

Economic Outlook

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Survey shows increased optimism among IT companies

Some 30 percent of South Florida executives at information technology companies expect to add staff this year, up from 24 percent who shared that expectation a year ago, according to an annual survey.

Boca Raton-based staffing agency PROTECH, which conducted the February survey of 681 technology executives in Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties, found mounting stress on existing staff at IT companies.

"People are stretched. They're working a lot more hours per week after all these layoffs we've had," said Deborah Vazquez, owner of PROTECH, an agency that places permanent and temporary employees in technical jobs with IT companies.

In the past year, many of the additions to staff at IT companies have been temporary workers. Temps comprise 29 percent of the combined work force of the executives who responded to the PROTECH survey, up sharply from 14 percent a year ago. The percentage may increase further this year.

"Companies are going to be hiring more temp workers," Vazquez said. "We began to see a major shift last year, and it's continuing this year." In her own agency, temp placement now accounts for 90 percent of the business, up from 62 percent a year ago.

Though business conditions gradually are improving at many of the IT companies her agency serves, "they don't want to make that long-term commitment to increasing the FTE [full-time equivalent] head count," she said. "I think it's going to be a couple of years before we see a real pickup in hiring of full-time employees."

The eighth annual PROTECH survey also showed that the percentage of area technology executives who perceived the economy was "getting stronger" increased to 21 percent, up from 6 percent a year ago, and the number who depicted the economy as "recessionary" fell to 13 percent of the total, down from 44 percent a year ago.

PREVIEW:

CONSUMER SPENDING: The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis will report the February levels of consumer income and spending on Monday.

HOME PRICES: Credit rating agency Standard & Poor's will release its January index of home prices in 20 major U.S. metropolitan areas, including South Florida, on Tuesday.

PRIVATE EMPLOYMENT: Payroll processor ADP will report its March estimate of private-sector employment on Wednesday.

U.S. UNEMPLOYMENT: The federal Bureau of Labor Statistics will release its March estimate of the national unemployment rate on April 2.