

## Book broker green with pride

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Abebooks has made the list of the Top 100 Canadian Employers five years in a row, but the world's largest online marketplace for new, used and rare books is not about to rest on its laurels.

The Victoria-based company can't if it wants to stay on the list for a sixth year.

"It's getting tougher every year," said Judy Hamza, Abebooks' director of human resources. "They add complexities every year because they want to make sure you are progressing as a company."

And Hamza is quick to point out that given the current state of the provincial labour market, progressing, recruiting and retaining are the key words.

"It's getting so tight, particularly for us in the high-tech and software development sector," said Hamza. "There is no unemployment in the IT sector at all and you are competing with these great companies like Google, Amazon and Microsoft ... and they are just across the border."

She said Victoria's high-tech sector also has to be on guard against poaching from the tight labour markets of Vancouver, Calgary and other local companies.

"You really have to be on your game and understand what the employee issues are and respond to those and be proactive about those things," she added. "It's got to the point that, if you're a company that just talks the talk and doesn't walk the walk, you are not going to cut it."

So far so good for Abebooks, which also placed on the top-40 list of B.C.'s employers.

The company, which has 102 employees in Victoria and another 35 in offices around the world, has always prided itself on offering its employees the right work-life-home-life balance as it recognized they needed more than good wages and benefits package to attract and retain good employees.

Abebooks includes in its package three weeks of paid vacation allowance for new employees, a share purchase plan to all employees, matches RSP contributions and subsidizes gym memberships.

But there have been changes in what's needed to be a top employer over the last five years.

"When we first started with this competition a lot of the things we were doing were fairly novel," she said of the little perks employees received such as snacks and beverages, flexibility in scheduling and social outings. "Now everybody is onto that ... it's common in the IT sector."



CREDIT: John McKay

Times Colonist / Hannes Blum, president and chief executive of Abebooks, moved his staff into a spacious office at Upper Harbour Place last year and launched an ambitious campaign to monitor their environmental footprint.

Hamza said the new employee demands involve working for companies that are good corporate citizens and those that have made a commitment to the environment.

"A large section of the application dealt with green activities, and we have a green committee and as a company we have been very proactive in monitoring our environmental issues," she said, noting their new energy efficient building at Upper Harbour Place makes that easier and even includes an in-house composter.

The company has also encouraged employees to limit their use of cars by giving them the cash the company would normally have spent on renting parking space if the employees choose to be dropped off, ride their bikes or find an alternative means of getting to work.

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