



Bridging the gap

Companies in Western Australia are having to think outside the skills shortage box by utilising technology.

The extent of Western Australia's skills shortage has been laid bare and the facts are sobering. According to the WA Department of Training and Workforce Development, the state could face a skills shortage of 150,000 by 2017.

Figures by WA's Chamber of Commerce and Industry suggest the state could experience a shortage of about 210,000 workers by 2020. The state's economy is on the cusp of another period of sustained growth according to Training and Workforce Development Minister Peter Collier, driven by an estimated \$225 billion worth of resource and infrastructure projects that are either under construction, committed or under consideration.

He says that growth will present significant challenges for government, industry and the community as the demand for skilled labour to service the state's growing industries places pressure on many sectors of the economy.

The issue is not just restricted to high-profile industry sectors such as resources and construction, but is being felt across a broad range of sectors including information and communications technology (ICT). Business telecommunications provider Comscentre is just one WA business observing how the skills shortage is starting to bite.

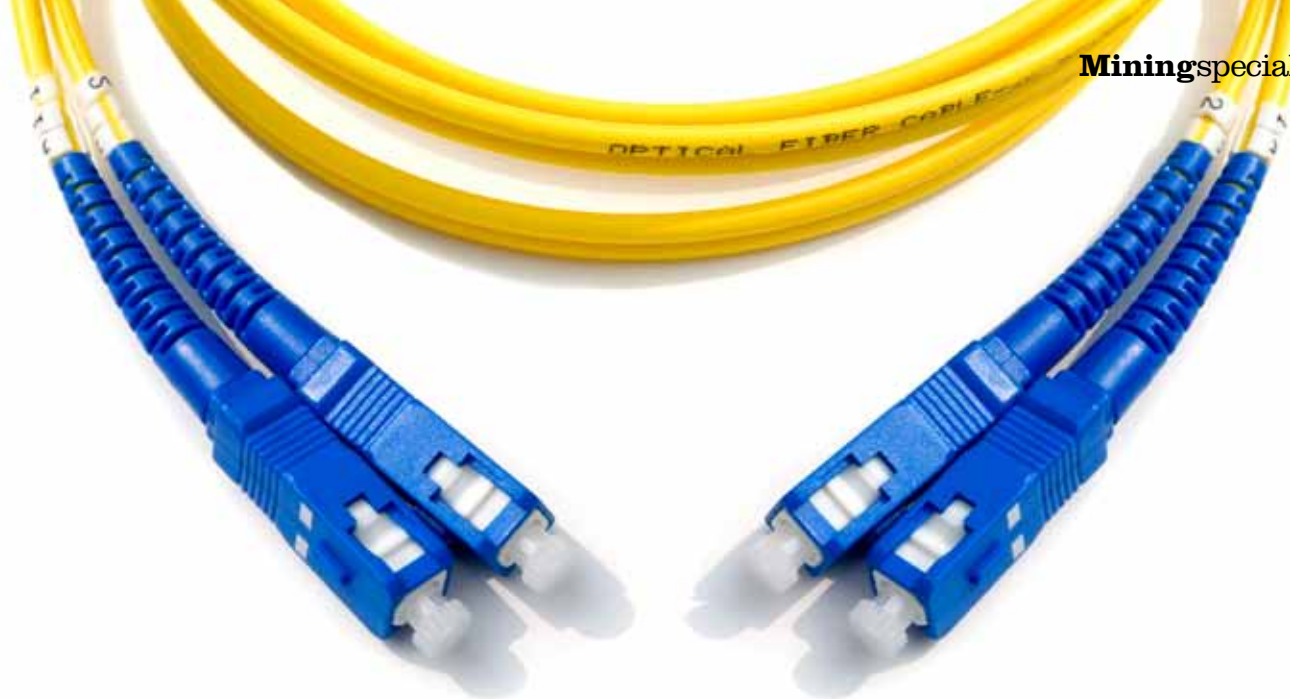
"The demand for skilled labour is placing pressure on industries across the state's economy," says Comscentre WA State Manager Paul Glass.

"At Comscentre, we get to see the rapid expansion that companies are undergoing in WA, and the frustration caused in finding key and skilled IT and communications staff. There is an acute skills shortage in the IT space, with the resources sector, major IT banking projects and the rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN) all driving demand.

"The skills shortage is now far beyond the need for engineering-type staff – it's the number of candidates to support the company that is becoming a problem, and IT is a major concern, simply because experience and qualifications specific to communications and networking is a must, not a 'nice to have'.

"Companies either embrace technology or fall behind, and unfortunately many are falling behind because they don't have access to employees who can build and maintain that technology for them."

According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia's ICT sector comprises businesses engaged primarily in providing computer and telecommunications ●



services, as well as hardware sales and service. It is the fourth largest in the Asia-Pacific region after the Chinese, Japanese and South Korean markets and the 11th largest in the world, accounting for 4.6 per cent of Australia's gross domestic product. The most in-demand ICT roles nationally are experienced network engineers.

The March quarter Clarius Skills Index reveals a nationwide shortage of about 2,200 computing professionals because of increased demand from resources projects, IT banking projects, anticipated requirements for carbon tax management systems and the NBN rollout.

Comscentre is one of only 12 retail service providers participating in a trial delivery of super-fast broadband services over the NBN.

The company is a national provider of IP telephony, data, video conferencing and managed communications services with offices across Australia. It specialises in providing businesses with unique One Touch Communications solutions – the amalgamation of voice and data into one centralised, affordable and fully managed service.

Customers benefit from advanced communications delivered by one organisation with one contact point and one bill. Small to medium businesses also enjoy a level of sophistication and service that was previously only available to enterprise-level organisations, while significant cost savings can be made by outsourcing telecommunications management.

Mr Glass says companies who employ technologies like Comscentre's One Touch solutions can save on the cost of expensive network engineers.

"In WA, the number of remote sites is increasing and the need for decentralised IT staff is becoming more apparent as staff numbers at those sites increase," he says. "The problem for many companies is that these IT employees become very expensive members of staff when cost of travel is factored in.

"Comscentre has a large base of skilled Cisco engineers and we give businesses peace of mind with our full managed services, whether a site is in West Perth or South Hedland.

"Technology is continually evolving to make doing business easier and Comscentre's communications solutions are a good example of how technology is helping companies cut costs and sidestep the lack of skilled staff."

Comscentre's clients include mining equipment manufacturer Cameron Australasia; oil and gas exploration company Oilex; Port Hedland Council; and, the Diggers and Dealers Mining Forum.

"Many companies are now thinking outside the box when it comes to getting around the skills shortage," says Mr Glass. "Here in WA, Comscentre is rapidly becoming the solution from an IT/communications perspective." ●

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