



JOHN HACKETT
DIRECTOR, EVENT
RECRUITMENT

JOHN HACKETT CONTINUES the discussion (page 8) about a skills shortage in the business event sector.

a skills shortage in the EVENTS INDUSTRY?

It was reported that during a recent micenet AUSTRALIA 'Meeting of the Minds' roundtable discussion, leading event industry players were bullish about business for the remainder of 2011. At the same time they expressed fears that a shortage of skilled practitioners could impact businesses within the next 12 months, with many believing they could struggle to find experienced staff to fill key positions.

So are their fears justified and what can we expect in the next 12 months? I thought the best way to determine this might be to look back over the last few years to gain some insight into event candidates/skill supply.

Pre GFC and for the 12 months leading up to October 2008, we were registering experienced, event specific candidates seeking work at the rate of around 60 per month. For the 12 months thereafter, up to October 2009, when most of us endured the downturn, new candidate registrations jumped to around 85 per month, to a large extent fueled by redundancies and expat candidates returning from overseas as work dried up over there.

Since November 2009, when most of us experienced an upswing in business fortunes, our rate of new candidate registrations has settled back to around 70 per month, in part, a result of increasing enquiries from candidates traveling here from the UK.

Interestingly for us, the ongoing boom that occurred pre-GFC (for some 15 years) did not produce a skills shortage in the events industry. We rarely had to advertise a vacancy on a major job ad board and could rely on our database of active candidates as well as referrals from others (inactive candidates and client/industry contacts) to source and place suitable candidates with our clients. And this is still the case, post GFC.

It remains to be seen whether this will continue but I am confident that it will.

Of course, there are specific roles in the industry that are always more challenging to fill than others (e.g. technical production/

direction, conference content production, business development) but, if you are targeting event management, logistics and operations staff we have never experienced a candidate supply shortage.

Some points to consider:

- The events industry is a very popular career choice and we receive regular enquiries from those looking for a start in the industry. An option for companies fearing they may be caught short is to "grow your own" and consider recruiting entry level staff now (always in abundance), harness their enthusiasm and develop their expertise in-house so they can quickly make a contribution.
- It is also important to keep track of event market salaries and ensure that you are paying (and offering) fair market salaries. (We produce a free salary survey periodically for the events industry).
- Staff engagement is a key issue to ensure you retain the talent that you already have on board - listen to them and address any concerns your team may have. Otherwise, you will not only be searching for staff to fill newly created positions but may well be replacing those who are leaving due to poor pay or management gripes.
- Many companies might consider experienced temporary event staff to fill peak periods or specific project requirements but they could be considered to satisfy an ongoing need. This will also open up your candidate pool to experienced event staff from the UK, many of whom will consider a longer term role if you are willing to sponsor.
- Use a specialist recruiter like ourselves to tap into a candidate market that you will not be accessing through advertising on website job boards or other means.
- Finally, keep an open mind about the skills you require in your team. Remember, there will always be a skills shortage if your perfect candidate is never found (they likely never will be). Some flexibility, compromise and an understanding of the realities of the market can go a long way to addressing any perceived skills shortage.

For further information contact Event Recruitment on (02) 9279 2019 or email info@eventrecruitment.com.au.