

tech ads. "There are many times when a client has no real need for any employees, but they just want to keep their name out there," he says.

Ira Gordon, vice president of the newspaper industry's New York-based Newspaper Advertising Bureau, hotly disagrees with the contention that the DOD has bought influence at the newspapers he represents. Rather than bribery, Gordon argues that one of the most important goals of the avalanche of DOD contractor recruitment ads is, aside from recruiting employees, to "pre-dispose all potential employees in an area to the company, build favorable employer imagery and impress them with the firm's work. . . ." This despite the fact that, in California at least, state law prohibits anyone from placing untrue or misleading advertising, a category which an employment ad for a non-existent job might well fall into.

If you're talking about locating employees for specific jobs, then those ads are horribly inefficient," says Deborah Bishop, owner of a ten-person, San Francisco-based personnel recruitment firm that has more than a small stake in the issue. Bishop, whose company has been finding employees for high-tech clients for nearly two decades, says she wonders why so many of her customers also purchase costly newspaper ads.

"So often, it is services like ours that actually fill the advertised jobs," she maintains. "On the other hand, it kind of makes sense that an industry that would pay \$600 for a coffee pot would waste hundreds of millions annually on those ads."

All of this naturally leads to questions about whether taxpayers—who spend about \$100 billion annually to keep defense contractors in business—should be footing the bill for recruitment advertising that is actually image advertising. Unlike the image advertising these companies run in publications like *Newsweek* and the *Atlantic*, classified ads convey an added message: Not only are defense and aerospace companies good, they also are contributing to a healthy economy with plenty of jobs for everyone.

While a careful look at the balance sheets of most large daily newspaper chains will no doubt soon raise questions as to whether the papers have, albeit indirectly, become Pentagon-funded vassals, it is the apparent ineffectualness of the ads that holds out some hope for reform.

Within weeks, a research group established by a consortium of headhunters will release a report that reveals the inefficiency with which many major companies monitor or control hiring costs. Even head-hunting industry spokespersons like Rich Lundgren of Professional Employee Recruitment Consortium are starting to point out that the claims of greater hiring efficiency among the daily newspaper chains are, in many markets, vastly overstated or simply untrue.

Lockheed's Imazeki gets positively defensive when queried about the claims of greater efficiency

among headhunters like Bishop and Lundgren. "I don't want to talk about that," she snapped when queried. "Other companies might find them useful, but we have a large employment department, and we think we have ways to fill our jobs without their help."

In addition to evidence that highly qualified professionals are not attracted by classified ads, there is at least the surface appearance that the editorial objectivity of some major daily newspaper chains has already been tainted by the current DOD recruitment arrangement.

For example, at the *Mercury News*, which last year received an estimated \$40 million from Pentagon contractors and related parties, coverage of the local defense establishment is anything but hard-hitting, despite occasional appearances to the contrary. Recently, the newspaper undertook a highly visible expose of the locally manufactured FMC Bradley Fighting Vehicle—a tank-like personnel carrier that has been attacked by congressional critics like Sen. Albert Gore (D-Tenn.) as a "total waste." The coverage didn't win the *Mercury* any friends at FMC.

Whether it was intended or not, however, the coverage resulted in the additional federal funds that would enable FMC to improve the vehicle. Wholesale cancellation of the controversial project did not appear to be an option and was not considered. This pattern—where snazzy, front-page, attention-getting "investigative reports" into DOD fraud and waste routinely lead to increased budgets for those under investigation—has become commonplace across the country.

"These companies must be getting something for their money," says Bishop, who admits she is mystified by the situation.

"Absolutely not," says Jennie Buckner, the *Mercury News'* managing editor for its afternoon edition. "The editorial and advertising functions are separate . . . News columns are not affected by whether someone does or does not advertise with us."

The mandate to reporters is to cover the defense industry "aggressively," Buckner says, noting that a reporter was added a year ago to better cover the defense beat. Large local firms have no exemption from critical coverage, she states. "With Lockheed, we played that angle very strongly and have given very good front page coverage to the [defense scandal] story and will continue to. We think it's a very important story."

For some time now, daily newspaper classifieds have packed a subtle but sophisticated political punch. Certified news junkies may recall that one of Ronald Reagan's first official acts as president was to hold up the enormous classified section of a major metropolitan daily in order to disclaim the existence of a significant unemployment problem. "Just look at all of these jobs," he smiled.

As Congress grapples with the

budgetary and political issues raised by the fact that much of the mainstream press has quietly, if indirectly, become financially dependent on the Pentagon, others like Rod Lake and Greg Bahue of Sunnyvale's Westech, Inc. are cashing in on the situation by providing an alternative way of connecting DOD employers with qualified employees. Despite the roughly half billion dollars spent each year on the daily ads—which, for the most part, don't work—the Pentagon does, after all, have jobs to fill.

Founded in 1981, Westech promotes regional job fairs where high-tech firms gather to meet, recruit, screen and select employees. The company publishes a bimonthly magazine called *High Technology Careers*, which is inserted into the *Mercury News*, and advertises its job fairs in the *Mercury News*, *Metro* and various trade publications. "About 90 percent of the companies are able to identify specific people they want to hire," Lake says, "while about 50 percent of the companies actually make job offers on the spot."

Lake says Westech is prepared for the next liberating hi-tech wave: on-line home-access job boards. Unlike current "hit or miss" newspaper ads—which require that a job-seeker pick up a specific paper on a specific day and read a specific page—the future promises a world where one can sit down at a home terminal, call up a screen, type in his or her qualifications and receive a full readout of jobs available across the country.

While such a system is still a few years off, Lake's partner, Greg Bahue, says that paying greater attention to the efficiency of DOD recruitment expenses can only help his business grow. The entrepreneurs do not worry about the prospect that Congress will eventually move to severely restrict the percentage of a DOD contract that can be used for advertising. "I would applaud that," Lake says, "because I know that our methods are the most efficient in the industry."

While the passage of such legislation will require that members of Congress emerge with a willingness to stand up to monopoly media and raises first amendment issues as well, such a prospect seems increasingly possible given widespread public revulsion at defense-related government corruption.

With defense-related classifieds receiving attention, their growing fiscal clout is sure to fuel additional debate regarding the role they play in America's political economy. Whether or not the ad budgets of the military industrial complex have in fact resulted in editorial softness in daily newsrooms, the threat of yanking ad buys carries considerable weight. A wholesale pullout would have substantial impact on the bottom lines of the country's largest newspapers, and could result in job losses as well.

It's a fact that will no doubt be a subject of concern in media industry boardrooms as efforts to reform the scandal-plagued defense procurement process make headway.

—Hal Plotkin