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Caitlin MacGregor, CEO of Plum, says it can be a challenge to convince companies that there is a better way to assess job candidates than by reviewing their resumes.

# Plum's hiring tool measures attitude as well as intelligence

Lindsay Purchase, Special to the Record

**S**kim cover letters. Parse resumés for key skills and experience. Interview top candidates. Select a hire.

This is the standard process followed by many hiring managers, but according to local startup Plum, it's failing employers.

"We need a new way of shortlisting that comes before the bias of that resumé and interview," Plum CEO and co-founder Caitlin MacGregor says.

Plum offers businesses a predictive

## BEYOND THE RESUMÉ

hiring tool that filters job applicants through what it views as two crucial metrics — intelligence and attitude. It says most failed hires are due to attitude, not skills, a mistake that can be costly and lower office morale.

MacGregor started Plum in 2012 with Christine Bird, who left the company this summer. The company has been in the market with its current product for about two years and has 70 active clients who pay

a monthly fee to access its service.

First, Plum asks hiring managers and top performers to complete a six-minute survey to define the criteria for the job. Then, all applicants must fill out a 25-minute assessment, which evaluates problem-solving ability, personality and social intelligence.

Each answer requires trade-offs and, without knowing what the employer has prioritized, MacGregor says applicants can't game the system.

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diagnostic platform that uses a Bluetooth module. As well as immediate alerts, the device will notify vehicle owners about recommended service intervals or recalls.

Essentially, Pitstop is an objective third party, says Bhardwaj. It establishes a bond of trust between the driver of the car and the technician who will fix it.

And Bhardwaj knows all about trust. His father has run several auto repair shops in the Toronto area, and he grew up around cars and around the people who repair them. He also understands that car owners don't always trust a mechanic's motives.

"Let's remove all the ambiguity and get the car back on the road as soon as possible," says Bhardwaj.

He says his device has "the ability to

stop vehicles from breaking down on the side of the road." He adds that "we have to make the way we travel more effective."

Bhardwaj graduated from the University of Waterloo with a degree in electrical engineering and partnered with another UW grad, Yashin Shah, a specialist in business and marketing. For now, the company is working out of the Velocity Garage in downtown Kitchener. There are 14 employees, including six full-time.

Bhardwaj started work on Pitstop early in 2013, and it's been on the market since February. So far, in addition to the Bhardwaj family auto shops, seven auto dealerships have bought into the Pitstop system, including four in Waterloo Region — Cambridge Toyota, Dean Myers Chrysler, Galt Chrysler and Parkway Ford.

The dealers install the Pitstop devices at no charge to their customers. They pay

between \$600 and \$1,000 for the necessary software and \$50 per unit.

"For a business to operate, it's all about trust, transparency and convenience," says Bhardwaj.

Pitstop, which has won a long list of awards, accolades and cash prizes, is the second auto-related product that Ansik has put on the market. Two years ago, after becoming aware of too many in-shop injuries to auto technicians, Bhardwaj's team developed a device called Shocklock, "a super heavy-duty mechanical device" that prevents the hood and of a car from falling down on the technician working on the engine.

The device is sold online directly to auto technicians. So far, more than 1,000 units have been delivered to customers in North America, Australia and Europe, the company says. ■

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An algorithm combines the results of the employer survey and the applicant assessment to give each candidate a match score, which can then be used to shortlist candidates.

TrueIT has used Plum to hire up to 15 employees since June 2015, says Brandon Conkins, director of IT services at the technology services provider. The company, based in North Dakota, realized it needed to make better hires, he says, and uses Plum to look beyond experience.

Plum "really helps break down the science of what we should be looking for," Conkins says, adding that the new hires have been "absolutely perfect."

Since TrueIT began using Plum, Conkins says the company has found it doesn't always need to look at resumés to make hiring decisions.

Eighty per cent of Plum's business is in the United States, where it has been able to reach more customers and boost sales thanks to winning US\$250,000 in the 43North competition in 2015. The win allowed Plum to open an office in 43North's incubator in Buffalo.

Plum has also raised more than \$1 million from angel investors and is currently raising a bridge round of funding

with the aim of getting to a break-even position in 2017.

The funds have allowed the team to grow from an initial four people to 12, giving Plum the capacity to work on two new products MacGregor calls "game changers." One offers businesses the ability to gather data on their teams to optimize employees' strengths, while the other quantifies company culture and how employees fit within it.

MacGregor has found that while there's a definite need to upend the hiring process with data and behavioural analysis, it can be difficult to convince executives to buy in.

"The market's not necessarily ready to put resumés in second place. They're not necessarily ready to let science help them shortlist," she says. "It's definitely what's needed, and there are definitely some companies that want it, but there's a lot of hesitation for somebody to stick their neck out and make a change."

The new products give Plum a way to get its foot in the door with new customers, MacGregor says.

"Once they have that data and insight on their existing team, there's no way they're going to let a new potential hire walk through their doors without knowing that same information and how they

fit against that basic benchmark that they've created internally," she says.

As MacGregor has navigated the challenges of growing the business, she's had a "secret weapon" pushing her forward: her husband, co-founder and Plum's vice-president of product, Neil MacGregor. She says he's her support system at work and at home, where they are raising two young children.

In their early days, recognizing that their relationship could be viewed as a liability, Plum tried to make sure it didn't come up in initial meetings with potential customers. But MacGregor says their partnership has been integral to Plum's success.

"I'm able to do more than is humanly possible a lot because I have somebody in my corner filling in all the gaps and getting me through the things that are challenging," she says.

But at the core of the company's success is the team's passionate belief in itself.

"Never hire against Plum" is a mantra one of its customers has adopted, and MacGregor fervently agrees.

"We have kept going because we can't live without this product. We'll never successfully run another business without this insight and knowledge." ■