

commercial feature **recruitment**

A tough job

More jobs, choosier jobseekers and more demanding employers mean the recruitment industry faces more challenges than ever before, writes Mikey Stafford.

Sixteen years on from the end of the decade and the 1980s seem like a bad dream. Condemned to the annals are Johnny Logan's white suit, stonewashed jeans and Bob Geldof's music career. Another bad memory synonymous with that grim decade in Irish history was unemployment. In the pre-Celtic Tiger days young Irish people who didn't take the slow boat to England or a transatlantic flight had little or no hope of securing gainful employment - as Tommy Tiernan put it, "You couldn't find a job, even if you were looking for one."

All that has changed and Ireland's unemployment rate is now little over half of the EU25 average. According to last month's live register figures our rate of unemployment now stands at 4.4%, while the European Union's average is 8%. As well as being good news for job hunters, Ireland's healthy job market has resulted in boom times for the recruitment industry. Myriad recruitment firms are now thriving in this

country as ever expanding sectors of the economy struggle to fill vacancies.

According to the most recent Fás/ESRI bulletin, vacancies rose by 4% in the month of June to reach 21% in July. While this considerable rise was driven predominantly by the construction and service industries, all sectors of the economy are experiencing an historically high demand for labour. Tom Crosbie of RecruitIreland.com says many industries are suffering from a shortage of suitable candidates to fill vacancies, particularly in the high-tech areas. "Right now I think there is a shortage of quality candidates across a wide spectrum - demand is particularly high in healthcare, pharmaceutical, and growing again in IT while areas such as manufacturing are still in decline."

Crosbie and others who have been involved in the recruitment industry for a considerable length of time have noticed a change in the attitude of prospective

employees, who now hold most of the cards in the job market. Gone are the days when a candidate would have to put all their eggs in one basket - jobseekers now have options, which they are not afraid to explore fully.

"At the moment it is clearly a candidate's market, with employers struggling to fill vacancies in many sectors," Crosbie told *Business & Finance*. "With the wealth of opportunity for candidates, it is difficult for individual employers to attract and retain good people. Very few people under the age of 35 remember what a slow economy can be like and this has rubbed off on some candidates' attitude to jobs-seeking."

This new breed of candidate is good news for recruitment firms, who are benefiting from a job market where shopping around is not only possible but also beneficial. New recruitment firms are springing up all the time to cater for Ireland's young, vibrant workforce who take an à la carte attitude to job hunting. "The number of agencies active



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in the market is increasing," says Crosbie. "New agency contacts for RecruitIreland.com in the first six months of 2006 were 134 compared to 90 in 2005 and 56 in the equivalent period in 2004."

All these agencies must deal with the same problem - candidate supply. The government's decision to open our labour market to citizens of the 10 EU accession states has alleviated the problem somewhat, but Michael McDowell's recent assertion that the open door policy would not be extended to the people of Bulgaria and Romania when they join the EU would seem to fly in the face of recent research. Crosbie believes the current levels of immigration may need to increase if the economy is to continue thriving. "The National Centre for Partnership Performance has estimated last year that Ireland needs 30,000 workers from outside the state every year for the next five years to maintain current growth rates, and now this looks like an underestimate."

30,000 workers per annum is a lot of potential business for Ireland's ever-expanding recruitment industry and competition is fierce. As one of Ireland's leading online recruitment sites,

RecruitIreland.com is aware of what is required to succeed. According to Crosbie, agencies need to focus on more than building their database of employers, it is becoming more and more important to offer jobseekers a comprehensive and attractive service - especially if they're operating at the

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higher end of the market. "For agencies quality of service is going to be key for any company to prosper in the future and the good agencies tend to get the best candidates by looking after them particularly with communication and feedback."

Employers are also seeking as comprehensive a service as possible, with the suitability of successful candidates sitting atop their list of priorities. To this end, Checkback International has carved out for themselves a niche in the market. Pre-

employment screening is now considered an indispensable service by many employers and Checkback International has become a market leader in the supply of quality driven pre-employment and background screening services.

It is estimated that as much as 30% of potential employees across all industries misrepresent themselves on their curriculum vitae by claiming false qualifications and experience. Checkback International has come across many instances of misrepresentation and fraud through their screenings on a daily basis. Most employers would agree that employees who commit fraud or misrepresent themselves at the assessment stage are putting their future success in jeopardy.

Based in Dublin, CBI is Ireland's first data protection act-compliant, pre-employment screening service. They screen thousands of international applicants each year, and as such are not only familiar to potential employees but also to human resource departments throughout the EMEA region. This familiarity opens many doors in their search for relevant data on behalf of clients, including restricted data that would otherwise be unobtainable. Their branding



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and penetration of the market place has become so successful that it has been known for applicants to withdraw at interview stage once presented with CBI application forms.

CBI's success means that they have developed a quick and easy system of screening, which can be customised for each and every client. Firstly a number of application forms are developed for use at the interview stage. These forms are then completed and returned to CBI. The analysis and screening process commences and takes on average two to five days. On completion, the client receives a full, comprehensive and confidential report on the potential employee's background. The client then directs CBI account manager on the suitability of said applicant after reviewing report and a clearance certificate is issued for each applicant.

To some, the use of CBI's services may smack of paranoia or a dangerous level of distrust, but the statistics are frightening. According to PRMG one-quarter of potential employees will commit fraud in order to succeed in a job application. This is corroborated by CBI's own records, which show that up to one-third of applicants

misrepresent or distort their previous career history, educational qualifications and other personal details when seeking employment.

CBI can trawl a huge variety of databases in order to test the veracity of an applicant's details. These include background investigations, educational verifications, reference checks, employment gaps, personal references, address verifications, credit searches, company records, directorships - as well as more general tools such as media searches. "Checkback services proved to be an extremely useful tool in our recruitment process; their professional and experienced team ensures quality of screening within a surprisingly short turn-around-time," says Alan Cousins of SPL Contracts. "Checkback services are well adjusted to the present labour market in Ireland thanks to the ability to screen foreign nationals in their own languages. All areas of our business relations catered for, from quality screening services through client account administration to comprehensive reporting system."

The success of firms like Checkback and RecruitIreland.com is testimony to the role that technology now plays in the

recruitment industry. The internet is now a hugely important tool for employers, prospective employees and firms themselves. Crosbie believes this has revolutionised the industry, as the continuing success of RecruitIreland would suggest. "The major change in recruitment trends over the past number of years has been the increasing use of technology, particularly the internet and email," he told *Business & Finance*.

"Whereas in 1999 when RecruitIreland.com was launched, job advertising on the internet was confined to IT jobs. It is now not just commonplace but is the main method for sourcing candidates across all sectors."

Judging by the latest research recruitment firms and jobsites are only going to get busier as Ireland's capricious workforce continue to look for that perfect job. Crosbie said that a survey of 1,000 candidates just conducted by RecruitIreland.com revealed that just over 70% are planning to change jobs in the next 12 months. "With 75% claiming they will use the internet as their first port of call to start their job hunt, there is no doubt this medium has become the number one destination for job hunting in Ireland." ■

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