

RECRUITMENT

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The IT recruitment market has matured so that candidates can now command more competitive salaries than ever before, say **Tamara Beasley-Suffolk** and **Wendy Phillips**

Right place, right time

If the current demand for technical business-aware IT professionals is any indication of general market conditions, then it is safe to say that the IT sector has begun its long awaited recovery in earnest.

With more job opportunities being advertised and with individuals now feeling confident enough in the market to consider moving to pastures new, recruitment is once again becoming a priority for organisations. What is therefore surprising in this upturned market is that many firms are advertising the same positions for months on end. The reason for this appears to be twofold — salary and client expectation.

The recovery of the IT market has been accompanied by a proportionate increase in salaries within some firms. However, it seems that the majority of law firms have failed to react to the changing market conditions and are still offering 2002/2003 salaries, as a consequence they are unable to attract and recruit the right candidates.

The demand for high calibre IT professionals in the legal sector is certainly there, as a consultancy we are very busy with both permanent and contract vacancies. However, placing candidates is

becoming increasingly difficult and long-winded as on top of the salary factor, firms are becoming much stricter in their requirements. The job specification 'wish list' that until recently served as a guide, has now become an inviolable prerequisite which must be fully met by the candidate if they are to have any hope of an interview. If firms were willing to consider similar applications to the ones specified or waive certain legal systems, then candidates could be cross-trained and the position would quickly be filled. If a candidate fails to pass their probationary period, it is usually a case of poor team fit rather than a lack of technical ability.

By adhering so rigidly to the prepared job description employers may be overlooking potential candidates, who although not offering ideal packages have valuable interpersonal skills. After all, absent legal applications can be learnt but teaching customer service skills and achieving good team dynamics is often a case of individual personalities and not solely a matter of technical expertise. By adjusting expectations and considering a wider range of candidates and skills, firms are far more likely to find the right candidate.

The position of the candidate mirrors that of the client, as they too are 'holding out' for the best opportunity. The high calibre candidates are seeking that elusive combination of competitive salary and career progression to justify a 'move'. Understandably these individuals are reluctant to leave their current employer when this is not offered and they can expect little or no financial improvement. Conversely, the firms they approach, unwilling to respond to the changing expectations of the market often comment that the applicants are demanding too high a salary.

The legal IT market has matured and become more sophisticated in its needs. For this development to flourish, firms seeking to attract IT staff from other law firms must increase the salary on offer. Firms whose salary budget cannot be stretched need to consider the option of cross training applicants with non-legal experience. In summary, firms with vacancies open longer than a month need to consider the above issues that are affecting today's market.

Tamara Beasley-Suffolk and Wendy Phillips run the legal IT team at Graham Gill.

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