

Business

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A pressing need to know

Local business applies new technology to find out what's really on workers' and employers' minds.

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In this Information Age people expect to find answers to questions in the time it takes to press a button.

Employers and their employees are among the most itchy — where a sense of urgency surrounds almost every business decision.

A Lancaster County business consulting firm has laid its hands

on a computerized survey tool that has already begun to satisfy local business people's need to know.

Success Performance Solutions, Leola, broke new ground last month when it conducted an electronic survey at the annual Job Fair, sponsored by The Lancaster Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

The Internet-based program — called InterVey.com — was used in a survey of more than 300 job fair attendees.

The startling discovery? Most of the job fair visitors were already employed. Surprise, surprise. Until then, most business owners believed the job fair primarily attracted unemployed people.

At the end of the day, the survey drove home the point that in this age of 2.3 percent local unemployment it's an employee's job market.

Dr. Ira S. Wolfe, a former den-

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Sunday News/Jeff Ruppenthal
Dr. Ira S. Wolfe, a former dentist and president of Success Performance Solutions, Leola, launched an electronic survey of the Lancaster County work force at last month's business expo. The new Internet-based survey tool is a product of InterVey Inc., Metairie, La.

Survey: Getting new information fast

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tist and president of Success Performance Solutions, said the information immediately challenged small businesses "to look differently at how we can offer better career opportunities to retain workers."

The remarkable thing about the survey data, Wolfe said, is the Lancaster business community did not have to wait weeks or even months to find out that there are some dissatisfied workers out looking for a better deal.

InterVey, Wolfe said, shortens the time a survey-taker spends interviewing and analyzing information. "The major advantage is it provides information in real time," he said.

Besides employee satisfaction polls, InterVey is used by companies to measure customer satisfaction, lobby for legislative changes and collect statistics to develop budgets and strategic plans.

It's the fast turnaround time that InterVey's owners believe will propel the electronic polling product into wide use.

Bill Costello and Rodney Cox are partners in InterVey Inc., Metairie, La.

Costello, who has a doctorate in industrial psychology, said the key to success in business today is "knowledge management." The faster a company can obtain data and put it to use, the more of an advantage it has over its competitors.

"The information age has placed us at a point where we can't gather information fast enough," Cox said. "We need products to help us collect knowledge and information."

The Internet link enables the survey audience to respond via e-mail — a major component of

real-time analysis. For instance, Cox said, in a company-wide survey, nearly all employees will respond almost immediately in an e-mail format vs. a small percentage of dutiful workers using the "paper and pencil" method.

Wolfe, of Success Performance Solutions, said he uses both paper and pencil and e-mail. In some cases, the people being polled don't have access to the Internet. Still, the data input and crunching is so fast, Wolfe is able to provide survey results within hours.

Wolfe considers the job fair survey InterVey's "pilot project." Now, his company is going a big step further.

During most of November, the company will poll Lancaster County companies and employees on work force issues. The results of the survey will be revealed at the county's first-ever Workforce Investment Board Summit, Thursday, Nov. 30.

The survey is meant to help summit participants identify Lancaster's specific employment issues and needs, Wolfe said.

The survey was launched at the chamber's business expo Oct. 25 and 26. After the first two days of the survey, Wolfe discovered employees are concerned most about getting more leisure time and

health insurance (in both cases, 26 of 103 respondents). The issues most important to those surveyed were an ability to balance work and family life (32/103) and better pay (20/103).

As for businesses, 17 of 73 surveyed say the local labor shortage has slowed their company's ability to grow. The businesses also believe the labor shortage means there are too few workers available (11/74) and there are not enough skilled workers (35/74).

To access the online survey, go to the chamber Web site at www.lancaster-chamber.com or Success Performance Solutions site at www.super-solutions.com. For a paper copy, call Success Performance Solutions at 656-4632.