

# Seasoned pros



MARINA SAMOVSKY / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Gray Hair Management partners Jack R. Heyden (left) and Scott Kane found jobs for 862 executive clients last year. The Deerfield-based company uses networking and training to help former and present executives land jobs.

## Gray Hair network targets execs between jobs

By Long Hwa-shu  
STAFF WRITER

Networking, the art of getting connected in the job market, landed Scott Kane a chief operating officer's position in a music company in Vernon Hills three years ago.

After eight months on the job, Kane's entrepreneurial calling got the better of him. Armed with a data base of people he had met or connected through e-mail while he was job hunting, he decided to go out on his own.

He founded Gray Hair Management in Deerfield to help people find work through networking and branding.

"Brand yourself as if you were a can of

soup on a shelf," said Kane, former president of Optimus, a television commercial production company, with all seriousness. Optimus is wholly owned by Anheuser-Busch, the beer company.

"The trick is to see that can moved from the shelf to a cart and then all the way to the checkout. You know some people do change their minds and put things back on the shelf," added Kane, who joined Telemation Productions in Chicago as a television director and rose to become executive vice president. He then saw it turned into a nationally recognized television commercial company.

Kane aimed high from the start.

"Our clients are executives between jobs. They were making \$100,000 or

more, which means their next job will have to pay as much or more," said Kane, who has a degree in cinematography and television from Southern Illinois University.

Many of them, he said, have been laid off in corporate reshuffling or downsizing. Others are looking for greener pastures.

Last year, he and his partner, Jack Heyden, helped 862 executives find jobs through Internet networking, a record they took great pride in view of the tight job market.

"Statistically, 85 percent of the people in the job market found their jobs

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through the people they knew. The more people you know, the better are your chances," said Kane.

Heyden, a former executive with the now-closed Continental Illinois National Bank, joined Kane in November 2000. The two met through networking while both were looking for work.

Heyden's strong suit is in executive coaching. A management consultant with an MBA from the University of California, he was senior vice president for training and development at the Illinois Bankers Association. At Continental, he was human resources officer. So the two complement each other nicely.

### A touch of gray

"The people who come to us have at least 15 years of experience either as a vice president or a manager in a company. They are seasoned, many with a touch of gray in their hair," said Heyden, who teaches at the Lake Forest School of Management.

Kane said years ago he was talking to the owner of a start-up company when the man mentioned the need to have someone with gray hair in his company. That, he said, inspired him to name his company Gray Hair. Both Kane, who is 57, and Heyden, 55, have a touch of gray in their hair.

The name, said Kane, has nothing to do with old age or senior citizens.

"It means we're interested in those who are experienced and seasoned. It won't hurt if they have a touch of gray hair," said Kane.

"But age should be no barrier. If you can solve problems and bring additional revenue to a company, they would hire you no matter how old you are," he added.

For \$75, a "gray hair" can become a life member of the company's network which boasts a data base of 6,000 members from across the nation and abroad — an eight-fold increase from 2001. Members communicate and swap job leads by e-mail.

"We have members from China, India, Canada, England, Turkey and Mexico. But 35 percent of the membership is from the Chicago area," said Kane, stressing the \$75 is a one-time fee.

In addition to networking, Gray Hair also provides individualized coaching — from how to write a resume, repackage and brand oneself, carry elevator talk, do the interview and get the job. For coaching, the company charges the equivalent of two weeks' pay or about \$5,000 or more.

"As a coach, I help executives build career skills so that they get a better job and make more money," said Heyden.

For networking, the company holds four events a month, usually

breakfasts or cocktails. At a breakfast this past week at the Mission Hills Country Club in Northbrook, 146 attended. To maximize exposure and multiple connections, attendees change tables several times during the meeting.

"There are a lot of talents there," Kane said of the attendees.

"But you have to have the right connection to find a job. The important thing is not only what you know, but whom you know."

Zeno Wisniewski of Hoffman Estates apparently found two right people through networking. A year ago at 54, he was looking for a job after the benefits administration company where he was the chief operating officer got sold. He joined Gray Hair's network and started attending meetings.

Today, he and the two members he met at networking are partners of Plan Sponsors Advisors in Chicago, a financial consulting company they formed late last year to focus on 401(k) investing.

"We're starting to bring clients aboard. We wouldn't be where we are if it weren't for Gray Hair," said an energized Wisniewski.

"They provided us a safe harbor in the storm. Not only did they give us professional help, but also psychological support in time of an enormous emotional stress," he added.

George Humphreys of South Barrington joined the Gray Hair network after a Naperville software company where he was the vice president of business development downsized. He said the coaching he received from Gray Hair helped him to land a job as a district sales manager with Peopleclick, a software company in Raleigh, N.C.

"They taught me how to brand my unique identity and market myself accordingly. It worked," he said.

The coaching, he added, "helped me to get connected to the hidden job market which doesn't post openings publicly and is known only to insiders."

While the new job does not pay as much as the old job, Humphreys, with a wife and three children — one in college and two in high school — said he is happy with his new job for which he works out of his home.

Flush with their success, Kane said he and his partner are looking to reach out to markets in Atlanta, Dallas, New York, and also in California and Canada through licensing.

Forecasting for this year's performance, he said, "The job market is by no means out of the slump, but the increase in Gray Hair landings indicate that there are reasons to be more optimistic."

Companies, he said, are beginning to hire back executive talents which are key to their success.

### On the Net

The company's Web site is [www.grayhairmanagement.com](http://www.grayhairmanagement.com).

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Jack R. Heyden, Gray Hair Management