



Jump in Asia Pacific demand for IT contractors



Robert Walters says IT services and outsourcing providers are expanding, driven by more government contracts.

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Andrea Ross, managing director of Robert Walters Singapore

SINGAPORE, 26 FEBRUARY 2009 - Hong Kong suffered the biggest fall in the number of job advertisements for information technology (IT) supervisor-manager and programmer positions in the fourth quarter of 2008, according to international recruitment consultancy Robert Walters, in its newly-released Asia Job Index.

The number of jobs placed for these IT-related positions in Hong Kong, fell by nearly 38 per cent from October to December 2008, although the report notes that "areas where there is still evidence of activity, albeit at a reduced rate, are IT and accounting, which are still seen as business critical".

"There is a continuing need for personnel to fill compliance and audit functions, whilst cost-saving initiatives are increasingly reliant on new forms of technology," the Robert Walters Asia Job Index stated. The Asia Job Index, launched last year, tracks ad volumes for professional positions across the leading job boards and national newspapers in Singapore, Hong Kong, China, and Japan.

In Singapore, the fall in IT job ads for the period was nearly 36 per cent. The reports said that "one area that has held up quite strongly has been public sector work, especially within infrastructure, where there has been a drive by the Singapore government to support the local economy".

Andrea Ross, managing director of Robert Walters Singapore, said: "There will be minimal increase in salaries for key/critical positions, whilst non-critical roles will likely remain static. As headcount is expected to be tight across all sectors, more organisations will be focusing on improvement in technology and reengineering processes to improve efficiency and productivity."

Malaysia bucks the banking trend

Malaysia bucked the trend by showing a continuing demand for banking professionals. Robert Walters related Global Salary Survey 2009, now in its 10th year, also released today, said that banking is still hiring in Malaysia and there is more demand for professionals in shared services and outsourced operations, especially in IT and finance.

The report noted that: "Strong demand remains for sales and business development professionals with specific product, technical or industry knowledge in IT, fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) and the oil and gas sectors."

Robert Walters related Global Salary Survey 2009, also released today, stated that: "Another notable trend that has emerged from the economic downturn is the increased demand for contractors, particularly within the banking and IT sectors, where many permanent roles are now offered on a contract basis as employers, unable to increase permanent headcount, look to flexible solutions to fulfill resourcing needs," the report said.

"Demand for IT contractors increased as organisations utilised flexible headcount on projects whilst waiting for permanent headcount approval. Permanent hires are, however, still being made for business critical projects," the Global Salary Survey stated.

In IT commerce, as outsourcing becomes more prevalent, employers are looking for mid to senior level IT candidates with experience in vendor, contract and relationship management. IT services and outsourcing providers are expanding, driven by an increasing volume of government contracts.

Compliance and audit specialists wanted

This latest Asia Job Index index found that, overall, the fourth quarter job ads decline was the sharpest in Singapore at 41 per cent. The current focus on financial regulations drove demand for compliance and audit specialists in Singapore.

The overall total number of job ads placed in the region declined by 15 per cent between October and December 2008.

Hong Kong's overall job ad numbers fell by more than 34 per cent, Japan's dropped by more than 24 per cent, but China's market was more resilient, with job ads falling by only some 12 per cent in the quarter.

Japan's IT-related job ad numbers overall dropped by more than 27 per cent, but "one increasingly discernable trend has been the significant growth in the online marketing industry". The report said that "it is clear that creative skills, in such areas as online marketing and web design, remain very much in demand and the rate of decline was considerably less pronounced."

Engineers wanted in China

China's overall job ad numbers for Q4 2008 fell by more than 20 per cent, but the Robert Walters' report said that "Perhaps the most notable trend in the Chinese advertising data has been the increase in advertisements for engineers and other technical staff required for construction and infrastructure projects."

"The final quarter of 2008 was quieter, although this is not unusual," said Mark Ellwood, managing director of Robert Walters Southeast Asia. "The decline in advertisements reflects the fact that headcount budgets tend to be filled up before the end of the year. "Some candidates did show an understandable reluctance to move jobs in this environment, whereas they would have been less cautious in previous years."

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