



Face to Face: Interviews with Hiring Professionals at Places You Want Work

SFGate.com

LookSmart Ltd.

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Web Site: www.looksmart.com

Number of Employees: 127

Products: Furl.net social bookmarking/tagging site and technology; Web search engine; advertising network; vertical search sites for consumers; technology solutions for publishers and Net Nanny parental-control software.

LookSmart provides relevant content, advertising and technology solutions for consumers, advertisers and publishers. **LookSmart's** more than 180 vertical search sites are where consumers look for what they need, offering essential search results and Web tools to find, save and share pages from the Web. In addition to its proprietary vertical properties, **LookSmart's** advertiser distribution network includes syndicated publishers and search engine partners that maximize advertiser return on investment. **LookSmart** also offers a customizable set of syndicated solutions for publishers to monetize their Web traffic and grow their advertiser relationships and audience.

How long have you been with **LookSmart**?

David: I've been with the company for about 18 months. I came to **LookSmart** at the end of October 2004. Previously I was president of 24/7 Real Media.

Michael: I've been with the company for three and a half years. What originally brought you to the company?

Michael: I came to **LookSmart** because the company was at that time first starting to seriously get into the Web-search arena, and with that came the unprecedented need to scale, which is my particular area of passion. Before I was at **LookSmart** I was at Akamai Technologies where I was vice president of operations and chief systems architect. I was there for basically the first four years of the company and built up all of the operations strategy and technology, including the systems engineering and information security teams, as well as initial building of QA, networking, tools development and so forth. So I was involved from the ground up in building the Akamai network to more than 15,000 servers all over the globe managed in a purely automated way. That's an example of how I am really passionately interested in big problems of scale.

David: We promoted Michael from vice president of operations to chief technology officer about six months after I joined the company because as I got to know his skill set and his judgment, and given where I knew we were going to take the company at that point, he was a perfect fit to take over all of our technology operations, including development engineering as well as regular operations.

What keeps you there? What keeps the job exciting and interesting for you? Michael: Well, the way that I look at it is that in many ways we are a startup venture, but we get to tackle these very large, very interesting technology problems. For someone like me, who is primarily motivated by those kinds of issues, it's a rare opportunity to be involved with so many of them and at such a close level.

What is unique about your work culture?

David: We are a small company with a large-company infrastructure. **LookSmart**'s infrastructure was built in the late 1990s and the early part of this decade and serviced MSN. The company was the provider of paid and unpaid search results to MSN for a number of years, so we've got this incredibly large infrastructure. I think what makes this a unique place to work is that generally the infrastructure comes along with a large corporation and a big-company mentality where people get boxed into their jobs because there are thousands of people in the organization. What I think is unique here is that we can tackle all of the things that large companies can, and we're tackling them as quickly as possible and doing a really good job at it. At the same time, since we're a small company, individual contributors can learn a lot, they can be recognized for what is that they do and they have a tremendous amount of input into the final product. It's not like things are designed upstairs and then shipped down to engineering. It's an "all hands on deck" experience, and we find that people who are really, really innovative and passionate about what they do tend to like the ability to have more of an impact on the operation. We're a smaller company with big-company assets, including being a publicly traded company, so it gives us a lot of flexibility.

What other companies do you compete against for employees when you're recruiting?

Michael: On one hand, we find that our candidates are also looking at established companies in the search industry, such as Google. On the other hand, many folks are also looking at other startups in the search area, so it's sort of across the board.

What are the growth areas for the firm in terms of hiring?

David: Let me start with what the business is, because I think it logically leads into the areas where we are hiring. There are really two different areas inside our company. One is developing a consumer audience, and we've done quite well at that. Our audience from the December quarter to the quarter that just ended grew over 30 percent, so we are obviously onto something from the audience-development standpoint. Based on that audience, we serve ads to the pages as people find the search results that they want, and they click on the ads and we make money that way. We also take our advertising results and syndicate them out to other search engines. So it's the business of building an audience and building an advertising base that we focus on all the time, and in the context of that we are always looking for highly motivated, highly qualified development engineers and operations engineers. We're looking for people with a passion for what they do and who want to be able to contribute rather than just go to work.

Michael: Since the middle of last year we've been doing a lot of new development in the vertical search area, so that is a particular hot growth area for us. Another area of growth is Furl.net, which is what you would call a "social bookmarking application." It is a place where people can save what they find on the Web that they might want to come back to later. It makes it really easy to find what you're looking for, and it solves a really pressing personal information management problem for anyone who uses the Web a great deal. We see this as being at the forefront of search and information technology. We announced on our earnings call last week that for several months Furl.net has been growing at more than one percent a week in terms of user registration, which is an incredible growth rate. We're also putting a lot of resources behind 181 vertical Web sites in 13 categories that we launched last fall. What are some of the key jobs that you are currently trying to fill? Michael: All of them! I think probably the best way to look at us from a "which jobs are important" standpoint is that we're always looking for people who can help us move forward through development and engineering efforts, both in terms of search and social bookmarking. So for anyone who has a passion for the social aspects of the Web, which obviously is becoming more and more of a positive with consumers, we're certainly anxious to get those positions filled. We have two killer positions that many people would just die for at Furl right now. With Furl.net being one of the most dynamic and exciting sites on the Web in terms of its usefulness to people, as well as being really the kernel of the next generation of search on the Web, these are really rare opportunities. David: We're also always on the hunt for good salespeople, and the folks who come to work for us have looked at opportunities at larger companies but then realized that it's going to take a long time before they get a chance to call on some of the big-name players. If they start with us next week, they'll get the opportunity to call those places immediately. At the end of the day we are really a publicly traded startup. We have all of the benefits of being a public company, and all of the allure of being a startup environment.

What programs do you have in place to retain employees? David: We have incredible benefits. We've got employee stock option and purchase programs, our 401(k) has a matching feature, we have great health and medical benefits, and I think a lot of the attention on our side comes from people that want to go somewhere and make a difference and not just have one task that they do over and over again. So the combination of the way we pay, the kind of benefits we offer and the type of work environment we have all go a long way toward retaining employees.

How does the interview process work? David: Of course we have the standard human resources stuff we have to go through by law and by our own policy, but then it gets pretty interesting pretty quickly. Any engineering candidate will absolutely meet with Michael, because very quickly he'll be working directly with him trying to get something accomplished, so in the interview the candidate is always exposed to someone who works for me, and many times is exposed to me directly during the interview process. What's important for us is to understand why a person wants to come to **LookSmart**. The way I characterize it is that there are some people who like to work in large companies - I was one of them, and I spent 21 years at a large company - and there are other folks who like small-company environments. In addition to skill set, passion, motivation and the other things we

look for in candidates, we really do test to see if a candidate wants to be in a large-company or a small-company environment. Michael: We are a very flat organization where everyone can talk to anyone else, and that's something that starts very early in the interview process. We set the tone there, because everyone here interacts directly with team members at every level of the company.

Are there any challenges of working at the company because you have essentially been in a "restart" mode? David: Of course there are. First of all - and I think this is probably the most important part of it - there is the "noise" factor that exists when you have two companies in the space [Google and Yahoo!] that are many times larger than we are. So the first challenge is for all of us to remember why we're doing what we're doing and that a small company with the right people and the right tools can make an impact in an industry that's going to grow at 20 to 30 percent for the next decade or so. But the noise is certainly a challenge. Past that, I think the other challenges are that as we try to do things quickly we're open to innovation, and innovation axiomatically causes mistakes. Around the shop we say, "we don't mind making mistakes - we just want to make them quickly!" So if you're an employee, you're signing up to be really innovative, which comes with being wrong every so often.

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