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DIRECT MARKETING JOB PROSPECTS LOOKING BRIGHTER

January 11, 2005 -- The employment outlook continues to show improvement for direct marketers with nearly three out of four direct marketing companies planning to add to staff this winter, according to Bernhart Associates Executive Search.

"In 16 years of recruiting in direct marketing, this is one of the strongest starts I've ever seen for a new year," said Jerry Bernhart, president of Bernhart Associates Executive Search, Owatonna, MN, which conducts the quarterly employment survey. "We've been receiving a steady stream of calls and e-mails from employers as companies gear up for 2005."

Among companies responding to the survey, 70 percent said they plan to increase headcount during the first quarter of 2005, up from 60 percent last quarter, Bernhart says in a press release. Only 5 percent said they'll be cutting staff and the percentage of companies reporting a hiring freeze continued its steady decline, falling to 8 percent.

"Right after 9/11 the hiring freeze number was nearly 40 percent," said Bernhart. "We've come a long way in two years."

Some 144 direct marketing companies participated in the survey, which was e-mailed the first week of January, Bernhart says. Survey results are published in The DMA's Statistical Fact Book.

Bernhart said companies will be looking for a wider variety of talent compared with past surveys and employers are expressing a higher sense of urgency.

"They're going to need everything from laser operators to chief marketing officers," according to Bernhart, who also noted that more junior level positions are opening up.

Bernhart said the survey also shows that new hires will outnumber replacements by six to one. "That statistic has shown sharp improvement in recent quarters," said Bernhart. "In 2002, the ratio was reversed, another indication of continued steady improvement."

Companies interested in being added to the quarterly survey should e-mail survey@bernhart with "opt-in" in the subject line.