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## New prescription Treeline Inc.

### Executive search firm's crossover to pharma market added growth

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To reach a professional height, Dan Fantasia went out on a limb in more ways than one.

In establishing his own executive search firm, Treeline Inc. of Wakefield, in the spring of 2001, Fantasia had to take two crucial steps: First, he left behind a coveted position at one of the nation's largest sales recruiting outfits, Diversified Communications Group of Burlington, where he'd risen to the rank of managing partner and was named one of the company's top salespeople nationally.

Secondly, he risked his survival on a market segment he knew virtually nothing about — pharmaceutical sales — because a noncompete agreement with his former employer prevented him from tapping into the high-tech sector, where he had gained much of his early success.

The name of his new firm, says its 34-year-old CEO, pretty much sums up his attitude about this risky opportunity: Like the hikers, skiers and other adventures he admires, Fantasia was determined to surpass the tree line — the altitude beyond which trees cannot survive.

These days, says Fantasia, he is closer to reaching that goal: After achieving more than 400 percent growth from 2001 to 2002, Treeline's revenue has grown steadily, from nearly \$410,000 in 2004 to close to \$1 million this year. Year to date, he and his staff of nine full-time

recruiters — he plans to double that number next year — have conducted 220 job searches and filled 81 positions.

The key, says Fantasia, was penetrating the pharmaceutical/biotechnology/medical device market — which currently constitutes 26 of his 85 clients and contributes about 32 percent of his total revenue. It's also provided a bridge into three other markets: business-to-business, which also contributes 32 percent; technology, 30 percent; and financial sales, 6 percent.

"I saw that as one of the only stable industries that was still experiencing growth," Fantasia says. "And in focusing on that market, I wasn't competing with my past employer, and I could continue to keep that relationship."

While he admits to being initially dismayed by the news that Fantasia was leaving the nest, Diversified Communications President Anthony Natella says that his former protégé's decision was understandable.

"You can teach a man everything but ambition," Natella says. "Dan's very ambitious. Very motivated in succeeding. And he's likable, so he can really build an organization."

Fantasia, who used \$60,000 of his own funding — basically, his savings and some stocks — to start his new business, says he was fueled mainly by blind faith.

"It was just a belief in myself," he says. "I had no clients, no candidates, no revenue, no employees. I had rent to pay and a growing family. I'd go to work every day with a suit and tie, and it would be just me and the office."

With the noncompete agreement in place for one year, Fantasia threw himself into learning the ins and outs of the pharmaceutical industry — only to discover that most were large na-



Daniel Fantasia branched out on his own to start his executive search firm Treeline.

tional entities that had preferred vendor lists and refused to deal with a company of his size.

In fact, Fantasia says, it took relentless telephoning and relationship building over a six-month period to garner his first pharma client, Alcon Laboratories of Texas.

"Dan was forced to go in a different direction that has proven to be fortuitous," observes Conrad Taylor, president of the National Association of Personnel Services, based in Banner Elk, N.C.

Taylor adds, "For a pure permanent placement firm, with the size that he is, \$1 million in revenue is a very good number."

Signing the client, Fantasia says, is only half the battle. As a contingency-based firm, his viability is largely based on his ability to secure qualified talent: "If they don't hire somebody, it is very easy for a company like

ours to waste a lot of time and to actually go out of business."

While he has managed an 18 percent profit margin, Fantasia says he's challenged by his constant reinvestment in the business: He offers a base salary to his recruiters, in addition to the traditional commission, and his staff is rapidly outgrowing the 1,500 square feet of space it leases in Wakefield.

#### FAST FACTS

**Dan Fantasia** incorporated Treeline Inc., an executive search firm that specializes in the recruitment of sales professionals, in 2001, following a four-year stint with Diversified Communications Group, a division of Quincy Consulting Inc., where he last served as a managing partner.

**Treeline currently has 85 clients** (71 in Massachusetts alone), for which it has performed 220 searches and filled 81 positions year to date.

