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Article by Stan Beer

Forget surfing and get yourself a real job

....Free internet service pioneer Bill Lang used to say words to the effect: "Why pay, when you can surf the net for free?" Now his philosophy is more along the lines: why surf online job boards when you can learn how to find a job for a fee? Lang says: "Don't expect your employer or contractor to manage your career for you. It's up to you."

Lang, a Harvard MBA graduate, together with fellow former McKinsey consultant Sydney Low, launched Australia's first free internet service, Freeonline, at the height of the dotcom boom in 1999.

Since then he's moved into the careers development marketplace and now runs a business called Bill Lang International, which operates two websites (www.billlang.org and enterprising.com.au) and a community TV program on Channel 31.

"What I found over the years as a business owner and manager was that many staff were technically proficient but they hit a ceiling in terms of how far they could go in our organisations without the further development of their interpersonal and organisational skills," says Lang. "We looked around a few years ago and found that there were no practical courses that would give you the key enterprising skills you need to help you manage your career as if it were your own business."

As far as IT workers are concerned, Lang says too many of them do not look beyond their current contract or spend time developing what he calls their personal brand. "They need to recognise that they are a service provider and that everyone they come into contact with is someone who can have an influence on what their next project might be."

Lang has advice for all those IT job hunters who are having trouble getting the attention of recruitment agents: try looking elsewhere. "There is the visible jobs market, which the recruiters represent, and then there is the invisible jobs market. I would have hired more than 20 people to work on contracts in the past 12 months without using a recruitment agency. I have gone through trusted sources to find IT people to work on my website. I was able to get these people via personal recommendation because the individuals have developed very good personal brands as being reliable, responsive, delivering high quality, being effective and being technically literate. Notice that technically literate was fourth or fifth down the list."

According to Lang, the invisible jobs market is bigger than the visible jobs market. "If you're an IT guy and you're flat-out working on a project and you're not spending any time and effort in developing a network of people who know who you are and the sorts of projects that you do, you'll never find an opportunity in the invisible market," he says.

"The more IT managers you can meet through industry associations, networking events and so on, the better placed you'll be. There's no shortage of business owners who would jump at the chance of talking to someone in IT who can talk the language of business."