

# Finding post-recession employment



News - Feature

## Technology and construction industries see brighter days ahead

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Employment paper

Technology, customer service and sales are the top three areas in which employers expect to add jobs first once the economy rebounds, according to a new study by Robert Half International and CareerBuilder.



It also found that in the next 12 months, more than half of employers polled plan to hire full-time employees, four in 10 will hire contract, temporary or project workers and four in 10 will hire part-time employees.

"Companies already are identifying the key skill sets they will need in new hires to take advantage of the opportunities presented by improving economic conditions," said Max Messmer, chair and CEO of Robert Half International. "Firms that cut staffing levels too deeply may need to do significant rebuilding once the recovery takes hold."

In the current economy, hiring managers consider customer service the function most critical to their organization's success followed by sales, marketing/creative and technology. According to the survey, public relations/communications, business development and accounting/finance round out the list.

"Over the past several years, B.C.'s tech industry has led the entire country in employment growth. Today, despite the current economic challenges, we continue to see growth in the tech sector with the most recent statistics showing 6% growth between August 2008 and July 2009," said Cindy Pearson, COO of the BC Technology Industry Association (BCTIA).

"The need for a diverse pool of skilled workers will always be in demand as the talent needs of a technology company are ever-changing and dependent on their business and growth cycle," said Pearson. "In the early days, the focus will be on product development and therefore technical talent is in high demand; as the product reaches the commercialization stage the need for sales, marketing and customer support talent is imperative."

Past tech industry labour studies, conducted by the BCTIA, have indicated a pent-up demand for talent in technical skills, sales, marketing, product development and project management, she said.

While talent is more readily available today, the demand for highly-skilled workers to support the development of cutting-edge innovation never diminishes, according to Pearson.

Statistics Canada recently reported that employment increased by 27,000 in August, led by part-time work and among private-sector employees. The unemployment rate edged up to 8.7% from 8.6% as more people participated in the labour market, but B.C.'s unemployment rate held steady at 7.8%.

Employment among private-sector employees increased by 49,000 in August, the first increase in this group since September 2008. Employment among both public-sector employees and the self-employed edged down in August.

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insurance, real estate and leasing. Total employment gains were partially offset by losses in business, building and other support services, as well as educational services.

There were employment increases in a number of industries in August, with the largest in retail and wholesale trade (21,000) and finance, insurance, real estate and leasing (18,000). Total employment gains were partially offset by losses in business, building and other support services (-33,000), as well as educational services (-17,000).

Employment in the manufacturing sector continued its downward trend in August, while construction rose slightly.

"We are beginning to see some positive signs for recovery in the economy generally, which bodes well for construction," confirmed Keith Sashaw, president of the Vancouver Regional Construction Association (VRCA).

"We are expecting to see some recovery in residential construction toward the end of this year or early next, and then some pickup in non-residential construction following that."

The industry is also beginning to see some impact from the stimulus packages put forward by the federal and provincial governments.

"While I would not characterize the demand as 'pent up,' there are probably greater opportunities for workers in the infrastructure sector. We are also seeing activity in the renovation sector of the housing industry."

Employers in construction have done their best to retain valuable employees who have experience and training as much as possible, he said.

"It is interesting to note that regional employment is forecast to drop 10% to 115,800 from 128,700 in 2008, which is where we were in mid-2007, although building permits are at pre-2006 levels. We expect to see a steady increase in activity as the economy works its way out of the recession, and are confident that we will see a concomitant increase in employment to meet the demand."

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