

Chameleon Tech seeks good match in staffing

BY [Brad Broberg](#)
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Melissa Acton and Michael Luckenbaugh co-founded a technical staffing company the same year the dot-com bubble burst. They didn't have a death wish. They had a dream.

"We wanted to be unique in our industry," said Acton. "The Nordstrom's, so to speak, of staffing."

Their vision paid off. Launched in 2000, Chameleon Technologies Inc. not only survived the tech wreck, it has thrived. Revenue doubled each of the past two years, climbing from \$610,000 in 2003 to \$2.33 million in 2005, and the company's clients include the likes of Costco, Safeco and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

"All the numbers indicate we'll double again this year," said Luckenbaugh. "The fact that we continue to do that is pretty crazy, actually."

What's really crazy is that Chameleon's growth could be even more impressive, say its founders, but that would mean compromising their vision. "We're not volume-based," said Acton.

Located in Kirkland, Chameleon focuses on customer service, a philosophy that extends to clients and candidates alike. "Some clients say, 'I don't care. I just want to see the résumés,'" said Acton. That's not Chameleon's style. "We're not just interested in what our clients want," said Acton. "We're interested in our candidates. We want a good match."

Chameleon, which provides both contract and permanent staffing services, goes beyond merely collecting, reviewing and forwarding résumés. It interviews every candidate -- in person. "You can't assess their soft skills over the phone," said Acton.

Acton and Luckenbaugh met through mutual friends. They'd both been working in the staffing industry since 1995 and at one time worked together before founding Chameleon.

"We wanted to do something different ... and the only way to do those things was have our own business," said Luckenbaugh.

In most respects, 2000 wasn't the ideal time to start a technical staffing company. Yet there were advantages. The downturn yielded great deals on office space and equipment, said Luckenbaugh.

The business environment has come full circle since 2000.

"When we started our company, people just wanted to work," said Luckenbaugh. "Right now, if anything, there is a lack of qualified candidates for openings ... they can pick and choose."

That puts a premium on recruiting and retaining qualified people. Chameleon offers them a competitive benefits package -- including the same health care plan as Acton and Luckenbaugh -- and a pay raise after one year.

Group outings to Seattle Mariners games and the Spaghetti Factory also build loyalty. Plus, Chameleon stays in touch with its people during their assignments to make sure they're happy and to head off any problems that might tempt them to quit. "We want to be proactive," said Luckenbaugh.

In an industry as cyclical as staffing, trying to make sure everyone has a positive experience is worth the effort, said Acton. "It's amazing how many candidates have become clients and how many clients five years later are looking for jobs and calling us," she said.

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