

Business Sense:

Labor market on verge of recovery following slump

3 days ago at 00:15 | Serhiy Marchenko

With Ukraine's economy now back on the growth path, increasing demand for qualified personnel will soon reach the line that will trigger a return to competitive wars for labor resources in some sectors.

While the economic crisis has put employers in the driving seat, that advantage will begin to shift back to job applicants, as the imbalances in the labor market that existed before the crisis remain – namely, a shortage of qualified specialists.

As employment opportunities pick up, and recruiting in some sectors remains very competitive, it's important for applicants to make themselves as attractive as possible for potential employers, and take advantage of increasing demand by seeking to secure the best possible pay package.

The upturn in employment may come much sooner than many expect. In the last two years there were no places for young specialists to improve their skills and qualifications, as most of the projects were frozen, and employers preferred more experienced staff, which was cheap on the market. The elder generation is poorly adapted to the leading companies' corporate culture, and prefers medium and small companies of a family kind.

So, as before, the real sector of the economy desperately needs qualified specialists, and as soon as the resurrection stage will be changed on the economy's development, one might witness the avalanche growth of that need.

Shortage of qualified personnel will also cause a jump in salaries. By the end of 2010, some categories of specialists might reach the income level of 2008.

Sales managers, commercial, sales and marketing directors are all in high demand. Many of these were laid off during the crisis, but after sales dropped, companies are now looking to hire them again. Sales managers could bank \$1,000-1,500 per month, although most of that depends on a sales bonus. Directors are likely to earn \$3,000 and the same again in bonuses.

IT specialists also have good prospects. The offshore programming market has revived faster than others, and Ukrainian developers have had plenty of orders since the second half of 2009. Qualified software developers can expect \$1,500-2,000 per month basic salary. Web developers are also in demand, although they are paid slightly less.

There are, however, some professions with weaker medium-term prospects, such as Specialists and middle-level managers in banking and insurance. Operations in those sectors have been drastically reduced, and the need for new personnel is unlikely to pick up before the end of the year.

At the same time, the top level positions in the banking and insurance sectors are undergoing rotations, as some owners are dissatisfied with their companies' performance.

The retail sector is an unlikely growth area for employment, given that there is little

likelihood in the near term of a repeat of the wave of shop openings that happened before the crisis and created openings for top managers.

It's also a tough time for lawyers, financial analysts and brokers to get high salaries. There are a few vacancies, however. Salary levels range from \$500 to \$800 per month, significantly below the pre-crisis levels offered.

The situation with accountants is quite different. Although the salary level also isn't high – even a chief accountant rarely takes home more than \$1,000 per month – there are plenty of vacancies on the market. And there might be even more of them given government plans to tighten rules on who can register as a private entrepreneur, and whose taxes don't need to be taken care of by an accountant.

Whether your sector is in demand or not, now is an important time to increase your competitiveness on the labor market. You can take some relatively simple steps, which could secure you a higher salary, an interesting job, or a place at a top firm. You don't need a perfect resume or top-class experience. Simply being better than others will do the work.

First, be proactive. Don't wait for an employer to find the resume that you've placed somewhere on a job site. Search for vacancies and send your CV directly.

Second, be loyal. Try to learn as much as possible about a company. Send them a resume targeted at a specific position, explaining the strengths you have that are most relevant. Also send a cover letter, where you can explain what you know about the company, why you want to work for it and why you are a solid candidate.

Third, be prepared. You should be ready to answer questions at an interview about your achievements in previous positions and your personal input into successes.

Fourth, be confident. During the meeting with a potential employer, carry yourself with dignity, as an equal. Do not try to fawn or ingratiate yourself, which is often taken as a lack of self-confidence.

Fifth, be honest. I am often present at interviews when our clients meet potential candidates. From my experience, it is always better to tell the truth, or admit that you don't have an answer to a specific question, than try to guess the right answer. The truth is always more persuasive.

Sixth, remember your interests. If the employer is pleased with you and offers you a job, do not be shy to stand for your interests. The job offer is recognition of your value, and you should push for the best possible package.

Don't forget that even on the most depressed markets firms are ready to hire the stars – the best in their profession.

And there's no need for those without a degree in law, economics or some other "cash profession" to worry. Income is more closely related to the professional level, and that's why a good waiter can sometimes earn more than a second-rate lawyer.