

## A Service That Aims to Make Cold Calls a Bit Warmer

By DANIEL TERDIMAN

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**A**s a longtime salesman, Jim Fowler knows how difficult it is to make a cold call. In one instance, it took Mr. Fowler a month of daily e-mail messages and phone calls to a major airline before reaching the right person to hear his pitch for the analytics software that he was selling.

The idea of circumventing the drudgery of finding potential clients helped inspire Mr. Fowler and several colleagues to start Jigsaw Data. The company, based in San Mateo, Calif., is a marketplace of business contacts that are all contributed by and, perhaps more important, vetted by the members. Jigsaw then provides the online organizing infrastructure.

"The power of Jigsaw is that we have thousands of people that collect and maintain the data," Mr. Fowler said. "It's the concept of many people all bringing small pieces of the puzzle, and we assemble them for the benefit of the community."

Each contact, the company has decided, is valued at one dollar of its membership fee. Every month, the service's members pay \$25 for access to 25 contacts or, alternatively, the member can contribute 25 contacts. Other members can challenge a contact if they believe it to be invalid, but if the contact lasts 30 days without a successful challenge, the originating member is granted another contact from the pool.

The first question Mr. Fowler is often asked is why anyone would give away valuable contacts for just a dollar. The question gives him an opening for one of his favorite lines: One person's trash is another person's treasure.

To do their jobs, sales agents need constant access to fresh contacts. The problem with the traditional business contacts market, Mr. Fowler said, is that access to existing databases from companies like Hoover's, Harte-Hanks and Dun & Bradstreet can cost thousands of dollars a year and some are frequently out of date. Jigsaw is trying to undercut those heavyweights, and by a mile. "It makes sense," said Kent Allen, a financial analyst in San Francisco. "They've got a little bit of that Netflix model. A lot of salespeople don't mind spending \$25 a month, even if it's just for one bit of information that they might have had to spend a couple of hours getting otherwise."



Peter DaSilva for The New York Times

Jim Fowler of Jigsaw Data has built a business on the concept that one person's trash is another person's treasure.

Jigsaw currently has about 5,000 active users and a database of 441,000 contacts from nearly 45,000 companies. The database is growing by 3,000 contacts a day, Mr. Fowler said.

The vetting process is central to Jigsaw's system, which attempts to bolster its shared data by letting anyone challenge a contact for any reason. If the challenge stands - meaning the contributor grants that the contact is faulty or does not respond- the challenger receives two new contacts.

The system also tries to prevent inconsistent information by penalizing and sometimes banning those who submit too many spurious contacts or whose challenges are frequently overturned.

"There's some very natural self-policing mechanisms that also reinforce the constant level of quality," says Jeff Crowe, a partner at Norwest Ventures, which, along with El Dorado Ventures, financed Jigsaw with more than \$5 million. "So the fact that the users are motivated to keep up the quality level is a very powerful concept."

One approach Jigsaw has taken is paying members with cash for heavy contributions. The company just conducted its first cash distribution and gave out more than \$15,000 to some of its most prolific contributors. The Top 10 contributors each received \$800, Mr. Fowler says.

"Are they getting their members to do the work for

For now, the company makes its money from members' monthly \$25 fees, but it hopes to supplement that with advertising. Mr. Fowler said that while the company reserved the right to resell the contacts, to do so would "kill the goose that is laying the golden egg."

Jigsaw is unusual in that its marketplace is devoted exclusively to business contacts; the company's closest competition comes from online social networking services like Ryze.com and LinkedIn, whose members connect electronically, often to make new business-related contacts.

Kirkland Jue, a member who recently used the service to get a contact at an Alaskan company where he wanted to do business, raved about Jigsaw.

"I couldn't get the e-mail of the C.I.O.," said Mr. Jue, a sales executive at Fiberlink Communications in San Francisco. "No one was allowed to give me his address. So I said, let me check Jigsaw. It's a company in Alaska, for God's sake. Not only did it have his e-mail, it had his direct dial. It kind of blew me away."

them?" says Michael Danzinger, an account executive at RAE Internet in New York and one of those Top 10 contributors. "They are, but that's where the value for the person adding it comes from. They're getting that value back. No one's forcing me to add anything."

Mr. Fowler maintains that Jigsaw goes out of its way not to intrude on the privacy of the listed contacts. For example, people listed in the database can set preferences on how they want to be contacted.

"At first, there was a bit of a shock factor that I was in there," said Olin Reams, in Larkspur, Calif., the director of sales for Mindjet, who wrote instructions that he should be contacted by e-mail and not by cellphone. "I don't mind being visible. I just don't want to be deluged with calls that aren't appropriate."

Still, Mr. Jue said that sometimes such instructions did not mean much, especially to people who were exceedingly eager to make a sale.

"It's sort of like someone puts up one of those street cones in front of you and you go around it," he said.