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Google joins Microsoft in opening Madison office

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Madison, Wis. - For the second time in a week, a major technology firm has announced the opening of an office in Madison.

Last week, it was Microsoft. This time, it's search giant Google, which cited the local labor pool and the community's focus on education for the opening of an engineering office that will concentrate on hardware and software systems design.

The Madison office, located on Doty Street, actually has been open for several months and is managed by Google's Jim Laudon, who attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison and earned a Ph.D. from Stanford University.

"We are opening an office in Madison because the city offers an excellent quality of life, a deep local talent pool, and commitment to education at all levels, including the University of Wisconsin," Sunny Gettinger, global communications and public affairs manager for Google, said in a statement.

Google, based in Mountain View, Calif., had wanted the office to be run by retired UW-Madison professor Jim Smith, who worked in the university's electrical and computer engineering department. Smith, who declined the offer, was noted for his work in computer architecture and was working to reduce the power consumption of computers.

"We had one of the best computer architecture groups in the world at UW," said Guri Sohi, chairman of UW-Madison's computer science department.

In Laudon, they have a technology professional who was with Sun Microsystems and was involved in the design of Niagara 2, which Sun touts as the world's fastest performing and one of the most energy efficient computer processing units. Laudon also was an undergraduate student of Sohi's in the mid 1980s.

Madison benefits

Last week, Microsoft announced it would open the Jim Gray Systems Lab to innovate in the area of database technology, an area where it has fallen behind competitive rivals.

One of Microsoft's rivals, not in database technology but for supremacy in search and online advertising, is Google.

Google's Madison office employs about 10 people, and is advertising several openings. Like the advanced computer lab that Microsoft plans to open, UW-Madison computer professors said the Google office should bring technology benefits to Madison.

Parmesh Ramanathan, a professor in UW-Madison's electrical and computer-engineering department believes graduate and undergraduate students will have more opportunities to work on internship and research projects during their degree programs. He also believes Wisconsin will be able to retain more students after graduation, and improve its chances of recruiting top faculty.

Potential faculty hires in electrical and computer engineering and computer science often have "significant others" who also work in high-tech, Ramanathan noted. "The presence of high-tech companies will make it easier for the significant others to pursue their career objectives in Madison," he said.

The Google and Microsoft offices also could result in more funding for research. Ramanathan cited as an example the National Science Foundation's recent call for a proposal on data-intensive computing. "The presence of Google and Microsoft will make it easier for our faculty to win such funding," Ramanathan said.

Sohi agreed that increased visibility resulting from Google's presence should bring more interest in information technology and computer science from students, other companies, and funding sources.

As for the company's presence in Madison, Ramanathan speculated that Google may be interested in the UW's expertise in computer architecture and energy efficiency because its large server farms consume vast amounts of power and have tremendous cooling needs.

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