

Parity sees public sector contracting remaining strong

Despite the series of scandals that have dogged public sector IT in the UK, there is good reason to believe that demand for contractors will remain strong and that there will be no massive project cancellation.

Government Can't Handle Our Data?

We've seen a whole series of data security scandals in the UK public sector, just at the time that the Government has been trying to convince us all that we should all have ID cards with our personal data. Contractors, usually of the large corporate type, have been involved in some of them. An American contractor lost a huge amount of learner driver data, for example. The NHS, also served by a major American contractor, leaked our health data as well. And the Revenue also managed to share private tax data which wasn't even being kept securely.

But Will This Mean Cancelled Projects?

One might expect all this trouble to lead to a series of project cancellations, reducing demand for contractors in the UK public sector. That is not the view of Alan Rommel, head of public sector recruitment at the London-based agency [Parity](#).

"Yes, growth in public sector demand will slow a bit, following a shift of priorities from service provision to cost control," says Rommel.

"But we only see growth slowing from 11% per year to 3% per year. So there will still be heavy demand for skilled IT contractors in the public sector in 2008."

What Drives Public Sector Growth?

As Rommel explains, the public sector is not like a private company that can simply reduce its activities. The Government has to make sure that it provides the services it is legally required to. That means the Government has to be certain that it can deliver, and that means increased use of IT to make it all happen.

"What we are seeing is a shift of emphasis from increased services to more efficient delivery of the services that are already promised," Rommel points out. "There will be emphasis on improved oversight. This will lead to increased demand for project managers, service managers, and data analysis."

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Alan Rommel-Parity

Obviously, the scandals will have helped to increase emphasis on security as well. "Contractors will be vetted with increasing care-- although we at Parity have long maintained the highest standards of controls over the personnel we supply. But as the Government increases its security checks, we will be well-placed to comply with them," Rommel continues.

The UK had, for example, been heavily committed to E-Government projects. The controversial ID card project was one of these. There are now rumours that the ID card project will be dropped. This move would fit in well with Rommel's perspective.

"We are looking at a breakdown of very large projects into much smaller phases, and these will be very carefully supervised-- obviously the Government doesn't want to see any more scandals." But the demand for skills will continue to be comprehensive to make these projects work.

Advice to Contractors

"The public sector will still be a great place to work," Rommel advises. "It's a kind of safe haven as compared to the private sector, and once you get in you won't face the kind of volatility you see there. Contractors should give it serious consideration."

“ There will be increased demand for project managers service managers and data analysis ”

Alan Rommel-Parity

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