

# Careers at Votizen

## Preface:

This packet is designed to provide 1) an overview of Votizen, 2) what we're looking for in team members, 3) what we offer in a career, and 4) the process we use to find good matches to join our team.

## Overview

### What We Do

#### Connecting Voters

Votizen is about connecting voters: connecting voters to issues they care about, connecting voters to their officials, and connecting voters to other voters. Votizen powers a listening platform where voters come together to express themselves in an authentic, open, and measurable way that encourages accountability and solution-oriented discussion.

### Our Mission

Our mission is to make voters as powerful between elections as they are on election day.

### Our Vision

Since the Nixon/Kennedy debate, television has dominated U.S. politics. Today, campaigns spend hundreds of millions of dollars on television commercials to get elected, often through ads which attack the opposition rather than promote positions. Eventually, the campaigns end and the winner takes office. Still, the rancor persists, paralyzing our leadership and poisoning public discussion until the next election -- when it only gets worse. Most agree that this approach is fundamentally broken.

Yet there are signs this is changing. Internet spending has more than quadrupled in the past election cycle. Barack Obama spent less than half his total budget on television -- the first time in the modern age that a presidential campaign dipped below the 50% threshold. Perhaps the most striking example of this shift was a 2010 statewide California race that had a prominent insider raise more than a million dollars, hire the best consultants, and run a textbook campaign -- losing to a previously unknown challenger who only spent \$3000 to cover the filing fee but made effective use of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. These are all examples of a clear trend: we are moving past the one-way campaign and into the era of the connected election.

Votizen sees this trend, and is focused on connecting voters. We believe that in a connected world the wisdom of crowds prevails over narrow extremism. We believe that in a connected election 30-second attack ads are powerless. We believe that connected voters represent the future of democracy. Votizen wants to foster, create, and empower those connections, giving real people the tools to have a real impact on the challenges facing our communities, our country, and our world.

This is happening now. The technology is maturing, the people are ready, and we intend to make the Votizen vision a reality.

## Business Model

Our business model is similar to LinkedIn: as LinkedIn charges to facilitate connections between recruiters and job seekers, so do we charge to facilitate connections between campaigns and voters. For instance, a recent campaign to help support job creators in the US used the Votizen platform to connect to voters, gather support, and be heard in Washington. This attracted the attention of the right officials, getting them to listen and eventually resulting in new legislation introduced into the US Senate.

We are a network-effect business; meaning, the more voters that participate in the system, the more valuable the overall system becomes. Network effect businesses are notoriously difficult to establish, but once established they are immensely valuable (Facebook, EBay, LinkedIn are other examples of network-effect businesses.) Politics is a \$10B a year industry that has grown 25% per year for fifty straight years. We think there is a huge business opportunity here that will help ordinary people become better and more engaged citizens.

Bottom Line: Go Big or Go Home. There is no middle ground.

## What we're looking for

We are looking for backend engineers. We want persons who have worked on low-level languages, have architected systems, or otherwise have built things from scratch that scaled. If you think elegant, well-documented code is as beautiful as anything you'd find in a museum then you're the type of person we want.

We are not looking for accidental hackers. We want people who have written their own framework, rather than used one to create a website. We don't specifically require a CS degree, but we generally expect to see one in a backend engineer. A great candidate will be able to point to a body of work used by others or accepted pull requests on Github (ie, not just lots of forks.) Inflated titles like CTO are not impressive to us; a well-followed blog or project is.

Above all, we want A players. Our standards are very, very high but we are at the very early stages and want high-quality talent that will attract other high-quality talent.

## What we offer

### Change the world potential

First and foremost, we're working on something that truly has the potential to change the world in profound ways. We're helping repair Democracy, and we think that's a lot more important than building a revolutionary way to sell grilled cheese. Social media is maturing beyond a mere entertainment medium and is helping to depose dictators and increase freedom across the globe. We're trying to harness that power to improve how government serves its citizens and fix a broken system. In short, we're not just another Groupon clone.

### Hard technical challenges

We have huge challenges in machine learning, classification, and general scale. Our database already has every voter in the United States plus their voting history -- in some cases going back thirty years. This is a billion rows of data and we've barely even started. We need to figure out how to process this information in way that is meaningful to each and every voter starting in the US (200 million voters) and eventually abroad (Democracy is a growth business.) Moreover, we have a new approach to social networking that uses dynamic linking, meaning: forming and re-forming the interest graph as opinions change, accommodating new nodes and edges in realtime along the way. No one has done this before, and it represents the future of social networks.

## **Real people, real usage, real important**

As our success grows, more and more real people are going to rely on our tools to help form decisions about the future of our country. This means that millions of voters will use the tools our engineers create, and will use them every day. It will be a badge of honor that Votizen engineers work on something so important and fundamental to the lives of everyday citizens.

## **Top-notch team**

Our team is very strong: David Binetti, our CEO, has ten years' industry experience and was the creator of one of the first examples of government e-transparency: USA.gov. Jason Putorti, our designer, was the lead designer for Mint.com and is one of the most highly sought-after designers in the valley. Matt Snider, our engineer, is a front-end guru and has written a book on Javascript (literally). We want to continue the tradition of only hiring the very best in a given person's field of expertise.

## **Agile process**

We ascribe to agile development processes. We are big believers in test-driven development. We thoroughly document our code. We engage in continuous deployment. We don't have a QA department; when something escapes our test coverage and breaks we fix it immediately. For us, it's all about reducing the iteration cycles. Our processes favor quick identification of problems and fast recovery. Speed is the best prevention.

## **Great investors**

Our lead investor is Peter Thiel who has one of the best track records in picking winners. Our board member is Sean Parker. We have some of the most prescient investors in the business, including Keith Rabois, Mark Goines, Ron Conway, Chris Dixon, and David Cowan. These investors see a huge opportunity in a space ripe for disruption, and anyone thinking about participating in this space knows that the group we've assembled is second to none.

## **Fantastic culture**

We have a great culture that rewards risk-taking and creativity. We create features by taking the perspective of the user: "A member should be able to do FOO in order to accomplish BAR as measured by BAZ." After that, implementation is up to the engineer. We are very flexible in our work hours, as long as the job gets done. And we play hard as well -- the office is very competitive, particularly in Starcraft.

## **Benefits, Perks**

Our benefits and perks are quite light compared to other large companies. We do have full health coverage for families, offer commuter checks, and generally try to be as flexible as possible in responding to team members' needs. But you can forget things like 401Ks, massage therapists and stuff like that. Our goal is to make our equity so valuable that all those things become rounding errors in our personal net worth.

## **Compensation**

Being a Peter Thiel funded company, we place a premium on equity participation and not cash salary. We encapsulate this as, "Salary to live on; Equity to retire on." Basically, we can be competitive with other startups, but not with Google, Facebook or other more established tech companies. Then again, our appreciation potential is much higher. Our goal is to make the equity in the company as valuable as possible and we want to ensure that everyone is aligned accordingly.

## Tools

We don't have religion on tools. Our basic principle is to use the simplest tool that will get the job done. While things may change, we currently use:

- **Amazon Web Services**
  - EC2 for front-end servers
  - S3 for serving content
  - RDS for backend MySQL databases
- **Redis**
  - Use for our newsfeed and other streams
- **Python**
  - We use Django for our front-end CRUD
  - twisted (for our asynch API)

## Process

Following is the hiring process to which we aspire:

### Portfolio Review

Once submitted, we review a candidate's resume to assess experience and qualifications. We try to do this within one business day. After the review, there should be one of three outcomes:

1. Fast track to [Phone Interview](#)
2. Schedule [Phone Screen](#)
3. [No Match](#)

### Phone Screen

The phone screen should be used to fill in gaps in any resume items. It is not designed to test any candidate's specific knowledge or experience as much as it is to find a good match on paper as presented. The screen should last roughly ten minutes and the output of the screen should be captured as notes in the ATS. After the screen, a decision should be immediately made according to one of two outcomes:

1. Schedule [Phone Interview](#)
2. [No Match](#)

### Phone Interview

The phone interview is designed to explore the candidate's experience and skills, drilling down on any aspect of the resume as necessary to ensure appropriateness and accuracy and running a coding exercise. The interview should last approximately 30-60 minutes and break down as 10 minute introduction of Votizen, 10-40 minutes of drill-down/coding, and 10 minutes for any candidate questions. After the interview, a decision should be immediately made according to one of three outcomes:

1. If above bar, schedule [On Site Individual](#)
2. [No Match](#)

## On Site Individual

The on site individual is an in-person interview that is meant as a deeper assessment of skills and general culture fit. The person most likely to be the direct report should conduct this on-site. It could take the form of a lunch, coffee, office sit-down, or other similar meeting. It should last approximately 1-2 hours. After the on-site, a decision should be immediately made according to one of two outcomes:

1. If good fit, schedule [Reference Check](#)
2. [No Match](#)

## Reference Check

Reference check should be the final assessment of skills:

1. If passes, schedule [On Site Team](#)
2. [No Match](#)

## On Site Team

The on site team is the final step meant to give all team members an opportunity to assess culture fit. Prior to the team meeting, the focus should be on matching the skills to the role. The team meeting is for matching the personality to the culture of the company. The should be half- to all-day affairs for the candidate and sponsor, and should require at least 2-3 hours of each team members' time for lunch and individual interviews. The preferred format is meeting with the sponsor in the morning, with all relevant team members individually in succession, ending with a lunch/dinner with all team members. After the on site team interview, all team members should come together to make a determination as follows:

1. [Hire](#)
2. [Learn More](#)
3. [Hold](#)
4. [No Match](#)

## Hire

Once the decision to hire has been made, the hiring manager must put together and present an offer package within one business day. **No exceptions**

## Learn More

This should not be employed frequently; the onus is on the hiring manager to ensure that this process reveals all that is necessary to render a decision. However, if there are occasions where getting additional information will help render a decision that should happen. No candidate should stay in the [Learn More](#) category for more than a week; ideally, we should be able to get the information we need with two business days.

## Hold

Periodically we might find good candidates that would be a good match aside from timing (on one side or another.) These should be placed in a [Hold](#) status. Ideally, when candidates are placed on hold there should be a defined trigger to bring them out of that state. Examples include: vesting fully, finishing school, campaign ending, etc. It should not be a catch-all category: the supposition should be that all candidates are either hired or declined.

## **No Match**

Most candidates will not be a match. While each case may be handled individually, all candidates who have on site visits should be informed of no-match via phone. Others may be informed via email. All candidates should be treated respectfully.

## **Applicant Tracking System**

To apply, please use our links from our main job page at <https://www.votizen.com/jobs>.

## **Special Note for Recruiters**

At Votizen we love recruiters! If you haven't already done so, please see our instructions on how to work with us at <http://www.votizen.com/recruiters>.

## **Questions/Contact Information**

If you have any additional information or questions please contact Marty Schneider at [marty@votizen.com](mailto:marty@votizen.com) or 415.690.8683.