

IT Healthy Despite Downturn

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One area that has continued to thrive despite the recession is information technology. That is borne out by the strong job numbers in the sector.

While employment in most other areas has dropped over the past three years, technology has grown steadily. It stood at 74,100 at the end of June 2010, up from 73,500 a year earlier and 71,100 two years earlier.

“The IT market has been outperforming most other sectors over the past year,” said Barry Rudden, associate director at Sigmar Recruitment.

“This time last year, when we’d seen the market pick up a little bit towards the end of 2009, we didn’t expect the level of demand we ended up seeing.”

Rudden said that the health of the sector was down to a number of factors. Technology companies are mainly export orientated, so they don’t have to rely on the weak Irish economy for sales. Secondly, the sector went through its own recession after 2000 and learned some tough lessons along the way.

“There are a lot more robust business models now and they are probably less susceptible to the problems that have plagued other areas,” he said. “Most of the venture capitalists investing here investing here are putting their money into technology companies. There is a huge amount of innovation happening in Ireland. People are going out there and winning funding for it. That can’t be said for other sectors.”

According to Rudden, companies right across the board are hiring. Big multinationals coming into Ireland are continuing to create jobs, with companies such as Google, PayPal, eBay,

LinkedIn and Dell all announcing new positions last year. Irish companies are also continuing to hire.

“There is a reasonable amount of activity from financial services companies,” he said. “They are hiring in positions related to audit, compliance and risk management. A lot of the things that drive advances in financial services these days are underpinned by technology.”

A number of skills are in high demand at present. In the software development sector, people with Java J2E and .Net C# are quite sought after. There are also a lot of vacancies in the field of software testing.

Rudden said there was a lesser but still reasonable requirement for project managers and business support staff. “If you stuffy computer science, it will be more focused on programming,” he said. “A broader business and IT qualification would put you into the systems administration and support side of the business. Others could go straight into management consultancy.”

A lot of technology companies continue to hire graduates straight from college through the traditional ‘milk round’, when firms take on a set number of graduates every year. Rudden said this still represented the most common entry into the profession for graduates.

“A couple of years ago, when things had dropped off, people were reluctant to go into computer science because there might not be many jobs,” he said. “It is always dangerous to make these assumptions, because you need to be looking four years on. Good graduates with high academic results are always highly sought after.”

Dick O’Brien