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Phil Harrington,
president, Kuder Inc.



The Greater Des Moines Partnership teams up with career development consultant Kuder Inc. to bring new tools to Central Iowa companies

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Social recruiting



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Social recruiting

■ Adel-based Kuder Inc. provides tools for Partnership's new workforce initiative

BY JOE GARDYASZ
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Phil Harrington could easily have spent his entire career working as a successful financial services executive. But 13 years ago, when his teenage daughter wasn't getting the career guidance she needed as she was entering high school, he knew that he needed to take action.

"I came out of (high school in) Oelwein, Iowa, in 1977 and all of us had a game plan once you got your diploma and stepped off the stage," said Harrington, who is now president of Kuder Inc., an Adel-based career assessment company. "I just assumed that would be the same process that my kids would take."

Harrington's quest for a better career assessment process led to his 1998 purchase of Motivational Research Inc., which has provided career interest tests to generations of Americans since the mid-1930s. Harrington renamed the company National Career Assessment Services Inc. and acquired the publishing rights to the assessments from The McGraw-Hill Cos.

"We said, how can we help students understand the importance of being in school and all the classes they have to take, how that might apply to real life?" he said. "And can we do a better job of helping students make that critical transition from eighth grade to high school? That became a real key goal for us."

Now known as Kuder Inc., the company provides a suite of assessment products throughout the United States ranging from "pre-K to gray," and has recently expanded to work with companies internationally. The company employs 36 people at its headquarters in Adel.

Connect 2 Business

As a significant step in its work-

Greater Des Moines Partnership recently contracted with Kuder to launch Connect 2 Business Greater Des Moines. The online network is designed to connect Central Iowa employers with a pipeline of skilled workers, and provide opportunities to connect businesses with both students and adult career changers.

"We came upon this tool and decided to use this technology platform because of its outreach to students, but it also has a great adult component as well," said Mary Bontrager, the Partnership's executive vice president of workforce development. "Adults that are in career transition or just simply want to do interest assessments or work-value assessments can use the tools."

The online assessment tools will be offered at no cost to all residents of Dallas, Polk and Warren counties, as well as to all Partnership members and affiliates.

"This is a response to the needs we saw to create better communication channels and awareness opportunities to our middle and high school students," said Bontrager, who said the project represents a significant financial commitment by the Partnership. "There are great opportunities here, whether that's entering the workplace right after high school or going on to a post-secondary experience."

"In addition, this really is a two-way communication tool," she said. "As we get this site populated with both student and adult users and businesses, the businesses can send messages out to that candidate population. Let's say you've taken an assessment and one of your top five areas is health sciences. If Iowa Health System wanted to hold a career fair, they can tailor a message to be sent to any high school students and adults who have indicated health sciences with a personal invitation to the job fair."

All Greater Des Moines Partnership member businesses have had their profiles loaded into the system, Bontrager said, and they will soon receive secure log-in information so they can customize those profiles.

Iowa Health System was the first corporate sponsor to sign on to

community College and Grand View University, both of which were already Kuder clients, are the first two educational sponsors. The Partnership is seeking more sponsors on both the corporate and educational sides, Bontrager said.

Connect 2 Business will not replace the Partnership's existing resume service and jobs database. "Actually, employers can post jobs on our site and we will scrape or spider those jobs to put out on Connect 2 Business," Bontrager said. "Of course, we're recruiting across the country for individuals, and so there is still the need for this jobs and resume database we have. For the most part, that's heavily populated with individuals who aren't residing here but are hoping to relocate here."

Fritz

The Connect 2 Business website is just one aspect of a broader initiative by the Partnership to engage middle and high school students. Representatives from the Partnership also plan to visit schools to conduct "Connect 2 Business Career Prep Academies," in which they will meet with groups of students to discuss career preparation strategies. Social media will play a large follow-up role in that effort, using a cartoon character the Partnership has developed. Named after Kuder's original founder, Frederic "Fritz" Kuder, the character will provide a teenage voice for Connect 2 Business.

"On an ongoing basis, Fritz is going to be that social media person

our young people," Bontrager said. For instance, Fritz will blog about topics that reinforce the Connect2Business message. "He might write, 'I just got elected to the student council. Will look great on my resume. Anybody else doing things that will be great on your resume?' We really want to create this social dialogue among kids that they can share, and share concerns and experiences."

The first four Greater Des Moines schools to be involved in the career academy program will be Dowling Catholic High School and Southeast Polk, Urbandale and Waukee high schools.

Kuder developed the Connect 2 Business program in response to requests from several states' workforce development agencies, Harrington said.

"They were telling us that one of the problems from a business standpoint is that students really don't know what business does, what all those jobs are, and businesses don't know who those kids are out there," he said.

Harrington spent much of his career in the insurance industry with Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. Prior to acquiring Kuder, he led Midwest Financial Services Ltd., a company he launched in Des Moines and grew into a \$10 million business.

Though Kuder has tailored Connect 2 Business for statewide use, the Partnership's project is the first time the company has provided Connect 2 Business to a metro area's economic development organization, Harrington said.

With the economic downturn, demand for student assessments declined as school districts struggled financially, he noted.

"We took it pretty hard in the chops last year," Harrington said. "We actually had some states that we were carrying 18 to 24 months before they were able to pay their bill, and not all were able to pay their bills. On the

Cover Story

"This is a response to the needs we saw to create better communication channels and awareness opportunities to our middle and high school students."

— Mary Bontrager
executive vice president,
Greater Des Moines Partnership



IMAGE SUBMITTED

The Partnership will use "Fritz" to engage local teens in an interactive dialogue about career choices.

Dice Talent Network embraces social media tools

■ More than 40,000 technology professionals already using the site

BY JOE GARDYASZ
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Technology and engineering professionals have a new way to connect with potential employers, through a social media-based product launched last month on Urbandale-based Dice.com.

Using the Dice Talent Network, each user of the jobs-board website can build an online profile and interact directly with potential employers through social media tools such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, personal websites and blogs. The service is available at no cost to job candidates as well as to employers and recruiters.

"Social recruiting is a relatively new concept, and embracing networking as a key offering in the job board community is brand-new," said Tom Silver, senior vice president for Dice Holdings Inc., Dice.com's New York-based parent company. "What's driving the change is that expectations have changed. Job seekers and recruit-

ers are looking for more one-to-one communication, and professionals want more control over their personal data."

Using the network, employers can communicate directly with professionals via real-time chat or instant messages, and can also release network-wide announcements about new positions or opportunities within their organizations. Companies can also provide an enhanced profile for prospective employees for a more personal look at their culture.

Focus Story

At the same time, job seekers can select which employers will have access to their resumes and social profiles.

Dice Holdings, which is publicly traded on the New York Stock Exchange, reported online revenues of \$29.9 million in the second quarter, an 11 percent increase from the comparable quarter in 2009.

In addition to Dice.com, Dice Holdings operates several other career websites, among them eFinancialCareers, Targeted Job Fairs and AllHealthcareJobs.com. In the past quarter, it acquired Worldwide-Worker.com, a Dubai-based energy industry recruiting company, as well as Rigzone.com, a Houston-

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— Tom Silver
senior vice president, Dice Holdings Inc.



based content, data, advertising and career services company.

Dice Holdings has also launched a similar service, The Cleared Network, for its Clearance-Jobs.com site, and the company plans to offer a customized version for each of its job-board sites, Silver said.

From the employers' perspective, Dice Talent Network will enable companies to build long-term relationships with technology professionals, which in many skill sets are in short supply, Silver said. "We are marrying the best aspects of the job board community – audience reach, targeting, efficiency and career-minded individuals – with the best tools of social media that build direct interaction between recruiters and candidates," he said.

Approximately 200 companies have enrolled in Dice Talent Net-

work since Dice.com introduced the beta version of the site in January, Silver said. In comparison, Dice.com provided recruitment packages for about 6,750 companies in the second quarter. Since January, more than 40,000 technology professionals have added social media links to their profiles, and many have connected with employer networks to follow companies of interest to them.

"We are rolling this out slowly to get both technology professionals and companies' recruiters interacting regularly and taking their feedback to continue to evolve the product offering over time," Silver said. "We do believe a significant portion of the customer base will ultimately use the Talent Network to brand their company and grow their own communities within the Dice platform." □



PHOTO BY DUANE TINKEY

Phil Harrington, president, Kuder Inc.

Adel company Kuder has trained facilitators in more than 15 states

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flip side, so many stimulus dollars have gone into workforce development, so we've been able to really grow that market and develop some new products and services along those lines."

International growth

Another key growth area for the company has been providing training for career development facilitators. Kuder offers a 20-week course accredited by the National Board of Career Counselors and has trained facilitators in more than 15 states. The company currently has a contract with the state of Arkansas to train approximately 600 people as facilitators who will work with both students and adults. Under that state's plan, every resident will have access to a career development facilitator.

In the past two years, Kuder has also branched out overseas to provide both student and adult assessment services in countries such as Ireland, Qatar and India. It's currently negotiating with an Indian company about providing career development facilitators as well. Harrington's oldest daughter, Erin,

the original impetus for starting the company, now leads Kuder's international development efforts.

In May, the company launched a career coaching service, which it is rolling out for displaced adult workers in Michigan and Ohio and for students in the Midwest.

"We think there is a large number of parents who would be interested in that for their children," Harrington said. "Guidance counselors maybe don't have as much time as they'd like to spend with students on career and college planning."

For Harrington, the fun part of the business is knowing that Kuder's assessment products are making a difference for students.

"We're now able to look at our data and say, we've improved graduation rates; we've improved college-going rates; transition rates (to college) we've improved dramatically. A big thing is that students who use our assessments before they enter college are graduating much faster than those that don't. We always say it's simple: It's because they have a game plan." □

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