

Facebook ringing in more jobs for Austin



Ricardo B. Brazziell /AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Sarah Smith, head of Facebook's online operations in Austin, rings a cowbell to mark the hire of two new employees during the company's grand opening downtown on Thursday. Facebook has more than 60 workers in Austin and has committed to hiring 200 people over four years.

By **Shonda Novak**

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As Facebook celebrated the opening of its downtown Austin office Thursday night, officials with the social networking company said they are in full hiring mode locally.

"We're very excited about the future and our prospects for growth here," said Grady Burnett , director of global sales and operations for Facebook Inc.

Burnett said Facebook came to Austin with high expectations and intends to grow a "tremendous amount" of its national business here.

Facebook occupies 29,236 square feet of office space on the 10th floor of the 300 West Sixth building at Sixth and Lavaca streets.

Austin is Facebook's first U.S. expansion of its online sales and operations teams outside of its Palo Alto, Calif., headquarters.

The local office is the front line of communication between Facebook and everyone it interacts with — advertisers, users and companies that develop products and services on Facebook — said Sarah Smith , head of online operations in Austin.

Facebook has more than 60 workers in Austin and is continuing to hire, Smith said. On Thursday night, she and other Facebook executives, along with Austin Mayor Lee Leffingwell, rang cowbells — a new tradition for Facebook's Austin office — to mark two more hires.

In addition to a 401(k) plan and medical and dental benefits, the company offers all employees free catered breakfast, lunch and dinner daily; dry-cleaning and laundry services; and a reimbursement for employees who use public transportation.

The perks make it easier for employees to focus on their jobs, Smith said.

Smith said having employees eat together promotes "cross-team collaboration" and a sense of community. She said lot of "intangible things" also get accomplished over meals.

In keeping with a corporate culture that values collaboration and transparency, employees work side by side in an open area, not in offices or cubicles. Meeting rooms have names such as the Broken Spoke, La Zona Rosa and Stubbs.

Under an incentives agreement, the company has committed to hiring 200 people over four years, Burnett said. The company is "comfortable with that number," but he declined to comment on hiring projections beyond that.

Facebook is eligible for \$200,000 in tax breaks from the city over 10 years if it creates 200 jobs with annual salaries of \$50,000 for staff workers and \$85,000 for managers. The state has pledged an additional \$1.4 million.

Burnett said Facebook has found "great talent" in Austin, which he said the company was drawn to in part as "a vibrant city with a strong tech background."

Smith said Facebook attracts "smart, entrepreneurial and dynamic people" who thrive in the "collegial" environment of a company that has "a huge impact on the world."

Courtesy of JB Goodwin