

Pool of engineers stretched thin in Boston and beyond

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Engineer. It's a broad term in today's knowledge-based economy, but one word seems to cut across many engineering disciplines: shortage.

As in other innovation cities, Boston recruiters and hiring managers report difficulty finding qualified engineers, even in the face of above-average salaries.

The demand has been particularly strong with companies in the medical device and power industries for electrical engineers, mechanical engineers and design engineers, according to **Mark O'Hara**, a market director at **TAC Worldwide**, a staff augmentation firm in Dedham that specializes in IT and engineering.

"We thought we would see a decrease in demand for direct hiring with the

recent economic woes but that has not been the case," O'Hara said.

"Several of our client companies have indicated that they are in fact feeling the impact of retiring baby boomers and they are scrambling to replace that talent," he added.

Walker Parking Consultants' Boston office is looking to add to its crew of 13 civil, mechanical, electrical and plumb-

ing engineers.

Chris Brennan, director of operations for the parking consulting and design firm, has hired two engineers in 2008 and is looking to add two more.

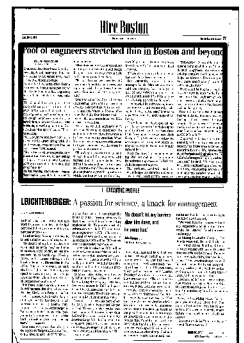
"For us, because we specialize, it's even more difficult to find experienced engineers with the skill sets that we need," Brennan said. "It's very difficult."

Brennan relies heavily on the firm's

engineering internship program to develop relationships with soon-to-be engineers. Walker's Boston office typically staffs four interns each semester. He also attends career fairs at local universities.

Attracting coveted engineers with three to 10 years of experience, he said, demands proactive involvement in local engineering societies. When Brennan needs engineers with seven to 15 years of experience, he turns to professional recruiters.

"There's going to continue to be a strong demand for engineers with degrees and it's going to be more difficult to retain them as time goes on," Brennan said. "Our strategy is to give engineers a growth opportunity within the firm so we get their buy-in long-term," he continued, noting



that 30 percent of Walker's engineers have been with the company at least 15 years.

TripAdvisor, meanwhile, is ever on the hunt for software engineers.

Eric Lombardo, human resource manager for the **Web 2.0** travel site, said the company has managed to hire 15 new software engineers this year, but still needs 17 additional new hires to keep up with the demand.

"The market for software engineers is competitive, and we are only looking for the best of the best," Lombardo says. "Our typical search takes about 90 days."

TripAdvisor has developed an aggressive program that includes sponsorship of tech events like the Facebook Developer's Garage and Melt Garage. TripAdvisor also relies on on-campus recruiting and offers its employees \$1,000 friend and family referral fees.

With the growth of consumer-facing Web technologies, the demand for software engineers with Web 2.0 skills is expected to grow.

The problem, Lombardo said, is the challenges are complex and some schools aren't teaching the necessary skills.

"TripAdvisor is scalable and that means complex challenges," Lombardo said. "Engineers get excited about solving complex challenges, so that helps us attract software engineers. But there aren't enough trained in software like Java."

There could be long-term engineering shortages in some fields. But the good news the engineering profession's strong salaries may help attract more students to the industry's various disciplines.

Recent data from **The Engineering Income & Salary Survey** shows engineering salaries across the nation remain above average. The overall median salary for all engineers is up over 5 percent from \$75,000 in 2006 to \$79,000 in 2007.

"Engineering is truly a vital, in-demand, and robust profession in our country," said **Lawrence Jacobson**, the executive director of the **National Society of Professional Engineers**. "Despite talks of shortages or aging workforce concerns," he said, "it's encouraging for current engineering professionals, and those considering entering the field, that the salaries remain above average no matter where you live or work."