

“ I don’t need an alarm clock to get up for work in the morning,” says Lisa Dunlap. This 34-year-old dynamo is so impassioned about her job that she radiates energy and optimism. She’s in charge of exciting things at a startup enterprise—but not the kind of techie, dot.com startup you might expect. Indeed, when you hear Dunlap’s title—vice president of retention and recruiting for The Thomson Corporation—you might even think it sounds a bit stuffy.

Not so. As the first person to hold the title, and thus to have corporate responsibility for employee retention, Dunlap cre-

and Peterson’s Guides, and employees often weren’t aware that those units were part of the Thomson organization. Obviously, an education effort was needed.

There was a second part to Dunlap’s realization: There would be far less attrition if employees were able to move about more freely within the corporation. Dunlap needed a system that would educate employees about all of Thomson’s businesses, showcase job openings across the corporation, make it easy for employees to find a new job inside, and convey the corporate message that transferring was not only acceptable but encouraged.

Career *Centered*

By Jennifer J. Salopek

How do you keep
great employees?
By making it easy
for them to stay.

ates a bit more of her job every day, as she has for the past two years. Her mission: to make it as easy as possible for Thomson’s employees to stay with the company, even in the face of career changes, personal needs, life events, whatever.

When Dunlap accepted the VP position and began to create a corporate recruitment mandate, she had a crucial realization: The organization would not be able to grow through any one method, be it acquisition or organic growth. Instead, it needed to embrace all possible methods of growth, and one of those was keeping as many of their employees within the fold as possible. In an organization of 40,000-plus employees working in multiple divisions of five major market groups, there were many opportunities for promotions and transfers that workers simply didn’t know about. Many divisions don’t bear the Thomson name, such as FirstCall

There was also an advantage for the businesses’ HR groups. As a former technical recruiter for one of the Thomson businesses, Dunlap had hired 275 technologists over an eight-month period. By increasing transfers and therefore retention, “We wouldn’t have to do full-circle recruitment every day.”

Not surprisingly, the answer to Dunlap’s requirements lay in technology. She decided to build an online infrastructure that would support Thomson’s internal—and external—recruiting efforts. It would be fun, personalized, and easy to use. It would also set the tone for the new effort—that it’s OK to look for a new job within the company.

Dunlap assembled a project team from across the corporation that included members of her staff as well as HR folks from each of the five market groups. Within four months, the team had decided

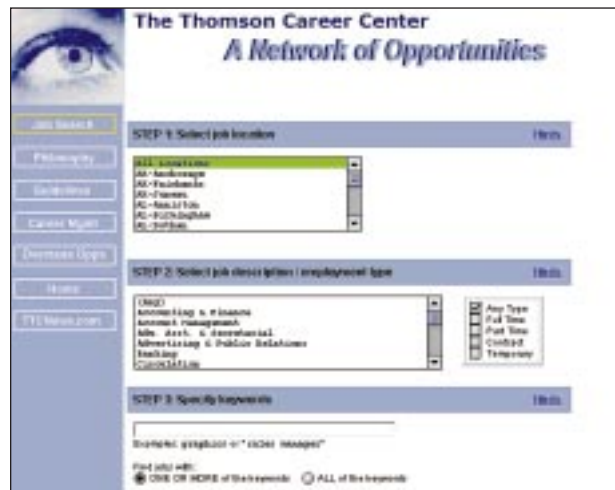


"There's a question of fun that needs to be had at work. We try to provide a collegial environment that everyone feeds off of."

on a basic feel and functionality for the online career center, then went outside for the technology to make it work.

Launched in July 1999, thomsoncareers.com averages 700 to 1,000 job listings and 5,400 hits per month. Job seekers can register a personal search agent that will notify the employee automatically whenever a new opening in his or her field is posted. Registering for a PSA takes only four steps; employees can specify preferred locations, full- or part-time employment, and keywords to help the PSA with the search. In my trial run, I registered a PSA to search all locations for a full-time editorial position. Within five minutes, I had an email message confirming my registration. By the next day, the PSA had delivered 24 job openings from Arizona to London. Each person can register up to five PSAs.

So, for example, if I also wanted to search for education and training jobs, I could just register another PSA. The PSA searches openings once a day, seven days



a week, for a year or until the PSA is cancelled. For employees seeking confidentiality, there's a link to create a free email address through CareerBuilder Mail instead of using their work email.

After launching thomsoncareers.com, Dunlap's next task was to publicize the site to employees. She tackled the problem as a typical advertising challenge—printing and distributing posters, note cubes, and the like. Further, she worked with an outside designer to create a series of three electronic postcards that were emailed to all Thomson employees. The first in the series features a photograph of a punk rocker's head, complete with spiky red hair. The tagline reads, "Just because you want to try a new hairstyle doesn't mean you need a whole

new head." That sense of fun reflects Dunlap's work and her management style.

Indeed, fun at work is one of the four elements that Dunlap believes make up a comprehensive recruitment effort. The others are a corporate environment dedicated to retention, the right fit between people and their jobs, and the right tools to help people do their jobs.

What's next for Lisa Dunlap and thomsoncareers.com? The project team is now working to augment the site with self-assessments, so that job candidates can determine whether they have the skills required for an open position. If a candidate determines that further education or training is needed, the site will link him or her to appropriate offerings from Thomson University, the company's physical and virtual corporate university.

Dunlap says, "We're helping the market groups get to where they need to be—faster. We have had more fun and been more effective over the last two years than ever before." □

Jennifer J. Salopek is *vibes* editor of Training & Development; jsalopek@astd.org

