

## MY BOARD

## Scott Epskamp of Leapfrog Online: Know what you are looking for in a board member

*Scott Epskamp is president of Evanston, Ill.-based Leapfrog Online, which he co-founded in 1995. Leapfrog is one of the largest digital-marketing firms in the U.S. and is a leader in developing digital sales channels for Fortune 500 companies. It has been recognized for its fast growth by a number of publications, including the Inc. 5000 and the Deloitte Fast 500.*

**A** board became a necessity when Leapfrog Online raised capital. North Bridge Growth Equity, a Boston-based venture capital firm, invested \$30 million in Leapfrog in 2008. It was the first time we formed a board, and I wanted to be sure we got it right.

Running a fast-paced growth business is part science and part art. We wanted to be sure board members could provide great guidance to accelerate Leapfrog Online's ability to achieve our business goals. We also wanted to be sure these board members had noteworthy success in growing sizeable businesses that were much larger than Leapfrog. We wanted to learn from their collective experiences and apply those learnings to our business. We are on track to be a much larger company than we are today and want a board to guide us to achieve our growth goals.

As background, Leapfrog Online develops and optimizes digital sales channels for Fortune 500 brands. We are compensated based on the customers, sales, profits we deliver to our clients through our solutions. The market is moving to us on two fronts — first, as the drive for accountability in marketing spend continues to increase for large organizations, and second, as the Internet continues to become a primary marketing channel to drive sales. Given our track record, client base, and compensation model, CEOs, CMOs and CFOs all see the value our model can deliver to their business.

So when I looked for prospective board members, I focused on three primary things:

- Will the board member contribute insight-

ful perspective to the company?

- Will the board member provide unique business experiences to the company?
- Has the board member achieved noteworthy success in leading a company of significant size?

The Leapfrog Online board currently consists of five members. That includes me; Dave Husain, my business partner; and Mike Pehl, a North Bridge managing director. Mike has served on the boards of 14 private and public technology companies. He has given the



**Scott Epskamp:** 'It took a good 12 months to find the right people.'

company great advice and insights. I am very pleased to have him as a board member.

In addition, I looked for board members who had experience in the digital space and good chemistry. Specifically, I looked for great communicators, people who had mutual respect for each other and who would be fun to be with.

One of our new board members is Dennis Chookaszian. Dennis is just an amazing person. He was CEO and chairman of CNA Insurance Cos. for a number of years. He's

seen it all. In addition, he's the chairman of the FASAC (Financial Accounting Standards Advisory Council), which helps set standards for the industry. And Dennis has deep experience in the insurance industry, an industry in which we are applying our solutions to help clients drive higher quality customers.

Dennis sits on a number of boards, including Career Education, a post-secondary education provider, and InsWeb, an online insurance marketplace. What's even more remarkable is that he teaches corporate governance for a number of schools, including the University of Chicago Booth School of Business. One of the things that Dennis teaches is how to run a board. So not only do we have an exceptional business leader, with wonderful experience — he's helping me make sure I'm doing an effective job managing the board.

Our newest board member is Larry Weber, CEO of the W2 Group Inc. Larry, like Dennis, is a fascinating guy. He's written a number of books on social marketing and is considered at the forefront of digital marketing and of the interaction of digital communications and the online space. Larry has owned and operated one of the largest public relations companies in the world, the Weber Group, and later was chairman and CEO of Interpublic's Advanced Marketing Services, a \$3 billion unit with 12,000 employees.

To those executives who are forming a board, I would say it's an invaluable resource. It's important that you know what you are looking for. And in order for a board to work effectively, the company must provide members with timely information so that everyone collectively is well informed and makes good decisions.

It has really only been one year that our board has been together. And it took a good 12 months to find the right people. I am very pleased and fortunate to have built such a strong board. I am confident with the oversight and guidance from the board, Leapfrog is well positioned to advance and achieve its growth initiatives.