

IT staff more confident and sought after than ever: survey

Nearly a third of employers made counter offers to retain key IT staff in 2007, according to new research, suggesting that global financial uncertainty has done little to soften demand for IT professionals.

The latest annual survey from a specialist IT recruitment company, which takes detailed responses from more than 200 of Australia's major employers of IT staff, also found that 56% had paid more than they had budgeted for in IT salaries during the year. This was a factor of both rising salaries and higher-than-expected working hours.

The survey showed that IT salaries rose by 4.2% on average during 2007, and were expected to rise by an average 4.6% this year. At the same time, the number of hours worked by IT staff increased, with nearly half the profession (44%) now working longer than a 40-hour week, up 6pp on the previous survey. All but 4% of IT professionals had to do some weekend work.

In total, 41% of organisations were planning to increase their IT workforce, up 6pp, with 40% planning to hire more perm staff, and 29% planning to use more contractors.

Turnover among IT staff was up, with 20% of companies reporting attrition of more than 15%, up 9pp. Three out of four of those who left (74%) did so voluntarily. As well, 48% of employers reported having had a job offer knocked back by an IT candidate, up 4pp.

Graduate recruitment increased sharply, with 37% (up 10pp) of employers having hired an IT graduate in 2007.

A growing number of employers were following a "build" rather than "buy" approach to their recruitment. Some 61% of respondents agreed with the statement: "When recruiting IT people, I am happy if they don't have all the skills required, so long as they have the right attitude." This was up from 58% the previous year, and 50% the year before - indicating that IT employers are becoming far more flexible in accepting permanent candidates who don't perfectly fit their job brief.

The survey found that IT professionals were "extremely confident" and clearly held the balance of power over employers. It also said the most in-demand roles during 2008 would be in business analysis, application development, project management and infrastructure support.