ITRegister records 200th Freelancer

By Nick Miller
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The Australian IT Register, a three-year-old network of IT consultants set up to provide a local outsourcing resource, has registered its 200th IT freelancer, which director Owen Baker says is a significant milestone.

"The people we are subcontracting are typically highly skilled freelancers with a reputation and the nous to run their own business," he says.

[Full text of press release below]
ITRegister, as it is known by staff and customers, has quickly become recognised as the company to call if you're looking for a high quality IT resource to fill an urgent need, or simply engage a resource to deliver a top quality job.

"Whilst we do primarily focus on software development and related activities such as project management, business analysis and architecture, we have also successfully placed people into the roles such as network engineering, systems management, IT strategy and even IT recruitment" says Baker.

The company was founded in 2003 to formalise what was already an informal network of contacts that Owen had established during his 20 years of working as a software developer, architect and manager with companies such as HP, Megatec and KPMG.

"Looking back on it now it was a natural progression to form an organisation that put structure around what was already mostly in place, but I had no idea that it would grow this quickly. Until recently I was still convinced that I needed to be working as a consultant myself, and running the business was just a part time administration task. But I've now accepted that I have to focus the majority of my time on ensuring this business continues to service its clients effectively, and that we attract and retain high quality individuals".

That doesn't mean however that Owen has had to give up IT consulting entirely, for example he has just recently completed a hands on role implementing a solution that provides education resources to Australian Primary Schools, using Microsoft's latest .NET and SharePoint 2007 product suites. That system is sponsored

Owen Baker… "we get more loyalty and respect from contractors than full time staff."
Photo: Mark Farrelly

by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and managed by Bill Lang International (see www.enterprising.com.au).

So what sort of people does ITRegister attract? Baker says the typical consultant who works for them is a person who has previously worked in contracting roles, and as such understands the rewards and risks associated with it.

"The rewards are not just monetary either, for most of us it provides a good balance of interesting work and personal lifestyle. Many of the people working for us are only working 2 or 3 days per week. What they do with the remaining time is their business, and in many cases it isn't business at all."

"The people that are not suited to us are those looking for a guaranteed 40 hour per week role. If you want that then stay in a permanent role. But the reality is that as a contractor you can work 30 hours per week (or 8 months out of 12) and still earn the same or more money. Job security also isn't necessarily any less either as full time roles can easily disappear and often contractors have greater control over their role. But it's a personal choice and the responsibilities associated with family, mortgage, and other issues need to be taken into consideration".

Whilst this might sound like an IT retirement scheme Baker is quick to point out that the majority of their workforce is in the 30-45 year old age group. "These are people who have considerable IT experience but for one reason or another have decided not to pursue the corporate career path. They are typically self motivated, articulate and get satisfaction from solving problems and helping people".

Baker says the one of the challenges in setting up the business was overcoming his and the clients perception that some ITRegister staff would need to be employees to ensure loyalty, trust and longevity.

"But we realised within the first 12 months that our concerns in this area were completely unnecessary, in fact I would say we get more loyalty and respect from our sub-contractors than I've experienced previously with some full time staff. The reason for this is actually quite simple, we solve some of the biggest hurdles of contracting; namely finding new and interesting work and providing them with a network of peers with whom they can interact. This in turn keeps them motivated in working with us and creates mutual respect".

The challenge now for ITRegister is to see if it can expand the number of people in its registry further. It raises the interesting question of just how many IT professionals are actually turning to freelance contracting as a viable alternative to permanent roles?