





# THE ONLINE STAFFING BOOM

Enterprises want to recruit consultants with the right skills, at the right price and for the right duration to meet changing business demands. And entrepreneurs have turned this search for the right fit into a lucrative business. **Arun Katiyar** reports.

**A** fast evolving economy is the perfect time to understand and appreciate the value of consulting. Businesses want to stay flexible, acquire the right skill-sets and yet not add to headcount. And, to ensure that overheads are kept low, commitments are met and production is not affected. What better way to optimally address these issues than to turn to consultants?

Today, there are 50,000 certified management consultants in India, according to industry estimates. Besides, there are 2 million temporary workers, of which more than 200,000 are in the IT and ITeS space alone. Of this pool, about 5 per cent are senior-level consultants in project management, sales, marketing and finance, and domain specialists.

For smart companies, especially those which want to employ the right talent at the right time – even for a limited period of time – and critically, at the right price, this presents an unprecedented opportunity.

In case a new project or a requirement comes up, companies no more need to add to the headcount of their teams. Ashok Shastry, founder and

ceo of Bengaluru-based ConsultGenie ([www.consultgenie.com](http://www.consultgenie.com)), an online portal dealing with consultants, citing industry estimates, says that consulting is a US\$825 million industry and growing at 15 to 20 per cent per year.

Indeed, temporary staffing through consultants is a growing trend in India. Ask any human resources (HR) manager and he or she will tell you that “temping”, as it is called in industry parlance, is one of the fastest growing HR trends in the industry today. According to industry estimates, almost 3 per cent of the workforce in the country is employed on a temporary basis.

Says Shastry: “Small businesses are set to contribute more to our GDP and they cannot hire every expert needed at various phases. With the share of small businesses growing in terms of their contribution to GDP, demand for consulting will be pegged to this trend.”

There is another side to this story. An increasing number of senior professionals, who have the experience, the capability and the drive to take up multiple projects are opting out of jobs to set up independent consulting operations.

# 'SOCIAL NETWORKS HAVE REVOLUTIONISED THE WAY EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR TALENT'

**Ashok Shastry** is the founder and ceo of ConsultGenie Consulting, the newest online resource for consultants across verticals like education, journalism, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, bio-technology, law and information technology.

His business model is rather simple and focussed: have consultant, someone will hire, ConsultGenie will get a fee. Consulting is a 20-year-old trend that is just being done differently now, explains Shastry in an interview.

## In which verticals is the demand for consultants the highest and why?

The highest demand is in the IT, education, healthcare, retail, engineering and media industries that are constantly looking for seasoned technical architects, domain experts, marketers, trainers, project managers, creative experts, writers and strategic planners in areas such as finance and HR.

The demand is triggered by a few recent trends. Senior professionals are increasingly opting for independent consulting and it is hard to attract and retain them on employment basis. Moreover, this kind of work requires fresh and independent perspectives for short durations and only consultants can offer that kind of flexibility.

## Is this a sustainable boom and will it continue as a way of doing business and running an enterprise?

Absolutely. It is a trend that started more than 20 years ago in the West and consultants have constituted upto 75 per cent of the workforce in entrepreneurial hotspots such as Silicon Valley. We have already seen how the temping industry, in the junior segments, swept India in the last few years.

Today it is a US\$825 million-plus industry and growing 15 to 20 per cent per year. Independent consulting is much more than freelancing and is largely unorganised today. ConsultGenie's aim is to organise these people and create a huge market-space that is in no way second in quality to the big consulting firms.

## What are the more profound changes that have set into the recruitment and employment business?

Employers of late have realised that there is little or no value in relying on dated job sites and staffing agencies. There are a few good ones, but this space has been highly commoditised and there is not much differentiation. Social networks such as LinkedIn have revolutionised the way employers look for talent. Temping and RPO (recruitment process outsourcing) too have made vendors more accountable.



Ashok Shastry

## How long did it take you to set up ConsultGenie and what sort of investment has been made in it?

The ideation was a continuous process and took almost a year. It took another 10 months to get the portal to market. We are funded by leading angel investors, including M. Chandrasekharan, corporate advisor to the Manipal Education and Medical Group. He is also an advisor to 3I Infotech Ltd., a part of the ICICI Bank group, IDFC PE and Blue River Capital. Narayana Swamy, ex-cfo of Collabera, is also an investor and cfo. We have raised US\$100,000 in the first round.

## What is your projected turnover at the end of operations in the first year?

We expect to close business of around US\$200,000 based on the current pipeline. However, our objective is only to break-even in the first year. As one of our advisors says: if you want returns in year one, put your money in a bank.



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**Sairee Chahal**  
founder FlexiMoms

Ravi Kumar, a media professional in Bengaluru with more than 20 years' experience, quit his US\$75,000 a year job to take up consulting. Over the last two years, he has worked on assignments for three leading technology companies, a university in the UK, an outdoor adventure firm, one of the oldest retail chains in India, an online start-up, a wellness business aimed at urban women and an interactive solutions company.

Today, instead of carrying out mundane tasks that do not necessarily allow him to apply his training and skill sets, Ravi takes up short and focussed consulting assignments that leverage his capability and ensure that he is satisfied with his work.

In fact, he earns almost as much as he earlier did in a regular job. Besides, he is now able to spend more time with his family and pursue personal interests.

Another aspect that is adding to the talent pool is women professionals, who are open to working on a flexible basis due to their family commitments.

Says Sairee Chahal, who launched New Delhi-based FlexiMoms ([www.fleximoms.in](http://www.fleximoms.in)) recently to cater to such women: "The number of experienced, qualified women professionals, who need to rethink and rework their careers and their approach, is large and growing. This is getting further accentuated by longer commutes, nuclear families, complex

## WHY CONSULTING?

After all, aren't regular jobs more secure? Consulting scores over other jobs due to the following reasons:

As a consultant,

- you get to work with the best employers and with great companies and brands,
- you are exposed to a variety of interesting jobs at a compensation that is market led, and develop new skill sets,
- through exposure to a variety of industries, you can pick up best practices,
- and you have the flexibility in terms of who you work for, without any need for a long-term commitment to a particular company.



Sairee Chahal

lifestyles and the need for a continuous second income."

FlexiMoms has gone a step ahead by ensuring that women looking for part-time assignments are up-skilled whenever required. It offers coaching, mentoring, skill-based workshops and business refresher programmes.

Says Chahal: "The service aspect of the business was part of the plan and it was meant to enhance the 'flexibility quotient' for women professionals and corporates. The services for women professionals have been rolled out and we are getting a very enthusiastic response. The portfolio is being expanded as we grow."

Vidya Iyer, who takes up HR consulting projects through FlexiMom, shares a slightly different dimension of consulting. "The system allows us to be a part of growing business methodologies and also lets us have the satisfaction of being more than simply moms," she says.

So, if an employer or a recruiting professional wants to hire a temporary consultant, the options available are vast. ConsultGenie and FlexiMoms are just two of the dozens of online companies that have sprung up to bridge the gap between demand and supply.

"Many industries are going through drastic shifts in strategy, owing to market and technology changes," explains Shastry, pointing to the underlying drivers

of the consulting boom. "There are few people with relevant skills in some of the emerging new areas. Take social media marketing for example. It is a drastic shift from the traditional PR, advertising and Web marketing."

This is where an online company such as ConsultGenie stands to benefit. The firm offers businesses a flexible and reliable way to build an on-time temporary workforce from a large pool of talent that is pre-qualified, screened and certified. By organising the availability of consultants, ConsultGenie creates a growing market space where providers find a vast choice of businesses to work with and deliver quality work at remuneration that is market-led.

And the right fit that meets the smart employer's expectations is found using technology that makes the process swift, cost-efficient, reliable and accurate.

Sanjay Padode, managing director, Religare Technova, which has used ConsultGenie services, says he was "deeply impressed by the efficiency of the online system".

The new crop of companies such as FlexiMom and ConsultGenie have started flourishing, offering on-time, right-priced consultants who do work without adding to headcount. By providing pre-screened consultants they not only reduce the work load for companies, but also help in cutting down costs significantly. 🌱