

Recruit

Contracting gets less taxing

IT freelancers have a new site for networking and advice. By Adam Turner.

For IT contractors, the struggle to keep their skills current in an ever-changing market is hard enough without worrying about ever-changing tax laws.

When Paul Knapp returned to Australia last year after several years working as a Lotus Notes and Domino developer in London, he could find little accurate online information about issues such as tax, superannuation and immigration.

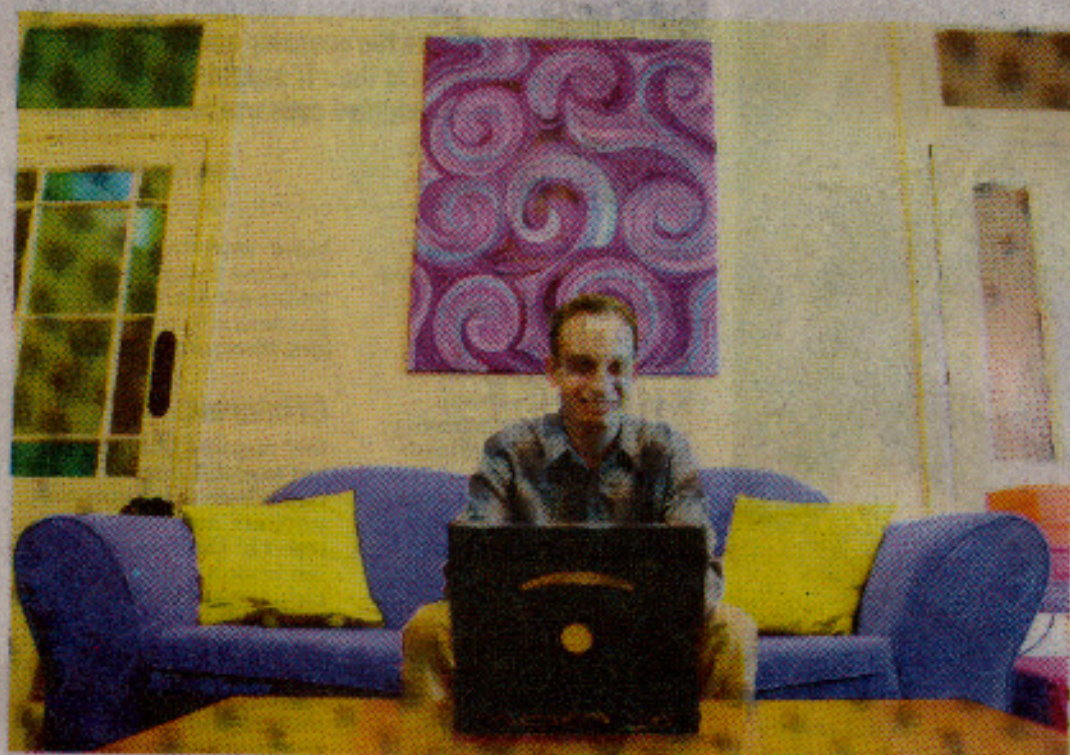
"Working in IT, you need a lot more information about the industry, how it works and how you should be operating because it's such a fast-moving industry. You also need a lot of practical information, such as how to operate from the best tax point of view, what skills you should be getting up to date with, who is hiring and firing and stuff like that," he says.

"In the UK there were quite a few websites for that, so I found it pretty easy to set up as a contractor over there and move into the industry. When I came back to Australia, about half-way through last year, I was just amazed to find there was hardly any information available at all."

Knapp's experience inspired him to establish Brainbox.com.au, a web portal that went online last month, providing IT contractors with networking opportunities, professional advice and links to relevant news articles.

"I've contacted quite a few professionals who have some sort of stake in the business. For example, recruitment agencies that specialise in IT and companies that offer accounting services to IT workers. From those groups I've managed to get some people to offer me some content."

One such group is contractor



Brainbox developer Paul Knapp says the portal aims to give contractors up-to-date information.

PICTURE: ANDREW COOKE

manager IT-Global, which was established five years ago to support IT contractors travelling the world.

IT-Global is particularly interested in developing networking among IT contractors and has committed to advertising on Brainbox, says global

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sales and marketing director Lorne Lee.

"In Australia we really don't have a formal way of networking from a contracting point of view. There's no formal alliances or communities sorted out for contractors," Lee says.

"What Paul's doing is fantastic. We're in the process of putting together a whole range of back-end technologies and adding to our infrastructure for us to do something similar. With us doing it from the outside in and with him on the

inside — in the contractor base spreading the word — it really should develop quite quickly."

Advice is a large component of IT-Global's work with contractors, and it spends up to an hour with each new client to assess their needs.

"The important thing is not

to give them advice without understanding what their circumstances are," Lee says.

"Most of us have actually worked in IT and are not just tax accountants. We give clients information not just based on their earnings but future trends and what's happening in the marketplace."

Knapp has also approached the Independent Contractors of Australia, a lobby group formed 18 months ago during the debate over changes to tax laws for contractors. ICA is yet to

enter discussions with Knapp, but its chief executive, Ken Phillips, says it already provides such information to contractors across all industries via its own website.

"About 26 per cent of the private workforce are now not employed but independent contractors of one form or another," Phillips says.

"What we found was that the various industry sectors were all looking at contracting just from their industry perspective, not from the overall perspective of independent contractors. We've done some very heavy networking across the industry sectors and pulled together a group of people under the umbrella of Independent Contractors Australia and so our objectives here are to address the generic issues affecting all independent contractors."

brainbox.com.au
www.it-global.com
contractworld.com.au