

WORKPLACE DIVERSITY

Indian companies looking beyond regular talent reserves

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NEW DELHI

Indian companies are beginning to look beyond the traditional talent pool while hiring employees, and derive a competitive advantage. Casting a wider net to tap women who have fallen outside the regular talent reserve, soft drinks company **PepsiCo India Holdings Pvt. Ltd** has tied up with leading job portal **Jobstreet.com** to post jobs targeted only at women.

Postings include both full-time and part-time jobs, consulting, sales and marketing roles with options such as working out of home and flexible timings. "This initiative is targeted at women in different stages of career who may have left their jobs for personal or family reasons," says Pavan Bhatia, executive director of human resources at **PepsiCo India**. "These women are experienced and hence, a precious resource for companies," adds Bhatia.

PepsiCo India, whose US parent is headed by India-born chief executive Indra Nooyi, ranked among the most powerful women in business, is the first company to launch such an exercise. Companies have traditionally hired their own former female employees back into the workforce.

Jobstreet.com, part of media conglomerate **Network 18**, says a targeted website will help companies harness the female talent pool. "Most job portals are skewed towards men and this sort of association will

help target women employees specifically," says Amit Jha, online marketing manager at **Jobstreet.com India Pvt. Ltd**.

Currently, the webpage (<http://in.jobstreet.com/company/PepsiCo/index.html>) features job postings at **Pepsico** only but the company plans to expand it into an industry-wide initiative. The beverage company is currently in talks with several companies such as **Microsoft India**, **IBM India**, **RPG Group** and **Fidelity Fund Management**, to get them to post their jobs for women on its site as well. **Jobstreet**, too, is encouraging its multinational clients to use the platform. "As we scale up, the **PepsiCo-Jobstreet** initiative will have several companies advertising jobs for women," says Jha, adding that, later, the site will seek to target differently abled persons and former armed forces personnel.

Pepsico says it felt the need to expand its diversity programme beyond the organization. "We need to see diversity and inclusion from a larger perspective," says Bhatia, adding that the company saw better retention rates since it offered mothers the option of working half days. **PepsiCo** has also set inclusion-related objectives for all managers, and conducts biannual surveys to assess workplace diversity.

Currently, women account for around 33% of its top management and 15% of the rest of the workforce. Two years ago, women accounted for only 5% of **Pepsi's** total number of employees, says Bhatia.

As companies look at ways

to expand the available talent pool, diversity is being taken more seriously than ever. Besides the information technology and consulting sectors, even traditional companies are looking at engaging professionals who need a flexible work environment. "Programmes like the latest **Pepsi** initiative not only give opportunity to women to get back to work but also the companies to widen the talent base," says Prabir Jha, global head of human resources at **Dr Reddy's Laboratories Ltd**. "More than one-third of our campus hires this year were women."

In March this year, the **Tata** group launched a second career internship programme for women who have taken a career break of less than eight years. As part of the programme, selected candidates get an opportunity to work on a business project by **Tata** group companies, at the end of which they will have the option of joining full-time.

Human resources managers say that smart companies know that flexible workplaces are a way to attract and retain not just women but a majority of the workforce outside the regular talent pool. Although women mostly opt out of work to attend to family and other needs, men too need time off for personal commitments. "Flexible work policies can address these issues and retain employees better," says Jha of **Dr Reddy's**, with a caveat that not every industry may be able to offer a similar degree of flexibility because of the nature of their business.