

Job vacancy: Only top talent need apply

The recession has idled many tech professionals, but businesses still can't find skilled staff

CURT CHEREWAYKO

Last year's labour crunch has become this year's labour surplus, but many companies are still having a hard time finding highly skilled technical workers.

While **Nokia**, **Business Objects** and other large tech shops have announced reductions affecting up to 10% of their workforces, many junior companies are still hiring and finding it just as difficult now to secure top talent as it was a year ago.

For example, West Vancouver's **Small Energy Group Inc.**, a developer of software that communicates with building automation and metering systems, continues to hire an average of three employees each month.

It's seen an increase in the number of applicants and recently hired a few top-level workers that were laid off by other firms, but Small Energy's biggest challenge continues to be finding the skilled workers needed to keep pace with company growth.

"It's a full-court press to get the word out to find the most amazing people we can," said **David Helliwell**, Small Energy's CEO.

He noted that job cuts in B.C. have flooded the market with workers of various skill-sets. However, compan-



Don Safnuk, president, Corporate Recruiters: it's becoming difficult for workers with lower skill-sets to find work

ies don't necessarily require those skills.

Small Energy no longer posts positions on job boards.

"There was a lot of chaff and not a lot of wheat," said Helliwell.

The company instead relies heavily on its business networks and relationships with universities.

Helliwell noted that job interview dynamics have

shifted in the employer's favour. Potential recruits are more nervous than they were a year ago.

"They aren't able to jump from job to job anymore," said Helliwell. "They just don't have as many fall-back plans."

According to **Central 1 Credit Union's** five-year economic forecast, which was updated on January 15, the unemployment rate in B.C. will

climb to 6.7% this year from 4.5% in 2008.

The unemployment rate is forecast to peak at 7.5% in 2010 and 2011 before declining, according to Central 1.

Raymond To, a partner at **Go Recruitment Inc.**, an HR consultancy for technology companies in B.C., said many laid-off workers in the technology cluster are victims of circumstances.

He added, however, that an equal number of workers recently laid off were "marginal hires" a year ago, during the talent crunch, when all technology firms were fighting over recruits.

In the face of the recession, the low-skilled workers are the first to go.

"It's not a talent shortage, it's a depth and breadth issue," said To. "Companies want more skill, so the depth demands are higher, and they want a broader range of knowledge and domain."

He added that the demand is more acute during a down-

"It's not a talent shortage, it's a depth and breadth issue"

-Raymond To, partner, Go Recruitment Inc.

turn as companies cut costs and give employees additional responsibilities.

Demand for Go's retention services, which include involuntary turnover-prevention training and productivity acceleration seminars, has risen in recent months, as companies upgrade employee skills.

Go's recruiting services

upcoming titles for 2009.

However in response to further **BIV** questions regarding the status of **Sugar Rush**, **Nexon America's** vice-president of marketing **Min Kim** responded that **Nexon** was "in conversations with **Klei Entertainment** to determine possible next steps."

Kim said that continuing operations at **NPNA** was "not a viable option" given today's rapidly changing economic landscape.

"This was a move to secure the long-term health of the company."

He added that **Nexon America** remains profitable and growing annually. ■ apetrozzi@biv.com

business remains steady: it continues to hire roughly six or seven employees for clients each month. It has 15 positions available with clients that include **Mobidia Inc.**, a Richmond-based software developer that has posted four positions since January 6.

November was Go's highest sales month last year, meaning that the company's clients filled a number of high-salaried jobs that month.

In a partnership formed last month, Go and the **Wireless Innovation Network Society of BC (WINBC)** are hosting a series of human resource, recruitment and retention workshops to connect wireless developers with potential employees.

Under the initiative, Go works primarily with organizations searching for top talent.

Re-affirming that B.C. still faces a talent shortage, Go is recruiting from outside the province.

For example, To is closely watching Toronto's **Nortel Networks Corp.** and might head east to recruit some of the **Nortel** employees that are expected to be laid off in the wake of its bankruptcy filing last week.

Don Safnuk, president and CEO of **Corporate Recruiters Ltd.**, a recruiting agency based in Vancouver, agreed that it's becoming difficult for workers with lower skill-sets to find work. His clients are recruiting for a few key roles.

Salespeople are now a key commodity, said Safnuk, because many companies need to refine their pitch to raise capital or need to aggressively push back against the prevailing economic headwinds to increase sales.

Talented product managers are in demand because they make key decisions during a recession on where to focus a company's time and resources.

"While you have to make some course corrections to deal with the realities of the environment you're in today, you still need to position your company to be successful tomorrow," said Safnuk. "And that means getting the right kind of people to deal with the circumstances that you're working under." ■ cgc@biv.com

Video game studio shut down

100 employees out of work as Korean online gaming giant hit by global economic turmoil

ANDREW PETROZZI

Vancouver video game developer **Humanature Studios** is the latest local industry victim of the global economic slowdown.

Humanature Studios, also known as **Nexon Publishing North America (NPNA)**, shut down early last week, throwing about 100 employees out of work. NPNA was a division of South Korean online

casual gaming giant **Nexon Corp.** It opened in November 2006 and was Nexon's first development studio outside of South Korea.

Humanature CEO **Alex Garden** was also released.

When contacted by **BIV**, Garden confirmed that the studio had been closed, but directed further inquiries to **Nexon America** in Los Angeles. Humanature had partnered with local game de-

veloper **Klei Entertainment Inc.** for its first game, **Sugar Rush**, which was scheduled for release in 2009. When contacted by **BIV**, **Klei Entertainment** CEO **Jamie Cheng** declined to comment on the status of **Sugar Rush** or why Humanature was shut down.

"We are an independent company and because we're subleasing space from Nexon, a lot of people were worried

about what our state would be," said Cheng. "We're another development company that has lost a publisher. It happens."

As a result, he said the company reduced the hours of two employees and laid off another, leaving 11 staff.

Cheng declined to provide details about Klei's future, but said the company has other plans, including an art outsourcing section for the animation industry.

Nexon America was equally tight-lipped about what led to Humanature's sudden demise when contacted by **BIV**. Its L.A.-based teams will continue to work on existing titles as well as



604.986.2261 x 212
corporate@mountseymour.com
www.mountseymour.com

Add an Edge to your Next Board Meeting

With our new conference room, combine a morning meeting with an afternoon of skiing, snowshoeing or tubing!

