



## REDEFINING CONTRACT WORK

Companies increasingly look to temporary scientists to meet demand in an uncertain economy

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**T**HE CONCEPT OF A TEMPORARY JOB traditionally calls to mind clerical assistants, substitute teachers, and manual laborers. But a growing segment of the skilled professional workforce—including chemists at all degree and experience levels—is adopting temporary assignments as part of a long-term career path.

Data from the ACS Department of Career Services show that the number of chemists holding temporary jobs increased from 2.6% of the entire chemistry workforce in 1995 to 4.1% in 2000, and again to 4.6% in 2004.

Many staffing agencies have caught on to the trend, and several have specific divisions in place to cater to the scientific market. These agencies serve as employment matchmakers, recruiting and pairing scientists with contract positions at client companies worldwide.

According to Jim Lanzalotto, vice president of strategy and marketing at Philadelphia-based staffing agency Yoh Services, his firm was the first to focus entirely on professional placements. Established in 1940, Yoh encompasses eight industry-specific groupings requiring advanced skill sets, including Yoh Scientific, Yoh Engineering, and Yoh Health Care.

The company didn't start out with sep-

arate divisions, Lanzalotto says, but it did fill scientific openings from the very beginning, mostly for entry-level lab technicians. The Yoh Scientific group was created in the mid-1980s following an increased demand from clients for scientific workers beyond the technician level. For chemists, Lanzalotto says, demand is currently highest at pharmaceutical companies that have adopted temporary employment strategies to quickly build product pipelines and meet milestones in an uncertain economic climate.

**"OUR CUSTOMERS** have embraced scientific staffing as a competitive tool," says Peter T. Dameris, president and chief executive officer of On Assignment Inc., a California-based agency that specializes in health care and life sciences staffing. Especially when the economy is unstable, he says, having a mix of regular and contingent workers can help firms ensure that they have the right amount of staff available to accommodate shifts in product demand.

On Assignment, which was founded in 1985, encompasses two main divisions: Lab Support and Healthcare. The Lab Support division focuses on serving the biotech, pharmaceutical, and food and beverage in-

dustries, all of which can have fluctuating staffing needs depending on the consumer economy. Right now, Dameris explains, quality-assurance and quality-control specialists are in particularly high demand. "It's hand-to-hand warfare to find the best quality-assurance/quality-control talent," he says.

Increased demand for scientific contractors is likely linked to an overall increase in temporary employment figures nationwide. According to data from the American Staffing Association (ASA), agencies in the U.S. employed an average of 2.27 million temporary workers per day in 2003, and numbers are rising. In the second quarter of 2004, the number of employed temporary workers reached a daily average of 2.5 million, a 15.9% increase over the same period in 2003.

To meet high demand with the best job candidates, staffing agencies must work to address the needs of both client firms and recruited workers. "Contractors want to make sure they are giving their time and energy to a good company, and firms want to hire the right people because happy employees are more productive," says Lynn Bierling, a regional director for On Assignment's Northeast sector.

Many agencies have developed exclusive relationships with specific companies that look to staffing services as an extension of their human resources departments. Staffing agency Manpower Inc., headquartered in Milwaukee, launched a professional staffing division in 1999 that boasts two hubs—one in North Carolina and one in California—that serve the specialized scientific markets in those areas.

According to regional recruiter Beth Thomas at Manpower Scientific in North Carolina, many of their client companies use contract-to-hire assignments as their primary re-

cruitment tool for scientists. Such arrangements are a way for the company essentially to try out a potential employee on the job. In turn, the temporary worker gets exposure and makes contacts within the industry.

For example, people interested in working at the pharmaceutical and biotech firms based in Research Triangle Park, N.C., might gain a competitive edge by contacting Manpower, Thomas says. Instead of sending a résumé into what she describes as the "big black hole" that is a large firm's online application service, qualified applicants can get in-



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creased exposure through Manpower's direct line of communication with managers in that region.

Staffing agencies are not always the first path a company takes when recruiting, but firms often hire agencies to find solutions when the going gets tough. "Many times, the customer comes to us because they failed to recruit the best people for their needs," On Assignment's Dameris says. Staffing agencies have the time and resources to find the right job candidates so that the client company can focus on its own products and services, he says.

**MOST AGENCIES** keep online databases that client companies can access to search available candidates. Companies can also submit job descriptions for recruiters and job seekers to review. Agency recruiters are then contacted to schedule an interview with desired individuals, or they approach a client company with individual résumés that they think fit specific job openings.

According to Christopher Jock, vice president and general manager of Kelly Scientific Resources (KSR), his agency is well positioned to understand the needs of its clients because it is an agency of "scientists recruiting scientists for scientists." Jock himself holds a master's in chemistry from the University of Utah and says many of the approximately 200 staff recruiters have five to 10 years' experience working as scientists.

"Even though we have left the lab, we understand that running a lab has a continuum of needs," Jock says. Filling these needs means recruiting top talent from multiple scientific disciplines and from all degree levels. KSR, which operates as a specialized business unit of global staffing agency Kelly Services, counts nearly 20,000 prescreened scientific professionals in its database, and this pool of candidates fills an average of 4,500 jobs each month.

Staffing agencies first find candidates through a variety of methods, such as collecting referrals from contacts at companies, universities, and professional societies; sending recruiters to career fairs; placing classified ads; and scouring Internet-based job banks.

Nathaniel Schuster, an analytical chemist who recently graduated from Drexel University in Philadelphia, was contacted by a recruiter from Yoh Scientific after placing his résumé on several online databases.

"I was looking for a full-time job, but mostly I wanted steady industry experience," Schuster says. He hopes to enter the pharmaceutical industry and knows that real working experience is a major benefit to pharma job seekers. Contracting, he says, will help build his résumé until a permanent offer comes through.

Schuster says for him a staffing agency is little more than a job-search tool. According to Jock, nearly 80% of contractors in the job market think of temporary assignments as a way to track down full-time employment. Data from ASA show that

gain current experience they can put on their résumés. "It's a good way to ease back into the workforce," she says.

Taking temporary assignments as part of advancing a career is a new mode of thinking for most job hunters, but the skill sets gained from diverse assignments are becoming better appreciated by employers.

"There's an increased awareness and acceptance of contracting as a way to develop a career," Jock says. "In the past, if a person jumped around between jobs a lot, it created a negative perception. Now it's expected that people have to take charge of their own careers" by accepting multiple assignments to learn new skills.

Still others use contract work as an income source while attending school, and many recent grads use contracting to try out a variety of different jobs and company cultures before making a full-time commitment.

Heather Olson, a contractor through Yoh Scientific, has held a mix of temporary and full-time positions since graduating from Philadelphia University with a bachelor's in chemistry. "I did some full-time work after getting

my B.S., but the job was a bad fit," she says. When she started looking for new opportunities, a friend recommended Yoh. She started her first contract job placement three weeks later and, at about the same time, was accepted to graduate school at Central Michigan University.

"I spent three or four weeks in the job and was offered a permanent position, but I turned it down to go to school," Olson says. Recalling her positive experiences contracting, she decided to return to Yoh after earning a master's in polymer chemistry and took an assignment that introduced her to a chemist who was starting his own small business.

Olson accepted an offer to join the chemist's new firm as a full-time employee, but again was not entirely satisfied. Now back with Yoh, she is currently a contractor for Rohm and Haas in the firm's medical adhesives group. For Olson, the contracting experience has been a chance to discover the job activities she most enjoys and to apply her experiences to her future career goals.

"I discovered that I really enjoy being at the bench, especially doing synthesis work," she says. "I don't want to do the 'cooking' so much, but I like running something through its applications and seeing where it can go." ■

YOH SERVICES PHOTO



Lanzalotto

KELLY SERVICES PHOTO



Jock

72% of temporary employees find a permanent job while working for a staffing agency.

But working through an agency can offer additional benefits and services beyond simply plucking job descriptions from a database. "Our experience has been that contract workers, whether they are scientists or engineers, enjoy having an agent looking out for them, identifying exciting opportunities, and ultimately finding them gainful employment," says Emmett B. McGrath, president of On Assignment Lab Support.

In addition, more staffing agencies have been making insurance and savings plans available so that people can hold temporary jobs for extended periods without giving up the benefits of permanent employment.

**ASIDE FROM** just finding a source of income, job seekers can use contract work to build a portfolio of skills, either to make themselves more attractive to future employers or to facilitate a career change.

"Contracting is a good start for a B.S. graduate to gain experience," says Elaine M. Diggs, a senior membership associate in the ACS Membership Division and former ACS career consultant. Diggs also says that people looking to reenter the workforce can use contracting opportunities to