

Report: Supply of IT Pros Down, Though Demand Is Up

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According to a new report, demand for IT employment is high, but the supply of workers is lacking, and one of the reasons listed is that "tech just ain't cool."

IT employment posted a small increase in April, but has remained essentially flat for the last 11 months, finds the April 2007 IT employment report released on May 9 by the National Association of Computer Consultant Businesses, a trade association that represents IT staffing firms.

April saw an increase of 900 IT workers, leaving the total level of IT employment at 3.67 million, where it has rested since August 2006, found the report. Between May and July 2006, IT employment rested at 3.66 million.

"IT employment has remained essentially flat for the last 11 months because of limited supply of IT professionals, not lack of demand. To the contrary, demand for IT professionals remains very robust with unemployment below 1 percent in many IT skill sets," said Mark Roberts, CEO of NACCB.

The report stated that, while companies have always used IT staffing and solutions firms to address the flexible nature of their services, clients are increasingly turning to IT services firms because they are unable to fill their IT vacancies through internal channels.

Throughout the report, a shortage in supply of IT talent, and not a lack of demand for workers, was the reason given for the flat growth in IT employment.

"If you look at the unemployment data, so many computer professions have less than 1 percent unemployment. The H-1B allotment was gone in one day. The demand is there, but the supply is not," said Roberts.

Roberts argued that the supply issue is rooted in the loss of technology recruits after the 2001 economic downturn, and also in the lack of effort in luring students back now that the economy has improved.

"The problem starts way before the university level. Among a host of other problems, tech just ain't cool. Parents aren't encouraging their kids to go into technology. At one point, with all the IPOs and the options, tech had great appeal, but it's lost its allure since the bust," said Roberts.

H-1B temporary worker visas and offshore outsourcing were considered inevitable effects of a short supply of IT workers, and not something that further diminished IT's appeal.

"If we don't have the people, the work will get pushed offshore. One way or another, companies will get their projects done," said Roberts.

In January 2006, the NACCB's IT Index found that employment of IT professionals had essentially returned to the pre-downturn levels.

"You'll see variations in the demand. When the economy has a downturn, the companies will reign in their expenses. But the long term is that we're going to need more of these people to fill IT jobs," said Roberts.

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