

# HR Innovator

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

### Coffee and a Headset

We're a society of trends, fads, and fashions, for better and worse—and when the most powerful trends begin to stamp our daily lives, we can't imagine life without them. Few companies are trendier, for example, than Starbucks, the Seattle-based coffee empire. Those of us whose lifestyles are somewhat fueled by Starbucks' strong brews and tempting lattes know the potency of its business strategy.

Crucially, though, Starbucks is about more than profit margins. It's one of the most environmentally conscious companies around, and involves itself with a host of positive social programs and causes. For the purposes of this magazine, however, Starbucks is all about HR policies that address the reality of hourly workers in a service economy.

With its progressive benefits—including quality affordable health-care—Starbucks stands apart, and our cover story, "Starbucks' Central Perk" (page 24), describes how. Chicago author Robert Reed takes us into the colorful world of baristas—and inside the HR strategies that are turning them into loyal, engaged employees, any number of whom may wind up running the company.

Then there's Plantronics, another trend-setter ("Plantronics Feels the Force," page 30). Based (where else?) in California, this company has been the leader in communications headsets for more than 40 years. By now, there's hardly a video gamer or cell-phone user who hasn't been exposed to Plantronics' stylish, lightweight, state-of-the-art headgear. But the company needs to recruit engineers and tech professionals

from a specialized pool, so its strategy requires innovative approaches to meeting its recruitment goals.

These stories introduce us to sizeable companies who are finding essential as well as high-tech ways to win the war for talent. But we're just as proud to be featuring a small vendor company, Nobscot—based in, of all places, Hawaii—which produces the sort of HR software that large companies are turning to in order to keep winning. Indeed, Nobscot ("Goodbye—and Aloha!," page 35) provides crucial exit-interviewing programs—and now offers a mentoring software that is something of an industry first.

And speaking of industry firsts, we're proud to be the first HR magazine in the U.S. to offer a complete, integrated digital version to our readers and subscribers. That's right—*HR Innovator* is now available in both a traditional print version and as a digital magazine that brings every page, every graphic, and every advertiser to you on your computer screen—where you can zoom in, print pages, link to websites, and much more! Find out about this on page 40, and see how we're not only reporting HR trends but also setting them.



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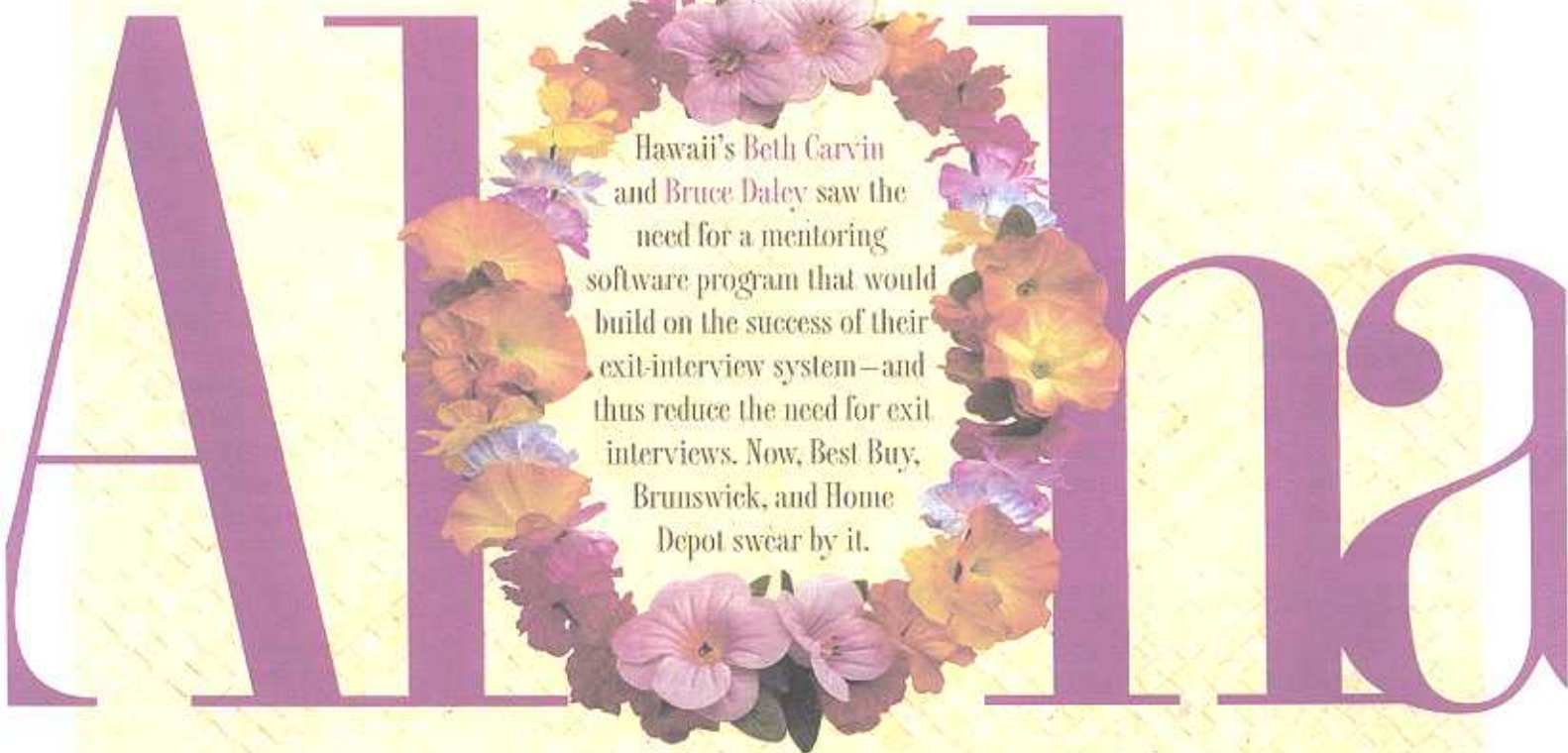


HR



# innovator

Goodbye—and



# ALOHA

Hawaii's Beth Carvin and Bruce Daley saw the need for a mentoring software program that would build on the success of their exit-interview system—and thus reduce the need for exit interviews. Now, Best Buy, Brunswick, and Home Depot swear by it.

STORY BY MATT DAMSKER

You could say that **Nobscot Corp.**, a small Honolulu, Hawaii-based firm, connects with employees who are leaving—and arriving. Either way, it's been "Aloha!" since 2000, when Nobscot pioneered a software solution called WebExit for companies to manage their exit-interview process. Now Nobscot has Mentor Scout, a software program that matches new employees with mentors—all as a means of reducing turnover and avoiding those exit interviews.

If that's an irony, it's a sweet one for Nobscot co-founder/CEO Beth Carvin and co-founder Bruce Daley, the software wizard who now serves as president of the Mentor Scout division. When they

founded Nobscot in Honolulu (Nobscot is actually a Native American word which connects with Daley's and Carvin's New England roots), they had no idea that their innovative WebExit system would lead to an equally innovative mentor-match software. The idea came about almost by accident, as Carvin tells it.

"I was a member of an unofficial SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management) online forum, and there was a desire on the part of many of the participants to informally set up a mentoring program," Carvin recalls. "But matching people up was ultimately a manual process, and it seemed to me there had to be a better way. I looked around and saw there wasn't a whole lot on the market in terms of software that could do the job of matching mentors, and when I mentioned this to Bruce, he said, 'Let's just make it ourselves, then.'"

Daley designed the program, called Mentor Scout, donated it to Carvin's online HR group, and soon the members were using it to enter their profiles, seek out mentors, and match up. "It was a huge success," Carvin recounts. "Soon there were 200 mentors and mentees, a lot of people serving as both, and these were all HR professionals. It didn't take long to figure that this could connect to what we had already established with WebExit."

Indeed, since its debut, WebExit has established itself as the leading exit-interview automation system, now in use by organizations in more than 20 countries. The recently introduced upgrade of WebExit not only offers a more robust database and security features but also an optional language module that supports more than 15 languages, including Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. In a working world increasingly

populated by Asian employees, the comfort level afforded by this native-language capability is increasingly vital for capturing the best information.

"All along, WebExit has been identifying areas that cause employee turnover," Carvin says. "And as we studied these areas, we started to see that of all the problems cited by employees during exit interviews, most of them could be solved by good mentoring programs. The research in this area is actually amazing. Some of it shows that the right mentoring programs can bring turnover down to as little as 4 percent from 64 percent, in fields like nursing assistance."

With the Mentor Scout program in hand, Carvin explains, Nobscot was ready to market its innovation as a problem solver for the career-development, managerial, and onboarding issues that employees could have addressed by various mentoring relationships.

*Nobscot's Daley and Carvin:  
From exits to arrivals.*



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"We weren't really doing much marketing, though," Carvin says, "before **Brunswick**, the leisure products company, learned about Mentor Scout and became the first corporate client to give it a try. It was looking for a way to automate the whole mentor-matching process, which up to that point had been manual, with little yellow notes stuck all over a wall—you know, let's put this person with that person."

With Mentor Scout's employee self-service model, Brunswick employees can access a branded mentor program via computer, fill out an employee profile, perform a search and, based on various criteria, receive mentor recommendations—

ranging from a 100 percent "match" to 80, or 60, or 50 percent. The prospective mentor can accept or decline the employee's electronic invitation, but once communication is established, it remains confidential.

For its large retail customers, such as **Home Depot** and **Best Buy**, Mentor Scout can function differently.

"As opposed to the employee self-service method," says Carvin, "a company may want to have its mentoring coordinators ultimately control the matches. One of our customers utilizes Mentor Scout to automate the process on one hand, but maintain oversight on the other. Employees fill out the profiles online, search for their mentors, designate their top choices, and then the mentoring coordinators or mentoring council can take all that into account and have the final say as to who would be the best mentor."

Carvin has been a Hawaiian for some 15 years, having worked as an HR officer for **BancWest** in Honolulu, and before that in the recruiting business. Bruce Daley's background in software development led him to a role with **Hewlett-Packard** before he chose to light out on his own with Carvin.

"I was a good match between the two of us," Carvin says, "with my background in HR and Bruce's ability to turn ideas into software. At this point, we're still a little company—lean, nimble, and responsive. I do remember, though, that when I was working at the bank I very much wanted a mentoring program, which we never got around to. So now we're answering that need."

Carvin notes that while some people wonder at her firm's island location, "Honolulu is a thriving business community, and a software/Internet business like ours doesn't need to be in a particular place. Anyone who thinks of Hawaii as just grass skirts doesn't know it very well. We've got a more than 90-percent client-retention rate, so we're more than a novelty, and our 75 accounts include really large companies like **Campbell Soup**, which has multiple divisions. Now we're really creating a niche for ourselves—moving from identifying the HR issues with WebExit, to solving them with Mentor Scout."

[www.nobscot.com](http://www.nobscot.com)

