



Comrise

Weighing the Benefits of Consulting vs. a Permanent Position
A comparison of the Pros and Cons within an evolving workforce

August 2011

According to the most recent statistics, the median number of years U.S. workers remain with an employer is 4.4.¹ Gone are the days of working for the same employer from graduation to retirement; instead, employment is a constantly evolving journey—spanning different fields and different configurations to meet the changing needs of workers and the changing economic and technology landscape. In today's market, job-seekers are faced with a wide array of choices and possible career paths.

Among these is the choice between pursuing work as an outside consultant or accepting a more traditional role as a permanent employee within a specific company. According to the most recently available statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, nearly 30 percent of all workers in the United States are employed in "nonstandard work arrangements," including consultant work, contracting, and temporary assignments. But the decision to take a position as a consultant or as a permanent employee must be weighed by the needs and priorities of the individual on a few counts.

- **Career Advancement and Training**

Though permanent employees have arguably greater resources for employer-sponsored training and long-term growth within a single company, contractors cite valuable training opportunities gained on the job and across multiple assignments. Consultants gain exposure to and experience with the latest technologies, and they take these newly acquired skills with them to each new assignment. This allows them to stay abreast of cutting-edge technologies and developments in their field—particularly critical in the IT landscape. “My current client is paying me to learn a new scripting language, while maintaining their legacy code. There is no two-week training class that can match six to 12 months of on-the-job experience,” wrote one IT consultant.²

Indeed, consultants have a far greater incentive and broader opportunities to keep their skills up to date, as opposed to a permanent employee within a larger company bureaucracy that can often encourage complacency within a specific role or functional area. Even the training opportunities that are available to permanent employees take place in the context of their specific companies, while consultants have a far broader basis for comparison across multiple assignments with different clients. Over the long term, this translates to the difference between becoming a true *subject matter expert* vs. a *company expert*. And the broader perspective of the former can make the consultant a much greater asset to a future employer, who can benefit from his or her insight across an industry and ability to bring best practices from a range of employers to bear on the project at hand.

- **Compensation**

Consultants, whether independent consultants or those employed through a staffing agency, typically earn more than their W-2 counterparts. At the same time, *independent* consultants, as opposed to those working through a staffing agency, must assume the administrative burden for correctly tracking and withholding all relevant taxes themselves. They also assume the financial responsibility for benefits such as medical insurance and

¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. “Employee Tenure Summary.” January 2010.

² (<http://www.techrepublic.com/article/opinions-vary-on-permanent-work-vs-consulting/1061148>)

other retirement savings that are typically available to permanent employees or to consultants engaged through staffing firms as part of their larger compensation package.

On the positive side, work as a consultant gives the employee the maximum flexibility in determining how to manage his or her own earnings and financial future. Instead of institutionally mandated company savings plans and predetermined benefits packages that employees must buy into, consultants can choose to select only those investment and insurance options most important to them at their particular stage of life and given their personal financial priorities.

- **Flexibility vs. "Security"**

One of the benefits most frequently cited by consultants is flexibility. Contract work gives individuals the power to determine the length and location of their own assignments. It also gives employers the ability to find the specialized skill set they need with each new project, and allows them the easiest way to staff their team in accordance with changing needs—often making contingent workers a more appealing and cost-effective option for hiring managers.

On the flip side, those who pursue permanent employment over consulting most frequently cite the stability that comes with one employer and a steady paycheck as their greatest incentive.

This sense of stability becomes an even more important consideration in today's rebounding economy. Yet despite this perception, "permanent" employment has no guarantee of permanence. As companies turn to downsizing and outsourcing to realize cost savings, contract work continues to expand. In this climate, the greatest job security is often the flexibility to move to a new assignment armed with the latest job skills.

The Best of Both Worlds

In light of the competing pros and cons, those ready to move into a consulting career have an option that arguably allows them to have the best of both scenarios. By becoming a professional consultant with an established staffing firm in their field, they can enjoy the freedom and flexibility of consulting while reaping some of the key benefits of a permanent position. As one technology professional explained, "I receive paid vacation, 401(k), sick leave, paid training, seniority benefits, someone else to do the administrative and sales tasks, significantly higher base salary than my clients' IT staffers, paid overtime, constant variety of client assignments, and a career path for advancement focused entirely on IT."³

Consulting with Comrise...

Ben Cheung first started as a consultant with Comrise in the Telecommunications industry in 1996, and eventually transitioned into a permanent position based on his changing career priorities.

"A consulting position was initially a good fit to where I was in my career because it offered the flexibility and job opportunities that I would not have been able to find on my own. Comrise had access to a wide range of interesting and challenging assignments.

"In retrospect, I would certainly not be where I am today without Comrise. As it turns out, Comrise was the booster rocket that took my career into orbit."

- Ben Cheung
Systems Engineer

³ <http://www.techrepublic.com/article/opinions-vary-on-permanent-work-vs-consulting/1061148>

Consulting with Comrise...

After graduating from college with a computer science degree, Debbie Chen began her career as a consultant with Comrise, where she was placed as a Programmer with one of the firm's clients. One year later, she advanced to a position as a System Engineer with a different Comrise client, which allowed her to take on more responsibilities.

After four years with Comrise as a consultant, Debbie decided to take on the challenge of an in-house business development position at Comrise, an entirely new twist for her. To this day, more than twelve years later, Debbie is doing what she loves most, and in her role as a Senior Account Executive is thriving in selling Comrise by using her technical background to relate to her clients' needs.

"I am proud of myself for tackling some tough jobs. I have loved every one of the challenges. Comrise is helping me to stretch my limits and that's why I enjoy working here."

- Debbie Chen
Senior Account Executive

The right staffing agency can act as your strongest advocate and represents one of your best assets in a competitive and ever-changing marketplace.

Unlike independent contractors, who must always continue to prepare for that next assignment by building their own networks and aggressively marketing themselves to potential clients, partnering with a staffing firm also allows the consultant to draw upon an established network of clients, connections, and resources in his or her specific field, as well as the firm's administrative support system for managing all payroll and accounting issues.

Consultants also have access to a range of work configurations and options that a staffing firm can make available. For example, they can pursue work on a contract-to-hire basis within a staffing agency. This allows the consultant to gain experience working with a specific employer over a time-limited period, with the option to transition into a permanent role pending a review at the close of that period. Such an arrangement allows the consultant a valuable chance to experience a company and its culture from the inside in order to establish a fit before committing to a longer-term engagement. This minimizes the professional and financial risk of having to resign from an undesirable permanent job, only to begin the search all over again—and having to account for this abrupt departure with a future employer.

With the counsel and insight of the recruiting team at a staffing agency, the consultant also has the ultimate freedom to leverage his or her evolving skill set into the latest assignment or challenge he or she wishes to pursue. Instead of being limited to the open opportunities for advancement within just one company (where making a vertical move is often extremely difficult) a consultant has the opportunity to work in tandem with his or her recruiter to make a strategic move to a new subject area, or even a new industry, in the most seamless way possible.

Ultimately, then, finding the *right* staffing firm to partner with in your job search is a critical choice and can make all the difference in terms of your professional development, financial security, and your ultimate job satisfaction.

How Can Comrise Help You Discover and Realize Your Career Goals?

As a global staffing and consulting firm with nearly 30 years of experience and an established presence in the IT, telecommunications, media, pharmaceutical, and finance industries, Comrise Technology is uniquely positioned to be your partner—not just in a specific job search but in charting your desired career path.

At Comrise we understand that our reputation is built upon our consultants, who are our greatest assets and best representatives. Our success can be attributed to the care we take to understand each consultant's unique skill set and career goals. Our technically-savvy recruiting team of staffing industry veterans draws upon an established network of client opportunities across different industry verticals to help you find the best fit with your talents and the best way to advance you on your desired career path—and there is never any cost to you.

By joining Comrise, you will have a unique opportunity to achieve your full potential and expand your capabilities.

Become part of our team today and let Comrise begin working for you! Our team is here to help you obtain your ideal job—whether it is as a Comrise consultant or as an in-house employee working as part of our dedicated and passionate staff to match skilled consultants to exciting opportunities.

Contact us today at **1-800-862-2330**. Or learn more about the opportunities and benefits available to Comrise consultants and employees by visiting us online at **www.comrise.com**.

Consulting with Comrise...

“From the beginning my technology recruiter, Lei, was very positive and supportive about me being the right person for the role. Even though Lei was my main contact at Comrise, I had the feeling that I was being supported by a large team—and I was in fact introduced to the rest of this team on a conference call before my final interview.

“I would recommend Comrise to anyone looking for a career/job and any employer looking for the right candidate to fill an available opportunity.”

- Neville Meertens
Technical Consultant
IT2 Treasury Solutions