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Human resources report: Interim executive market predicted to spike U.K.'s largest interim management company sets up shop in Vancouver

By Glen Korstrom

Vancouver's contract-executive recruitment sector is fledgling compared with that of Europe and the United Kingdom, but that could change with the U.K.'s largest interim management company, Odgers Berndtson, opening a Vancouver practice.

Many Vancouver human resource firms have temporary placement divisions, but available positions tend to be for fill-in administrative workers.

Jason Peetsma, who heads Odgers Berndtson's Canadian interim executive division, believes Vancouver is set for significant growth in demand for interim executives, in part because the trend is so strong in other parts of the world.

"In London alone there are 600 service providers that provide interim management solutions," Peetsma told Business in Vancouver. "I don't think there's even that many headhunters in Canada."

Those who do provide interim executive placement in Vancouver welcome Odgers Berndtson's addition to the Vancouver human resources scene and hope that the firm's arrival spurs interest in hiring interim executives.

"The term interim management doesn't ring a lot of bells in Vancouver as people are generally unaware what alternatives are available to them," said Stephen Kendall, who is Osborne Interim Management's managing director in Vancouver. "So Odgers Berndtson's arrival may bring more awareness, which is a good thing."

Business owners frequently seek contract executives when their companies are in trouble, explained Ian Wright, who is a principal at Wricor Capital Corp.

BlackBerry Ltd.'s November hiring of technology industry veteran John Chen as interim CEO is one high-profile example.

Wright, who has taken on interim executive roles through the years, believes some interim executives are wired to like the challenge of turning a money-losing company around.

Others, he said, are either hired to do a very specific job such as a turnaround, sale, rebranding or expansion of a product line.

Then there are some who thrive on new challenges and would get bored with doing the same thing year after year.

Traits of good interim executives include being flexible, high-energy and fast to respond. They come with a wide range of skills and are usually willing to work long hours.

Wright's most recent gig was between April 2012 and October 2013, when he headed high-end furniture maker William Switzer & Associates (WSA). He was able to steer the company for owner Morris Belzberg until a sale could be finalized with buyer Jake Chalmers.

"This isn't something that I do consistently," said Wright, who also owns and likes running his own companies, such as the successful Hodder Tugboat Co. Ltd.

One of the more versatile interim executives in town is G-Force Group owner Gary Powroznik, who is also a chartered accountant and a bankruptcy trustee.

Powroznik spent 34 years at PWC Canada before taking early retirement in 2008. He then founded G-Force to capitalize on having a network of senior executives as contacts.

Powroznik's specialty is restructuring, and he both acts as an interim executive for clients and hires others to be interim executives if he believes they are better suited to the job.

Belzberg first brought Powroznik in to stickhandle WSA's sale to a buyer who, it turned out, was not able to complete the transaction.

Powroznik did some initial restructuring and then brought in Wright to run the company on a day-to-day basis, Powroznik said.

"We realized that we were into a longer-term sale process and had to do a lot of things to fix the company," he said. "I do 360-degree service, and one thing I will do is look for an interim person for a company. We have a number of senior people who we can introduce to clients."