

ISSN 1749-740X

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ISBN 1-904769-10-1 - September 2005

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What salary should you be getting?

This is a thorny question and one that crops up repeatedly in the letters pages of the various information industry journals/newsletters as well as on the discussion lists.

Unfortunately, the answer, as with so many things, is not a simple or straightforward one and depends upon many differing factors. Some of these include:

- The industry sector you are working within
- The size and culture of the organisation within that sector for which you work
- Your job title
- The actual level of responsibilities you have within that job
- How that role is perceived by the organisation - business critical or 'nice to have' or burdensome necessity?

There often isn't any apparent logic in how these varying factors apply in different cases. As recruiters working in this industry, we are constantly surprised by the sharp contrasts we see between similar-seeming jobs at similar organisations, which are offered at totally different levels with widely varying salaries.

The most extreme example of this that I have come across for a long while arose recently. We currently have a role for a 'research analyst' to specialise in an industry sector at one management consultancy, which is offering a salary of up to GBP 76,000, while a recent interviewee that I saw is working at another consultancy as a 'market intelligence analyst', has eight years experience, and is on a salary of only GBP 22,000 - I had to ask them to confirm that I had heard them correctly!

Such an extraordinarily marked discrepancy is rare, but variation from GBP 25,000 to GBP 40,000+ for 'research analyst' roles is surprisingly common. People on salaries at both ends of the spectrum can have in-depth industry knowledge, mastery of a range of online sources, the ability to carry out trends analysis and make forecasts and recommendations - so why the differences in remuneration?

One factor that may underlie this, which crops up repeatedly, is the value the different organisations are perceived as placing (or not) on their support staff in general and the providers of information and analysis in particular. Similar anecdotal stories of salaries, which appear mis-matched to the responsibilities of a role, could also easily be found in the traditional libraries, records management or archives sectors.

The obvious question, which then arises, is how to address this value perception by the organisation. Some information staff call for their professional bodies to carry out more promotional, PR and lobbying work in order to raise the profile of information professionals. While this is undoubtedly important and more could be done in this regard (although ultimately the membership would have to pay for it in increased subscriptions - but that's another topic!), the people with the most direct access to the decision makers in their organisations are the information staff working there.

Since the outcome (i.e. salary level), as well as the opportunity, is most directly relevant to those information staff, it is also largely their own responsibility to raise their own profile internally. There are numerous ways this can be done; service (and outcome/benefit) measurement, ROI, business cases, internal marketing and communications, promotions, internal user training, etc.

Nicola Franklin is the Head of Information Recruitment at Sue Hill Recruitment & Services Ltd.



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