

Developing Top Workplaces

Tech Companies Earn Initial Recognition

By Matt Ottinger

In the recruitment game, the stakes have been raised for tech companies looking to attract the top talent from Indiana and beyond. This has some of the state's upstart businesses looking to maximize their appeal.

Central Indiana tech companies Blackboard, Emarsys North America, CleanSlate and Performance Assessment Network (PAN) are all celebrating their first year of being named to the Best Places to Work in Indiana list. They, and others, are striving to make their workplace cultures as attractive as possible.

A broad reach

Cloud marketing platform provider Emarsys credits a global influence toward its practices and having an overseas operation provides an added perspective.

"Being a global organization with headquarters in Europe (Austria), one advantage we have is taking that European culture as we built out our U.S. team," explains Sean Brady, president of Americas. "In Europe, they're really about quality of life and balancing work and home life, so they're known for taking holidays. We gave our employees four weeks of vacation a year (in addition to sick leave)."

Leading education technology company

Blackboard also takes cues from its other locations to boost morale in its Indianapolis office.

"Blackboard is a pretty distributed organization," relays Tim Tomlinson, vice president of software engineering. "We have the development center here, and we're headquartered in (Washington D.C.), and another development center in Austin, and some offshore locations in the Czech Republic and China."

Family brand

Being a tech-oriented company also has its benefits when it comes to enhancing internal connections.

"We do provide a lot of tools to support the virtual workplace environment," Tomlinson notes. "We actually use our own Collaborate product as our online meeting location with online video, chat and document sharing."

Sometimes technology can be about limiting distractions to help your staff focus.

"It's funny, our core is around email and marketing software technology, but we actually try to help our team not get as much email," Brady remarks. "We leverage (instant messaging) tools like HipChat, so people can communicate with each other without having to blow up inboxes."

Video conferencing is also a tool global companies can use to bridge the distance divide.

"Yesterday was our town hall," Brady adds. "Once a month, I speak to the entire

Americas team through video conferencing about what's going on in the business. We do a lot of sharing praise of employees, but we want our remote employees to feel connected to it."

Parlaying strengths and relationships with other local companies can also play a role.

"We also use (Indianapolis-based training software creator) Lessonly," Brady reveals. "Many organizations forget how important it is to onboard people properly. One of the most emotional decisions people make is to switch jobs, so the first experience they have should comfort them to let them know they did the right thing. We use Lessonly to get them to a competent level in a certain period of time."

Beeping and bopping to better health

The benefits of a robust wellness program are often touted by progressive businesses; tech companies are no different. At Carmel-based CleanSlate – a custom software solutions provider and IBM reseller known as Preferred Partner until 2017 – a focus on health is a critical component of its Best Places culture.

"Through our insurance provider, we have activity trackers, like a Fitbit, that have challenges daily, so it challenges you to hit a certain number of steps and get up and walk for five minutes, six times a day," explains CEO John Loveys. "Once you achieve these challenges, you get money from the insurance company into a health savings account."

"It's funny, they beep when you're due for your next walk, and every morning or afternoon, I hear these beeping all over the office," he adds. "We're paying a little extra to the insurance company to make this available to employees."

Aside from cardio work and healthy eating, wellness also encompasses mental health. And at PAN – a thriving workforce assessment developer in Carmel that was recently acquired by California-based PSI – connections with co-workers can go a long way in boosting it.

"On at least a monthly basis, we try to get together in a social environment to get to know each other as friends as well as the professional nature of what we do," notes CEO Jim Holm. "Whether it's a barbecue or bowling or sporting event, we try to make sure those opportunities exist. It's important to know



CleanSlate employees don't need trick shots or a Magic 8 Ball to tell them if their workplace culture is positive: All signs point to "yes."



PAN employees enjoy the “peace” of mind of having team unity, while monthly recognition of staff accomplishments is a main focus, according to CEO Jim Holm.

people across the organization and not just those we work with directly.”

Keeping it lively is also the name of the game for many.

“We like to have fun and have a casual office environment,” Tomlinson says. “We have a game room with a foosball table and video game machines and there’s always something going on. We try to have a Happy Hour in the office a couple times a month and bring in lunch a few times a month.”

Emarsys also allows employees to turn in gym membership

receipts for reimbursement and employees have access to Market Tower’s workout facilities. A little indulging is also encouraged as the company periodically hosts an ice cream truck for its staff.

Community action

A common theme permeating top workplaces is that a cohesive internal community is bolstered by dedication to the community as a whole. That’s why giving back is imperative.

“It’s one thing to be in a community, but it’s another to be a part of it,” Brady surmises. “So we have a committee here that’s focused on what our charity giving looks like each year. Last year, we supported Nextech because we want to help younger folks get into technology.

“This year, the team came to me and said they want to focus on pets and the environment, and we want to support some families through the holidays,” he adds. “You want to have meaning in what you do every day and with the people you work with.”

Enhancing education is a point of passion at PAN. Employees with strong feelings about particular charities are encouraged to make suggestions.

“We’ve adopted an elementary school (Greenbriar Elementary in Indianapolis) and provide them with coats and snack packs for the kids,” Holm relays. “Three or four times a year, the staff puts in considerable effort to help that school out.”

CleanSlate chooses three organizations to support each year, counting Habitat for Humanity, Peyton Manning Children’s Hospital and United Christmas Service as recent beneficiaries, according to Loveys.

Bring ‘em in – and on

Building a culture means recruiting top talent – and surrounding

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that talent with other high achievers.

"We participate in the (TechPoint) Xtern program and Orr Fellowship, and we generally get really good young talent," Holm expounds. "If we're looking for first-time tech talent in the state, we generally find that here. If we're looking for senior tech talent, we'll look in Chicago and maybe a couple of other markets through search firms."

Aside from the traditional workplace benefits or on-site facilities, an attractive amenity at a tech company is simply the ability to create.

"Another thing we offer is creative freedom," Loveys states. "If you have an idea either for an application you want to build for a client or a solution you want to build for a customer, you can pitch it to management. We don't put people in a box or tell them, 'This is the only thing you can do.'"

These combined factors are helping companies separate themselves from competitors. The leaders consider placement on the Best Places to Work list an achievement worth promoting to potential hires.

"We'll definitely use it to recruit," Holm concludes. "There are others on the list who have used it against us in the past, so I think it will help. We plan to actively market the award on our web site and in recruitment activities."

RESOURCES: Sean Brady, Emarsys North America, at www.emarsys.com | Jim Holm, Performance Assessment Network, at www.panpowered.com | John Loveys, CleanSlate, at www.cleanslatetg.com | Tim Tomlinson, Blackboard, at www.blackboard.com