

L.A.'s FASTEST GROWING PRIVATE COMPANIES

Two-Year Growth: 9,126 percent

L.A. Business Journal's #1 Fastest Growing Company - David Lewis Co.

DAVID Lewis was bred on the traditional methods of recruiting.

His father owned a financial recruiting firm and after working in the family business for six years, Lewis left to found David Lewis Co.

But while working to fill positions with the most qualified candidates, he realized that corporations were changing too fast to rely on the old ways.

"Most financial executives look at an organizational chart and think if they can fill all the boxes with the right people the company will move to a static state of everlasting happiness," said Lewis, who holds a master's degree in international economics from Georgetown University. "But the static model doesn't work anymore."

Lewis saw that people were changing jobs every three to four years, and that companies are never fully staffed. He also saw demand for project-based hiring and in 1998, he revamped his Woodland Hills-based company to focus on project-based financial consulting.

"There's a 50- to 60-year business trend toward 'projectizing' work and we're riding that trend," Lewis said.

Lewis built his recruiting business primarily through cold calls and the occasional referral. When he re-focused on consulting, many of his recruiting contacts came along and used his consulting services. When client contacts moved to different companies, they would go back to him with new requests.

A typical project will come up when, say, a company's controller leaves. Lewis examines the position to see what the highest priorities are—tax statements vs. administration, for example. Then he identifies someone on his staff with the right experience, abilities and availability. There's a meeting with the client to make sure that the fit is right, and work commences.

With 2003 revenues projected around \$8 million, Lewis says his biggest challenge is maintaining the infrastructure to support rampant growth. His company has deployed consultants in health care, music, entertainment, food, real estate and agriculture. Current and former clients include Nestle USA, Walt Disney Co. and ConAgra Foods Inc.

Unlike many consulting firms, Lewis' employees are on salary and not paid on a per-project basis. All have experience at Big 4 accounting firms or in Fortune 1,000 companies.

"We want our employees to focus on taking care of our clients, not worrying about whether they'll get pulled from a project before the work is done," he said.

Lewis didn't begin marketing his firm until this year, though the company has recently launched a new Web site and created an internal marketing department.

His next goal is to double the number of consultants he employs and expand into 10 new metropolitan markets within five years. "It's not just about hiring good people and finding work every day," he said. "It's trying to help clients change their view of how to organize and execute the work they have."

— Simone Kaplan