it came down to one simple, unshakable tenet: company culture.

"I love the people and products here," says Pollack, 29, a [software engineer](#) who joined Yammer in mid-March after fielding queries from six companies and talking to recruiters. "It was a fast process. Engineers, everyone in tech it seems, are in demand."

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