

Job Hunting During Russia's Crisis

By [Luc Jones](#)

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Typically, logic dictates that changing your job during a boom makes the most sense: The majority of employers are in hiring mode and there are more vacancies than good candidates available.

The best people can to a certain extent name their price when jumping ship, especially if they were approached directly or headhunted via a recruitment agency.

On the flip side, candidates tend to sit tight during a downturn, hoping to ride out the tough times and assuming — often not without good reason — that employers operate under a "last in, first out" policy if conditions worsen.

The recruitment world was shaken by last week's announcement from recruitment business Michael Page that they are to close their Moscow office after almost a decade.

With few hard facts available, speculation has mounted as to whether this was purely due to poor economic conditions, or whether it was Michael Page's inability to adapt to the specifics of the Russian market.

Consequently, the question on recruiters' lips is "who's next?" although this is almost certainly premature, at least for the larger players.

Few under the age of 40 were in employment back in 1998, when Russia defaulted and the ruble crashed, shops and businesses closed down in droves and restaurants and bars were largely empty for months.

If you had a job of any kind you held on to it, as in 1999 practically nobody was hiring — 95 percent of expats were on a one-way ticket out of Moscow.

Although things seem bad today, we are a long way off from that now. While the saying goes that anything could happen in Russia, business certainly hasn't come to a standstill.

Are companies in Russia currently in hiring mode? A surprising number are, but — and here's the caveat — they are being considerably choosier about who they bring on board. Why? For the simple reason that now they, for once, can largely dictate terms.

For much of the past 15 years (2009 being the obvious exception), the market has grown more quickly than candidates themselves have been developing, which has created a bubble in terms of a skills shortage.

Simultaneously, this has led to mediocre people being able to land positions — with salaries to match — that were well above what they could typically expect in normal conditions, although putting "normal" and "Russia" in the same sentence is always dangerous.

Regrettably, there are precious few new firms entering the Russian market at present. Many of the jobs that we are being asked to fill are in fact replacements — either for underperforming existing staff or to backfill somebody who has recently quit or gone on maternity leave; pregnancies seem to increase when the economy dips!

Job-hoppers whose CVs are littered with stints of less than a year working for unknown entities are likely to find the going tough.

However, if you can boast a solid track record with reputable, branded firms in a similar industry or discipline then there's considerably less cause for worry.

Strong candidates will always be in demand, and current uncertainties mean that they could end up costing you more than usual to lure them away, with additional "selling" required throughout the hiring process.

In the end, much comes down to overall attitude — when business is scarce, everyone is forced to work harder for less. Some are neither willing nor able to do that, but many will survive. Some will even see a recession as an opportunity and thrive as a result.

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