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How Door64 became an Austin tech hub

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None — In 2007, when chip design engineer Matt Genovese launched a website to help Austin tech professionals network, he saw it as a side project.

But two years later, when Genovese was laid off from Freescale Semiconductor and the job market dried up, building Door64.com into a meeting place for Austin's tech community became his full-time job.

Today, Door64, which operates as a for-profit business, has 25,000 registered members and has become an Austin tech hub, with networking happy hours, job fairs and events that showcase new companies looking for talent. The goal, Genovese said, is to have a workforce in which tech workers are highly connected with their peers.

"For people in sales or recruiting, part of their job is going out and meeting people," he said. "Most engineers are more likely to spend their time behind the white glow of their computer screens, and networking isn't part of their day. But when you get out and meet other people, it broadens your horizons by learning about what your peers are doing at their jobs. You may find out how they solve problems at their company, and that can help you do your own job better. You may also learn that what they're doing really lights your fire."

Next up for Genovese, 38, is a job fair that will take a different approach. This year, Door64 surveyed dozens of area companies and found they are struggling to find employees in four areas: Java developers, .NET developers, user interface design and software quality-assurance engineers.

As a result, the June 29 event, dubbed Austin's Painpoint Job Fair, will focus solely on those areas. So far, 31 companies, including Bazaarvoice, Rackspace, SailPoint and WhaleShark Media, have signed on, each paying $2,995 for a booth.

Painpoint, which takes place at the University of Texas' AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center, is free for job candidates, who must have experience in one of the areas. About 200 people are expected to attend.

Broadway Technology, which sells financial trading software, will be at Painpoint hoping to find .NET and quality-assurance engineers and senior developers. The company, which also has a co-headquarters in New York, develops and sells software and services to some of the giants of global finance, including Goldman Sachs.

Broadway doesn't usually participate in professional career fairs, which can be too general to pay off, said David Meeker, principal of the Austin headquarters.

Painpoint is an exception, he said, "because Matt has built an enormous network over the five years he has been running Door64, and he's very plugged into the needs of the local tech companies. He's concentrating on the positions we're having the most challenge filling, which is unique and means we will have a higher hit rate with the résumés."

Sixty-person Broadway plans to double its headcount over the next 18 to 24 months — mostly in Austin, if it can find the talent.

"We find that the people we want frequently have multiple offers very quickly. It's very competitive, and we have a friendly rivalry with a lot of the local tech companies," Meeker said. "Based on Matt's track record, we're optimistic about the quality of candidates we'll find at Painpoint."

Matt Hutchison of Columbus, Ohio, sees Painpoint as a chance to break into Austin's tech market. A 16-year quality-assurance veteran, Hutchison is now doing consulting work, is driving here for the job fair and has scheduled other interviews.

A move to Austin is attractive for a variety of reasons, he said. "Professionally, there's an exciting tech scene from startups to mature companies with a need for QA professionals. It has a strong economy, a warm climate, a great music scene and is family-friendly with so many things to do."

While he's in town, Hutchison is "looking to network, find the right company and secure a software QA/testing position where I can bring my experience. The first step is meeting people, and this seemed like a great place to start."

Genovese knows what it's like to build a network from scratch. After graduating from the Rochester Institute of Technology with a degree in computer engineering in 1997, he was recruited to Austin by Motorola Inc.

He spent 12 years with the company, which became Freescale, and had little contact with Austin-area tech professionals. To help himself and others meet people outside their own businesses, he started Door64.com. But Genovese's first attempt failed.

"I was focused on building the website; I was so focused on perfection that I was tweaking pixels that nobody saw," he said. "I needed to focus on building a community versus a website."

So Genovese began setting up coffees and lunches to share his vision with anyone who would listen. He hosted low-key networking coffees where recruiters could chat casually with job candidates.

"I realized that a website could never achieve what a face-to-face conversation can," said Genovese, who added tech fairs in 2009 to address something he noticed when reviewing his membership.

"I could see the accounts of people who registered on the website and what company they were from, and many of them were joining from companies I hadn't heard of," Genovese said.

The event was created to promote smaller companies that could benefit from the exposure.

The group's monthly happy hours are its biggest draws, with gatherings attracting several hundred.

Genovese acts as a host.

"There are many new people who tell me flat-out, 'I have never done anything like this, and I don't know what to do,' and I help walk them through it. It's not like walking into a bar where you don't know anybody.

"People are specifically here to meet each other, and once you make a couple introductions, they realize they have a lot in common with folks and there's a lot to discuss."

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