

MASS HIGH TECH • RECRUITMENT & WORKFORCE

Recruiters note an uptick in jobs

By Maureen Condon

There's a sudden strong uptick in computer hardware and software jobs, as well as other disciplines, in the region. A sampling of executive search firms and recruiters reveals a surge in demand for their services.

"Our permanent placement business was up 36 percent and our temporary business was up 8 percent for our Q2 compared to our Q1," said David R. Sanford, executive vice president of client services at Winter, Wyman & Co. in Waltham. He noted that Winter Wyman's fiscal year begins in October.

The company specializes in contract and contract-to-permanent staffing in accounting and finance, HR, information and software technology, and sales and marketing.

"We've seen across all divisions that job orders are up and placements are up. Revenue for March was the best month in two and a half years. We think the lights are coming on," Sanford said.

"Winter, Wyman has been around (for) 32 years," he added, "and IT and software have always been our leading groups. When the dot.com crisis hit, they fell off. Now we are very optimistic. Clients are expressing a greater sense of urgency about filling jobs in IT and software development, and there's more new jobs.

"I don't think the current uptick in jobs is a fluke. We feel the job market is starting to catch up with the rest of the economy. We can't control the geopolitical world. I think people have just gotten tired of sitting back and not growing their businesses. They had cut the fat and the muscle and they were down to the bone. In a lot of companies, people are doing the jobs of two or three. We knew the companies would hit a critical state where they had to hire."

Alex Tsatskis and Andrius Montvila, principals of A&A Search LLP, a recruiting and staffing services firm in Natick, say their gross sales last year were \$1.25 million, and they've already grossed \$1 million in the first quarter this year for contract personnel and contingency-based permanent searches and placements.

"It's about a 50-50 split on contract and permanent placement: hardware is 30 percent of our business; security and defense 30 percent; biotech 20 percent; and software and the rest is another 20 percent.

"Two months ago, I would have said security and defense were the fastest-growing areas of our business, but right now we're seeing a big uptick in hardware and software."

Montvila notes that ASIC design and verification is growing the fastest, with jobs mainly in the Boston area.

"And there's another indication that the economy is turning around: Some of our clients have indicated that they are looking for contract recruiters to help them staff open positions," Tsatskis said.

Dora Vell, a partner at executive search firm Heidrick & Struggles in Boston, concurs that recruiting activity is picking up.

"Overall this year, things have really picked up, and over the past month things have almost exploded in terms of the number of requests we are getting to fill openings," she said.

"Sales personnel are always in demand, but what's interesting this year is that we are getting requests to fill a lot of investment-type positions in engineering and marketing.

"The other trend we're seeing is that earlier-stage companies are coming back to search," she added. "They want top-notch people, so the search could be a national one. And, by and large, these companies are very solid. You don't see any company that hasn't stood the test of the recession, which is a very high bar."

Vell also noted requests coming in from Asia. "I don't know if it's a trend, but in my own microcosm, I've gotten an unusual number of requests to fill positions in Japan and China. Our Japanese technology partner has been busy as well, but it's unusual for me to see that number of requests coming in here."

But some local technology companies have been hiring all along, with sudden spurts.

Red Hat Inc., a North Carolina-based company that provides Linux and open source solutions, plans to make its Westford office its Linux programming hub with a planned 20 percent increase in the number of programmers this year, a company spokesman said. Red Hat has doubled the size of its staff in Westford over the last three years.

Chelmsford-based Kronos Inc., which provides HR, payroll, scheduling and labor software, also says it is steadily hiring.

"Kronos continues to hire across most functional areas," says Jim Kizielewicz, vice president of corporate strategy and development at Kronos. "As of 12/31/02, we had 2,154 employees worldwide. As of 12/31/03, we had 2,452 employees worldwide. As of this week, we have 2,483 employees."

Dora Vell is the CEO of Vell Executive Search, a premier retained technology executive search firm in Boston. Ms. Vell is an internationally recognized expert in recruiting technology executives including: CEOs, COOs, CTOs, CMOs, CROs, board members and others. She works with VC-backed, PE-backed private companies and public companies. She can be reached at dora@vell.com.