

Telecommuting, governance, drive ITregister.com.au's early success

After being made redundant when the IT firm he worked for outsourced all its contracts overseas, "getting even" wasn't on Owen Baker's mind: the future of Australia's IT industry was.

"For a long time," Baker says, "it has troubled me that slowly but steadily IT work has moved offshore. Retaining a strong IT sector ensures we retain a solid training ground for graduates, who, with time and experience, become part of a valuable pool of IT talent in Australia.

"Obviously, the complete opposite happens when the work is eroded away."

Baker quotes a survey from late last year for the Graduate Careers Council of Australia.

"This showed the relatively poorer employment prospects for IT graduates. For instance, 80.1 per cent of all 2003 graduates had full-time employment — compared with 68.1 per cent of 2003 computer-science graduates. That's only two-thirds!"

So, armed with the skills, knowledge and connections from 20 years of delivering IT solutions to business, Baker got together with some friends and started The Australian IT Register, or ITregister.com.au.

But they weren't just flogging their own wares and skills. Baker wanted to expose the rich lode of talent of sole operators, which is sometimes untapped just because of their small size. And he wanted to target those skills (including his own) to the projects, businesses and regions that really needed them — whether in tailored teams or as individuals.

He always thought a registry-based business model would be successful. It was the speed with which it happened that surprised him.

"Obviously nobody really wants to send projects overseas and put local people out of work, but when you're offered cost reductions of 40% or more, how can you argue? The problem isn't the lack of local talent, it's simply an upfront economic decision that many business managers have to make.

"What we've done is find a way to still be competitive on price, and highlight the obvious improvements you get from using local resources who understand Australian business, culture and lifestyle. To do this, we had to come up with a business model that goes against the trend; we dispensed with the flashy offices and slick sales presentations, and simply focused on delivering high-quality solutions at a competitive price."

ITregister.com.au has a rapidly growing database of professionals from around the country with every IT-related skill of which you could think. For instance, not every job just needs software developers, sometimes specialists in testing or technical writing or business analysis are needed.



What also makes ITregister.com.au unique is the way it supplies these skills.

“We work a lot via telecommuting,” Baker says. “We’re a ‘virtual’ company, using the internet to service clients. Telecommuting means we can provide a highly responsive service at very competitive rates. It also means no job is too small, or too big, or even in the wrong location — although we do have people placed regionally. Obviously when the job needs it we also work on-site as part of a company’s team.

“But no matter what skills are needed on a job, the overarching methodology is project governance, or what I like to call ITregister.com.au’s ‘six steps to project success’. These are: definition, design, building, testing, implementing and support. There’s a lot more to making an IT system work for a business than simply buying a package or hiring a contractor!”

Baker says ITregister.com.au’s business model suits it to working for SMEs right up to corporations.

“We often take on really small jobs that the big IT companies pass over. But then, because we can gear up a widely skilled team quickly, we can also jump in and do big projects for big corporations.”

Baker hopes ITregister.com.au will go some way toward stemming the flow of IT work and skills out of Australia.

“Hopefully, we’ll start to see better results in future Graduate Careers Council of Australia surveys, which means Australia’s IT industry will be a great, strong resource for Australian businesses and the economy.”

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