



TOOLS AND RESOURCES FOR FINANCIAL EXECUTIVES

Now Hiring

Finance departments will add staff for many reasons, but particularly as a preparation for growth.

Kate O'Sullivan, CFO Magazine

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After more than two years of gloom, things are looking up in the corporate-finance job market. CFOs are more cheerful about 2004—and their companies' hiring plans at last are beginning to show it.

Recent studies have tended to bear out the December 2003 installment of *CFO's* quarterly Global Confidence Survey, in which 45 percent of finance chiefs expected to increase hiring during the next six months, up from 37 percent the previous quarter. The latest Business Roundtable report shows 25 percent of CEOs are ready to add staff through this June, for example, more than double the percentage looking to hire in an October survey. "We are going to see a very robust market," predicts Peter Crist, founder and president of Chicago-based executive recruiter Crist Associates, which itself will be hiring to keep up with the new business it foresees.

Finance departments will add staff for many reasons, say recruiters, but particularly as a preparation for growth. "Changes at the top are driving change" through the organization, according to Nancy Keene, a director in the Dallas office of executive-search firm Stanton Chase International. As companies bring in new CEOs or CFOs to help their volume grow, those executives in turn will summon more new staffers to round out their inherited teams, especially in the controller and treasurer positions. Crist agrees there will be a domino effect.

An anticipated increase in merger-and-acquisition activity, after two years of doldrums, also will fuel finance hiring at companies on the prowl for external growth. Some "will be looking for an experienced CFO who can put together an acquisition plan," says Keene, while others will seek to expand due-diligence and merger-integration teams at levels below the finance chief.

On the compliance side, the need to abide by the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 will continue to boost hiring in the internal-audit area, says Keene, as companies strengthen their financial reporting and controls procedures. She adds that boards and their audit committees may get involved in finance-department expansions in an effort to guarantee error-free financial statements.

"There is the fear that some kind of accounting problem can derail a company," says Keene. Such threats could lead some larger companies to create a "supercontroller" position to oversee the reporting process and to manage divisional controllers from various parts of the business.

A Back Seat to Sales

Mark Anderson, president of ExecuNet Inc., a career-management firm in Norwalk, Connecticut, also sees companies eager to build up their finance rosters. But he expects the major hiring focus to be on the sales team. "Companies are looking for growth," he says. "We're seeing a lot of people looking for rainmakers in sales and marketing and business development."

At Oregon Chai Inc., a \$30 million Portland, Oregon-based maker of specialty tea beverages, sales will "always" be the top priority for hiring, says Kurt L. Peterson, CFO and vice president of finance. "In finance and accounting we know we're not producers; we're cost centers." Nonetheless, Peterson is expanding his finance group this year, in part to reward the stalwarts who stuck through the grueling stretch during which cash management and prompt collection of receivables took on a new importance for the small company. "We had people working twice as hard on twice as many things," he says. "Our revenues have grown 20-plus percent per year, but we've had sort of a hiring freeze, and now the tasks have outgrown our staffing."

Among other closely held companies expanding lately, Atlanta-based STI Knowledge is also giving top priority to operations outside finance. "We're in the process of transforming the business," says Mark Agustin, finance chief at the fast-growing business-process outsourcing concern. In the next year, Agustin says, the company will add 100 to 150 people, mostly consultants, to the current workforce of 300. Still, STI's acquisitions strategy will need more finance resources, too. For one thing, "postacquisition efforts will require additional head count," says Agustin. With only 5 people in his accounting group now, he recently hired a controller, and he plans to add financial analysts and accountants as well.

Orange Glo International, a \$350 million cleaning-products company in Greenwood Village, Colorado, is also looking beyond finance for most of its hiring. CFO Terry Bates lists brand management, research and development, and marketing as areas

in which most staff additions will be made. But Bates's 20-person global finance department will also expand this year, mainly at the company's eight overseas offices.

In short, finance staffers "should be looking more aggressively if they've been deferring a job change," says ExecuNet's Anderson. "There's a lot more opportunity as the economy turns around."

Where the Jobs Are

One survey of 200 recruiters lists the following, in order; as the areas of greatest demand.

1. Sales
2. Marketing
3. General Management
4. Business Development
5. Operations Management
6. Finance
7. Engineering
8. MIS/IT
9. Consulting
10. Human Resources

Source: ExecuNet

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