

Immigrants a force behind tech firms; They started firms with \$50 billion in sales, a new study says. Most were from India, China.

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Body

About 25 percent of the technology and engineering companies launched in the last decade had at least one foreign-born founder, according to a study released this month that throws new information into the debate over foreign workers who arrive in the United States on specialty visas.

The report, based on telephone surveys with 2,054 companies and projections by researchers at the University of California at Berkeley and at Duke University, found that immigrants - mostly from India and China - helped start hundreds of companies with estimated sales of nearly \$50 billion.

Technology-industry lobbyists have already cited the study in a push to persuade Congress to increase the annual allotment of H-1B visas, which allow U.S. companies to sponsor temporary workers in specialty occupations, such as computer programming and systems analysis. The companies say they cannot find enough Americans to fill jobs; other proponents contend that globalization requires U.S. companies to import talented workers.

"This research shows that immigrants have become a significant driving force in the creation of new businesses and intellectual property in the U.S. - and that their contributions have increased over the past decade," wrote the study's author, Vivek Wadhwa, a former technology executive who immigrated from India with his family as a young man.

Another study will be released next month by the Center for Immigration Studies, which supports low levels of immigration. That report says most specialty visa holders come to the United States to do low-level professional jobs for relatively low pay.

Wadhwa's study looked at founders of engineering and technology companies started from 1995 to 2005, and analyzed the World Intellectual Property Organization Patent Cooperation Treaty database. About one-fourth of international patents filed in the United States in 2006 were submitted by immigrants.

Scott McNealy, chairman and cofounder of Sun Microsystems Inc., is among those advocating an expanded visa program by writing editorials, calling members of Congress, and supporting political action committees.

McNealy noted that immigrants Vinod Kosla of India and Andy Bechtelsheim of Germany cofounded Sun. The company "created tens of thousands of jobs that have generated billions of dollars in exports and has created

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thousands of patents and intellectual-property positions," McNealy **said**. "Why would you have any arbitrary number on smart people?"

Last year, the industry raised the issue in the national debate over immigration reform, but Congress ended its session without acting on the Securing Knowledge, Innovation and Leadership Act. The bill would increase the annual quota on the H-1B visas to 115,000 from 65,000, eliminate green-card caps for some advanced-degree holders, and streamline the processing of employment-based green cards. **Tech** lobbyists want to revive it.

"We are working on that **new** piece of legislation that will hopefully be a great fix for a lot of our companies," **said** Andrea Hoffman, vice president of government and political affairs for TechNet, an industry lobby backed by hundreds of technology companies, including Apple Computer Inc., Microsoft Corp. and Google Inc..

Those who favor low levels of immigration and oppose expanding the specialty-worker programs contend that foreigners accept lower pay and depress wages.

Jessica Vaughan, an analyst at the Center for Immigration **Studies** in Washington, **said** an increase in the cap would amount to "a subsidy for business because it allows them to bring cheaper labor from overseas."

It is unknown how many of the **immigrants** who founded technology companies had H-1B visas.

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