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Pulse of DC Tech Job Market Grows Stronger

The tech job sector shows strong signs of improvement both with the number of jobs that are available as well as with the forward looking IT positions surfacing.

By Bob Keeffe | May 17, 2010

Bradford Rand's company organizes job fairs for high-tech workers twice a month in the greater D.C. area. When Rand opens his latest show on Wednesday in McLean, Va., he'll have something he hasn't had in a year or so: A full house.



Job seekers line up at a recent TechExpo job fair for tech workers. The company's job fair in McLean, Va. on Wednesday is sold out (for hiring companies) for the first time in about a year. CREDIT: TechExpo

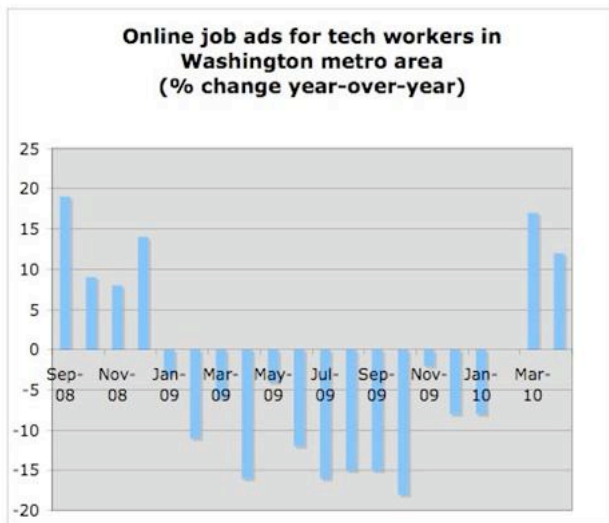
"We're sold out," said Rand, president and CEO of events company **TechExpo**. Fifty companies will be seeking to recruit hundreds of IT workers who have government security clearance at TechExpo's job fair at the Ritz-Carlton hotel in McLean on Wednesday. In recent months, Rand has been lucky to get 30-40 companies to sign up for space.

"Our job fairs for quite some time have been - I don't want to say quiet - but just not as strong," he said. "All of the sudden, literally in the last 30 days, we've seen a spike."

The job market for tech workers, Rand said, "seems to be strong again."

According to **WANTED Analytics**, which tracks online job ads for high-tech companies, ads seeking information technology workers in the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, Va. metro area rose in March for the first time in more than a year.

After flattening out in February, want ads for IT workers in the region jumped by about 17 percent in March and 12 percent in April from a year ago, according to the research firm. By comparison, online tech job ads were down about 18 percent during the doldrums last October.



Source: WANTED Analytics

Better yet for the local technology industry - and the local economy - the jobs that companies are trying to fill seem geared toward future expansions, said Charles Thibault, research manager for WANTED Analytics. In the D.C. area and across the country, "we're seeing a lot of demand for what I would call forward-looking IT positions," he said. "It's (hiring by companies) that are investing in new products and processes."

Few companies in the area are hiring more people more quickly than **Booz, Allen Hamilton**. The McLean,

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Va.-based consulting company plans to hire 1,500 workers over the next few months, and approximately 5,000 in all over the next year, said company spokesman James Fisher.

The majority of the openings are for tech-related consultants, Fisher said. Many of the new positions are tied to a huge influx of new government IT and cybersecurity contracts that Booz Allen landed in the past several weeks.

The Department of Defense recently announced more than **\$120 million in contracts for Booz Allen** for cybersecurity, communications technology, information analysis and other types of high-tech work.

For job seekers, the apparent turnaround in hiring couldn't have come sooner. Overall, the region has been losing civilian jobs ever since October 2008, albeit more slowly than most parts of the country. Partly because of the hiring by local tech companies, some economists now predict that the government's April private-sector jobs report for the region will finally show a net gain when it's released in a few weeks.

Still, with the overall civilian unemployment rate at nearly 11 percent in the District at 6.7 percent in the metro area in March, it remains an employer's market for many positions.

"I would say we're still certainly very satisfied with the folks we're seeing," said Fisher of Booz Allen.

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