

ROBERT WALTERS MARKET UPDATE

ENGINEERING SECTOR

APRIL 2009



HR

- There is an increasing need for good HR Managers with strong business acumen and the ability to partner business leaders, particularly in the downturn.
- There is an increasing demand for the creation of shared services divisions and the outsourcing of HR transactional activities. Hence, candidates with project management experience in setting up shared services division(s) will be in demand.
- As the market turns, HR teams are downsized and the automation of HR processes becomes increasingly popular. This results in a surge in demand for HR Systems Project Managers.
- Demand for contract employees are also on the rise and there is general acceptance among candidates to take on contract jobs for projects.
- There is still a strong demand for rewards candidates at the junior to mid level, with salaries ranging between S\$50K to S\$120K.

SALES & MARKETING

- Market leaders and/or companies who are not that affected by the current economic downturn have acknowledged a strong candidate pool and therefore look to hire strong key personnel, particularly strong sales individuals.
- Company and job stability ranks as the number one most important factor for candidates when making the choice to move.
- Demand for candidates, especially in the manufacturing, semiconductor, electronics and heavy equipment industries, has slowed.
- There is still a high demand for strong sales professionals who are both commercially strong and technically inclined.
- Aftersales and/or service candidates are also highly sought after.
- We see many candidates without local market exposure, but with good marketing experience, strong track records and excellent educational credentials keen on opportunities based in Singapore.

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SUPPLY CHAIN AND LOGISTICS

- The primary shift of manufacturing and assembly operations has been to low cost locations like China and emerging countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, India and Thailand.
- Manufacturing and assembly is becoming increasingly globalised, particularly in support functions like procurement and warehousing. There is therefore more demand for procurement, sourcing and logistical operations professionals with strong regional or global exposure; with individuals who have worked within the above mentioned emerging markets being particularly sought after.
- With factors like supplier financial risk, commodities, volatility in energy, labour rates, currency exchange and unpredictable economic recoveries, a stronger emphasis on supply chain risk mitigation has emerged. Supply chain cost discipline and efficiency will also become a key focus for professionals within engineering companies for the coming years. More companies are now seeking process improvement procurement and audit professionals who can look into the re-evaluation and reconfiguration of supply chains.
- Engineering companies are also looking to reduce inventory cost, and lower operating and carrying cost. We will see more buyers looking at extended payment terms while suppliers seek to collect faster receivables to allow larger liquidity buffers. Supply Chain professionals with experience in cost management and P&L responsibilities will therefore be in high demand.
- China outranks all other countries in manufacturing and sourcing, with the country accounting for almost one-third of 2010's international investment forecasts. This is largely due to a low cost manufacturing base and the Chinese consumer market's increasing importance. India has also stably gained momentum as the best resource to tap for IT, R&D and technology.

IT

- The current trend of outsourcing standard commoditised IT services continues amidst an increased focus on cost. These have centred on functions such as desktop and/or helpdesk support, call centre and data centre management. However, organisations are also increasingly insourcing IT roles critical to the business and looking for professionals who are able to apply technical knowledge to business processes.
- There are more contract opportunities across all sectors as companies look to reduce overheads and seek the flexibility to adjust themselves according to changing business conditions.

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IT (continued)

- IT project budgets are keenly scrutinised and dampening the demand for new resources. However, there may still be opportunities for strategic roles that cover both business and IT. This includes service delivery management and vendor management roles with salaries ranging between S\$100K and S\$150K.
- Companies continue to look into IT governance more seriously, leading to the emergence of new roles such as IT audit and compliance, with salaries ranging between S\$80K and S\$120K.

SECRETARIAL SUPPORT

- The demand for experienced and qualified secretaries and personal assistants within the manufacturing sector remains flat. Manufacturers' demand for labour remains weak and more than half of the firms surveyed reported job cuts as the average work week index plummeted. Sluggish demand has therefore kept hiring to a minimum.
- Contracting is a comparatively new market in Singapore but has become very popular due to the flexibility it offers. We expect the demand for contractors to increase substantially in 2009 and 2010. Another growing trend we have observed in the market is "temporary to permanent" offers. This involves the candidate starting a role as a contractor before being offered a permanent role (provided that both the hirer and candidate are keen to continue the working relationship).
- Despite the flat outlook for manufacturing, the demand for candidates with MNC experience remains high and in addition to basic secretarial skills, organisations are looking for candidates with stable career histories and solid secretarial experience.

ENGINEERING

- As the global economy takes a toll on the electronic manufacturing industry, there is an increased pool of experienced professionals, managers, executives and technicians (PMET) from the electronics industry. Manufacturing companies looking to strengthen their processes and strategies are keen to hire from this available talented pool of candidates.
- Contract opportunities have increased across all manufacturing industries as companies look to reduce fixed overheads and seek the flexibility to react on the occasional ramp in production demand.

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ENGINEERING (continued)

- Experienced engineers across all sectors are adopting a more cautious approach to exploring opportunities. This is in reaction to the global slowdown that has led companies to rationalise and consolidate their businesses. Increasingly, job stability is cited as the primary motivator for candidates looking to change jobs.
- There is an increased interest and demand for “green collar” engineers and specialists as companies are leveraging on the slowdown to invest in hiring talented engineers for R&D and implementation.

ACCOUNTING & FINANCE

- There is continued strong demand for FP&A / business controllers and business analysts able to partner the business or support strategic and business planning.
- As companies restructure tax efficiencies and prepare for more audits this year, a shortage for tax candidates still exists in the market. This is especially pertinent for people with transfer pricing knowledge.
- Companies are still attempting to manage headcount despite attrition through headcount freezes or by not backfilling roles. This has led to an increased demand for contractors to deal with workloads despite headcount freezes.
- Media coverage of retrenchment within the sector has created the impression that the sector is a “hire and fire” sector.
- A trend of off shoring more transactional roles to lower cost countries utilising a shared service model has emerged.
- There is an influx of candidates from the financial services sector and from abroad looking to move or return to Singapore.
- The industry has also experienced a decline in the demand for senior level positions.
- The main motivating factor for moving jobs is to obtain job security and/or to alleviate uncertainty, with a large percentile of candidates in stable jobs reluctant to move due to the perceived risk of changing jobs.

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