Outsourcing vs temporary staff could make all the difference to your database

By Jaroslav Cerny

11 Sep 2012

Economic conditions are a very pressing challenge for organisations of all sizes around the world, resulting in squeezed budgets. One such area is IT. As a result, many organisations are turning to outsourcing as a business model, as it offers savings, flexibility, scalability and the ability to access resources on demand rather than having to hire them full time. However, as a result of the unique conditions in South Africa which include a massive skills shortage, and in an effort to save money, some organisations are turning to temporary staffing solutions to fill critical posts. This can be a costly mistake.

While temporary staffing are often cheaper in the short term than an outsourced provider, and can help to fill gaps in the IT environment, there are certain areas where temps are not the ideal solution, typically mission critical areas such as the database. When it comes to the database, knowing the difference between outsourced and temporary resources and choosing the right one for your business could make all the difference.

Not so simple

In areas such as the database, it is simply not possible to assign a nine to five value for tasks such as database administration. The IT environment does not stop working at five in the evening and over the weekends, as people do, and many organisations do not realise that temporary staff members may not be available after hours. If they are available, they need to be paid after-hours rates, which are generally a lot higher than normal rates. In critical areas such as the database, organisations will be left with little choice other than to pay the 'after-hours' rates, since the consequences of extended downtime are undesirable. Temporary staff may also call in sick, or even leave the organisation, which means that these staff will have to be replaced - a significant challenge in a skills scarce environment.

An outsourced provider, however, is contracted by a Service Level Agreement (SLA) to deliver a certain level of support, irrespective of the time of day, the day of the week and so on. These providers stake their income and reputation on being able to provide the services organisations need, when they need it, which is a far better option in mission-critical environments. Outsourcing also provides a service, as opposed to a staffing solution. This means that even if the usual resource handling an account is unavailable for any reason, the service will still continue as there is a pool of resources for the outsourcer to draw on.

What outsourcers can provide

Outsourcers can provide 24/7/365 support for critical IT applications and infrastructure, and their business is built on delivering these services to the highest standards, whereas the loyalty and commitment of temporary staff can be low as they have no incentive otherwise. Furthermore, temporary staff is often not included in company training due to budget pressures. If the employer does not invest in upskilling temporary resources with additional training, there is little opportunity for growth. Their key performance indicators may not necessarily be aligned with those of the business but rather aligned to the temporary contract.

Outsourced resources are highly trained and are exposed to many different environments from which they are able to learn. Their training is kept up to date by the outsourced provider, and certifications are also of the utmost importance, since it is in their best interests to maintain the highest levels of skill. Outsourced providers, through SLAs, will also ensure that the key performance values of the outsourced resources are aligned with the business, since outsourcing at its core is a business service.

Not all areas are mission-critical, but...

When it comes to the IT environment, not all areas are mission critical. Not all aspects of IT require the high levels of service delivered by an outsourced provider. Some areas work well with temporary staff, particularly in areas such as web development where the task at hand is not a 24 hour job. The database is not one of these areas. It is critical to the business and it needs to be secure and maintained. A database administrator must be able to access all of the data contained within a database, which could prove dangerous if this task is handed to someone with no loyalty to the company, as the WikiLeaks saga proved.

Database administration requires a trusted, skilled resource who will document processes according to best practice, who has the necessary skills which are kept up to date, and who will be available whenever needed, whether this is after hours, on the weekends or during the course of a normal business day. No single resource will be able to provide this, but an outsourced service provider can.

An organisation would never hire a temporary security guard, as this represents a huge business risk - the guard may not be loyal because he has no job security and he needs to sleep and have days off. Even hiring an additional security guard does not solve this problem, as one guard may get sick, both may leave and so on. Security is not a one person job, it should be a service. The same is applicable to database support, where the modern business is hit hardest if something goes wrong. Business solutions such as outsourced services are critical to keep the database, and the business, up and running optimally at all times.

ABOUT JAROSLAV CERNY

Jaroslav Cerny founded RDB Consulting. He leads a team of 35 employees and his goals are to further grow the business and build on the success they have accomplished thus far. Follow @RDBConsultingSA on Twitter.

▪ Outsourcing, not "body shopping", enables business - 19 Sep 2013
▪ Outsourcing vs temporary staff could make all the difference to your database - 11 Sep 2012

View my profile and articles...