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Canadian IT Industry Needs Image Makeover! Looming Skills Shortage!

January 25, 2007

Canadian IT industry needs image makeover, say analysts
ITWorldCanada.com

January 24, 2007

by Nestor E. Arellano

The information technology (IT) industry in Canada needs an image makeover to save companies and labour consultants.

Over the next five years, Canadian businesses will have to fill no less than 90,000 new IT positions, says Information Processing Society (CIPS) and association of IT professionals in Toronto.

However, Canadian colleges and universities will not produce the required number of qualified candidates.

Of the 90,000 vacancies, around 60,000 will be newly created positions and an estimated 30,000 will be replacements.

"I've spoken with numerous talent brokers and they're telling me the demand can't be filled," said Ibáñez.

The CIPS executive said companies, educational institutions, and the government should work together to address the shortage.

Analysts believe the personnel shortage is a result of IT's tainted image — a legacy of the disastrous 2001, saw the rapid founding and spectacular crashes of technology companies, particularly those in the dot-com era.

"IT has lost its glamour. Computer sciences don't really seem appealing to students as it was 10 to 25 years ago," said Woyzbun, a senior analyst at research firm Info-Tech Research Group Inc., in London Ont.

He said students are probably being advised "at home or in schools" that IT is not a stable or attractive career choice.

Intensifying the problem is the fact that the number of IT workers retiring each year is growing.

More and more workers are retiring even before they reach 65. When these people leave, they take with them a wealth of experience that is still widely used within the company and industry.

Woyzbun said the turnover of skilled IT workers can cause serious problems. He recalled an incident, where a major bank (RBC) experienced a technical difficulty that prevented clients from transferring funds.

The incident was especially hard on companies that needed to release salary payments. It was later discovered that the system was not understood how the malfunctioning system worked, the analyst said.

"It's a paradox," said Woyzbun. "The industry needs schools to teach leading edge technology to attract new talent, but it also needs to train people who understand the older stuff to replace the retirees."

The recent growth of IT service outsourcing and off shoring has helped some companies deal with the shortage, but analysts noted that this practice is also contributing to the perception that it is not worthwhile to enrol in tech education.

"The talent pool shortage will hit us very hard by 2012," said Rhonda Singer, president of Progress Career Services, an organization providing career planning aid to job seekers and immigrants who received their training in their home countries.

She said foreign trained professionals could be ideal candidates for most positions if they could leap over the barrier of technical training but companies are hesitant to hire immigrants because of a language and culture barrier.

Chaim Fachler, employment adviser, PCPI, said most employers are also looking for IT professionals with soft skills. "Its not enough that applicants have the technical knowledge and skill, they also have to demonstrate good communication and interpersonal skills."

The PCPI helps foreign trained IT professionals upgrade English language skills, develop so-called "soft skills", and improve themselves.

Fachler, however said, most IT professionals they have encountered are short on training in areas that are in high demand.

"A lot of companies are looking for people with background in security applications or game development," he said.

Ibaraki bundles together today's highly marketable skills under the acronym BAIT: Business and communication skills; and Technical skills.

Areas where IT professionals are most needed: business processes and analysis; infrastructure optimization; and Web-based technology; and enterprise resource planning (ERP).

For the full article, see:

<http://www.itworldcanada.com/Pages/Docbase/ViewArticle.aspx?id=idgml-9d1dbf89-919a-4087&Port:>

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