

Hi my name is Bev Sollinger and I am one of the Directors at DataFin Recruitment. DataFin has been going since 1999 and was started by my sister Lindy Sollinger. She had been in financial recruitment for 7 years and when she resigned she had to sign a one year restraint of trade clause. During this year she started selling IT training packages to large corporates and after meeting a lot of IT people, she decided to go into IT recruitment. It was September 1999 and the recruitment market was booming, with every company searching for MCSE qualified people. Before Y2K there was a frenetic search for IT staff predominantly on the networking side of things. There was a crazy rush to get your MCSE and salaries were slightly inflated due to there being a demand and moreover there was a sense of the unknown. Y2K came and went without too much chaos and the IT market settled down with salaries evening out and many MCSE-ers landing up without jobs.

I joined the company a year later in October 2000. This was followed by the bursting of the dot com bubble. And once again people lost a little piece of faith in the IT market. Since this rough but interesting time though, businesses have become more and more reliant on systems and technology and the IT industry has become more resilient. And as economies have grown so too has the reliance on IT skills i.e. IT people.

And through all of this, recruitment continued. In the last 8 years I have never really seen a slump in the demand for people – well not for an extended period. Companies always need staff. And companies are prepared to pay for staff – albeit sometimes begrudgingly -because they know that if they don't have the staff they can't offer the service or the product. And this is even more apparent in the IT arena. The owner of an IT company in a lot of cases can't develop, and if he doesn't have developers he doesn't actually have a company or a service to offer his clients.

Just a short note about DataFin: 8 years ago there were 2 of us, now there are 12 of us – all girls. We are one of the top 3 IT agencies in Cape Town and are on many of the large companies preferred suppliers lists. We also have small and medium sized companies as our clients. We rarely turn a company away unless the salary they want to pay is too low. If a smaller company feels they can't afford the cash layout, we allow them to pay in installments. We are different from other agencies in this way. We are not looking for a quick fix, we are trying to engender long lasting relationships, repeat business, happy clients and happy candidates.

The current situation from a recruitment perspective goes like this:
The market is booming.

We hardly ever cold call, companies come to us with specs

If a good candidate comes onto our books, he gets placed very fast. If he is a .NET developer, because of the skills shortage in the market, he will get sent to no less than 35 companies – this means we have 35 companies desperately searching for good .NET people. If he is a Java developer he will get sent to roughly 10 companies. If he has a degree the chances of him getting placed within 7 working days are higher. If he has a for eg a BSc or Bus Science degree from a reputable university and hardly any experience he will get placed. Easily.

The experienced developer will be able to increase his current salary by 25% if he is a .NET Developer and 15% if he is a Java Developer if he moves jobs.

There is an increased demand for Business Analysts, Project Managers and Systems Analysts. There has also been an increase in demand for Sales people which comes with a growing economy.

Along with all of this demand-driven information, we also need to look at the other side of the coin – that is where companies are focusing increasingly on talent

retention. In the past, IT people gravitated towards companies that were run by Developers or 'ex-Developers' because they felt that the people running the company had a better understanding of developers and knew how the developers needed to be treated in order to make them more productive and creative. Now if companies don't treat their staff in this way, the employees will simply leave.

Advise for Employers – maintain a close connection with employees, check that their work is stimulating them, monitor their salaries, make sure they are acknowledged and that their work is appreciated. It is more costly to lose staff than to spend money keeping them happy. And this is really where agencies come into play. Due to the shortage, if a staff member leaves it's often necessary to bring in an agency to assist in sourcing a new staff member. One needs to find an agency that has tapped into the market, one that knows what they are talking about and has the experience dealing with candidates and clients. You need to find an agency that is not just after a quick fix and who you can build a relationship with. An agency that is not going to drive you mad by calling you all the time, but at the same time is going to be attentive to your requirements.

Advise for employees looking to move.

Think about how long you have been with the company for?

Think about how you feel when you are sitting in your car, on your motorbike on your way to work?

Think about the people you work for, the people you work with and the clients you are providing solutions for? How do these people make you feel?

Think realistically about what you are earning, and whether you think you are being compensated for the amount of work you are putting in?

Think about whether the work that you are doing stimulates you?

Depending on your answers in your head to these questions – you need to do one of the following:

If your answers to most of the above were negative- come and speak to me

If your answers were positive to most of the above questions – stay where you are

And if you were in the middle – some positive and some negative, then make 100% there is nothing that you can do to improve your current situation? And only you know who you would need to speak to make these changes happen

As the saying goes - The rich get richer, and in this vein, good companies get better – why? Because good companies will generally have access to cutting edge technology, they will have high level mentors, they will be able to offer good salaries and therefore will retain their staff and attract other good people. With these trends coming to play in the market, companies can no longer be complacent. Owners need to work hard to make their companies appealing to employees.

According to an article from the States, they made the following comment about 2007: "The experts have consulted their crystal balls and made their predictions about the IT job market for 2007. The consensus? This year, employers will likely be hiring more IT workers and paying their current workers a little more. The outlook is rosy for a few hot job titles and industries."

And so we can only hope that things continue to be rosy and that working environments continue to improve so that IT staff can be in work spaces that allow their creativity to flow – because IT is an art and an artist needs to be able to wear the clothing that makes him feel comfortable, to have the right equipment that helps him to produce, to have the necessary things in the fridge to allow him to think properly and to be in the right environment to allow his creative juices to flow...