

Careers

Max Messmer, Editor

2005 Accounting Hiring Trends

➤ The hiring outlook for 2005 is positive as companies devote greater attention to accounting issues. Even organizations not directly affected by new corporate governance requirements are recognizing the value of hiring employees who can ensure the integrity of their financial data and prevent fraud and wrongdoing.

The Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, in particular, is affecting staffing activity in a number of ways. For starters, businesses are hiring more personnel to focus on internal controls. Companies need accounting professionals who can assess the firm's business practices, such as its processes for documentation and authorization as well as asset security and ethical guidelines, and recommend strategies for improvement.

The demand for financial reporting expertise has increased, too. Public companies faced with accelerated Securities & Exchange Commission (SEC) filing requirements want accountants who can help them streamline processes to facilitate a faster close cycle for the 10-Q and 10-K. And businesses also are paying



particular attention to reporting practices now that CEOs and CFOs must certify company financial statements.

Skills in Demand

In addition to solid accounting skills and knowledge of government regulations, organizations seek can-

didates familiar with the latest database applications and enterprise resource planning (ERP) programs. The ability to manage data with these technologies is a basic requirement, and firms now expect accountants to apply their expertise to broader initiatives, such as upgrades and systems conversions.

Business acumen and interpersonal skills have become key hiring criteria. The heightened visibility of the accounting function has made it even more important for corporate financial staff to make a positive impression with colleagues, shareholders, clients, vendors, and other key constituents. Accountants must collaborate effectively with others and be able to communicate complex financial information to diverse audiences.

Companies are looking for applicants who have a demonstrated commitment to their profession and stay abreast of the latest industry standards. As a result, there's a strong demand for accountants who possess accreditations such as the Certified Management Accountant (CMA) designation.

Top Specialties

According to Robert Half's 2005 Salary Guide, businesses will focus hiring efforts in a number of areas during 2005:

◆ **Internal audit.** Many firms are expanding their internal auditing teams due to new regulations, including Public Company Accounting Oversight Board Auditing Standard No. 2. This rule requires auditors to offer an opinion on management's assessment of the effectiveness of the company's internal control over financial reporting and whether financial statements are fairly stated.

◆ **Cost accounting.** Businesses are hiring cost accountants to develop cost standards for material and labor that will increase competitiveness and profitability. These professionals are also being recruited to

evaluate production expenses and identify cost-savings opportunities.

◆ **General accounting.** Staff and senior accountants are needed to perform ongoing accounting work. Accounting professionals with knowledge of SEC reporting requirements are in particular demand.

◆ **Financial analysis.** As the economy improves, many firms are shifting their priorities from survival to long-term success. This creates a need for financial analysts to help define business strategy by evaluating data and making recommendations based on an assessment of trends.

◆ **Bookkeeping.** Smaller companies are hiring bookkeepers to manage a variety of tasks, including processing accounts payable and receivable, administering payroll, and managing bank reconciliations.

Organizations have begun recruiting more entry-level employees than in recent years. They seek candidates who have strong academic records and internship experience for these roles.

Employee retention has become a key concern. Businesses are taking extra measures to keep their accounting staff—including offering higher salaries and special bonuses for in-demand professionals. They are also offering advancement opportunities to show that there is long-term career potential within their organizations. In a survey by our company, 60% of executives polled said firms are more likely to promote from within than they were three years ago.

As business confidence grows, so will competition for accounting and finance professionals with the most sought-after skill sets and specialties. Companies that stay on top of trends and refocus their hiring practices accordingly will be in the strongest position to secure qualified candidates in the coming year. ■

For a free copy of Robert Half's 2005 Salary Guide, call (800) 474-4253 or visit www.rhi.com.

*Max Messmer is chairman and CEO of Robert Half International Inc. (RHI), parent company of Robert Half® Finance & Accounting, Accountemps®, and Robert Half® Management Resources. RHI is the world's first and largest specialized staffing firm placing accounting and finance professionals on a full-time, temporary, and project basis. Messmer's most recent books are *Motivating Employees For Dummies®* and *Managing Your Career For Dummies®* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.).*

Attest to the Adequacy of your Internal Controls with Confidence.

Account reconciliations and analyses are important parts of internal controls, especially now that you and your auditors have to attest to the adequacy of the reconciliation and analysis process.

Introducing ...



The only program designed specifically to prepare reconciliations accurately, consistently, and quickly... with complete documentation for management and auditor review. Pick the size that fits your organization:

- Professional Version**— Used on a network for multiple users, or on a stand alone PC in smaller organizations.
- Enterprise Edition**— Available in March, 2005 with fully integrated reporting features.



... good accounting the easy way.

Visit us at Account-Reconciliations.com or call Jeff Adler at 732.938.7000

Employment Conditions

Problems associated with insufficient staffing have been amplified at some firms due to the demands of recent government legislation. Companies that haven't maintained sufficient accounting personnel levels more likely have inadequate internal controls and financial reporting. As a result, they must take greater measures to comply with internal auditing and corporate governance mandates and reduce their risk for errors and fraud. These organizations are aggressively hiring more staff to keep up with changes.

Increased competition for top talent is changing the way employers approach the hiring process. Many firms are streamlining their recruitment efforts to secure the best applicants. Demand for internal auditors, in particular, is extremely strong, and many candidates find themselves receiving multiple offers.