

IDENTIFY, RECRUIT, RETAIN: WHAT YOU NEED TO PREPARE FOR IN 2011

THE CHALLENGE

The news is out! The recession is officially over. While many markets face a slow recovery, there are a few truly bright spots in the job market, particularly in the Chicago job market. One of the brightest spots of all is in technology. The IT market is continuing to grow and outpace the rest of the economy. Information Week reports this is especially true of the market for consultants and contractors, as more companies are turning to temporary employees post-recession.

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An October 2010 Chicago Tribune article reported that certain IT roles, in particular software engineer, are in high demand in the Chicago area. The Bureau of Labor Statistics supports the Tribune's report, with a prediction that software engineer will be the fastest growing job over the next eight years, with a 32 percent increase between 2008 and 2018. For comparison, the total workforce growth is predicted to be just eight percent.

The increase in demand for IT roles is becoming news nationally. CNNMoney's 2010 "Best Jobs in America" report looks at pay and growth prospects of careers across industries. What was the number one "top job?" Software Architect (with an anticipated 35 percent growth from 2008 to 2018). Close behind at number seven was Database Administrator (20 percent growth predicted). Other IT roles also found their place in the top 30.

Chicago's high demand for IT professionals, especially consultants, is certainly good news – any news of job growth is positive. However, it is news that holds a warning for those who need to hire IT professionals (especially software architects and database administrators). As demand for IT professionals grows, hiring managers should anticipate greater challenges in recruiting and retaining top-notch IT professionals in 2011, particularly consultants. Are you prepared for this? It is imperative for Chicago employers to consider how they will identify, attract, and retain top talent in 2011.

IDENTIFY

If you don't already have top IT talent on staff, the first challenge is finding it. This is often easier said than done.

CAST A WIDER NET

Chicago has a growing tech market, but not quite the pool of candidates found in places like Silicon Valley. One of the best things you can do is to consider "casting the net wider," says Todd Thibodeaux chief executive of the Computer Technology Industry Association (CompTIA). One method is to look for candidates who went to school in Chicago or are originally from here, and might be happy to return. Discuss with your recruiting partners if looking outside the area could help you find better candidates.

OLDER AND WISER

Don't be afraid of more mature workers. Many of these IT professionals have been in IT for decades, and will bring a depth of experience to your organization. Older workers also tend to be more loyal and

less likely to shop the market for different opportunities. The bottom line is if they have the right skills, don't pass on worthy candidates for the position.

OVERQUALIFIED IS THE NEW QUALIFIED

Even though the IT market is good, the economy is still down, and you may be lucky enough to come across candidates who are actually overqualified for your role. Don't pass over these resumes. A different perspective or enhanced skill set could bring a new dimension to your project. You'll want to ensure this person won't get bored with your project, so pay attention to the retain tips if you find yourself in this situation.

ATTRACT

Your recruiting partners have found some stellar candidates. But now what? How do you get them to say, "I want to work there!"

You're going to need to sell the job in the interview.

KNOW WHERE YOU STAND

In a down economy, it's easy to think that you (the employer) are in the position of power when it comes to hiring. Unfortunately, this is not necessarily true in the Chicago IT market (especially for certain roles). Employers must understand that while you deserve top-notch talent, the best IT consultants are in high demand. Before even entering your office they have likely already interviewed with several companies and may even have an offer or two. If you like the candidate,

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you’re going to need to sell the job in the interview and make your hiring decisions quickly.

COLLABORATE WITH YOUR RECRUITING PARTNER

If you’re working effectively with your recruiting partners, your top prospects should already be “closed” before they walk in your door for an interview. Ensure the people recruiting for your jobs have a full understanding of the benefits of working at your company, the job challenges, and opportunities. Ask your recruiting firm, “How can I help you sell our company more effectively?”

FLEXIBLE SCHEDULES FOR TOP PERFORMERS

Flexible schedules are a source of much angst amongst hiring managers. Balancing accountability with a positive work environment is not an easy recipe. A good approach to flexible schedules for a very attractive candidate (one who may be taking on a long commute or living in a different city from his/her family) is to set up a “trial” period and have a set time period when you will discuss flex options.

RETAIN

Once you’ve got the best IT consultants you need to know how to keep them. The higher in demand a consultant becomes the more likely it is they will be getting calls from headhunters looking to lure your best consultants away.

CONSTANT COMMUNICATION

It’s key to talk with your best consultants regularly. Not just about the projects or daily work, but about their satisfaction and role in the company. Find out if they are satisfied. If there is a possibility of their contract being extended, let them know early and keep them updated. Why? A

satisfied consultant is someone who stays in the job for the duration, and gives full effort every day. Ensure your recruiting partner has an active role in fostering communication and analyzing the health of the relationship.

PART OF THE TEAM

Treat your consultants like an equal part of your team. It is important for consultants to feel that they are a part of an organization that embraces them even if they are not full time employees. Consulting work is often lonely, and you’ll improve retention if you work to blend the differences between consultants and direct employees.

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OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW

The best IT consultants are the type who live and breathe technology and are always looking to learn new things. Giving IT consultants opportunities to challenge themselves can be tricky. On the one hand you hired a consultant to perform a specific job and on the other hand they are looking for a challenge. Try to be as open minded as possible to new responsibilities. It could be beneficial to both of you.

CONCLUSION

IT consultants, particularly Software Architects and Database Administrators, are in high demand – and that’s not likely to change anytime soon. If your company utilizes IT consultants the first thing to do is align yourself with a recruiting firm you trust. In competitive times, you

need advocates for your company who are ready to do what it takes to get top talent to fill your open roles. Beyond a successful recruiter partnership, knowing how to best identify, attract, and retain IT consultants could be your key to success in the coming years.

