

Internal Audit Gets Its Day in the Sun

It may have taken an unprecedented accounting scandal to make it happen, but internal audit is finally getting the respect it deserves.

Robert Half International recently spotlighted five jobs positioned for growth in the upcoming year. According to information based on research gathered for the company's *2008 Salary Guide*, internal auditing is one of the top five high growth professions for 2008.

Companies seek internal auditors, particularly those who possess the certified internal auditor designation, to help improve internal control over financial reporting and meet the compliance mandates of regulations such as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act. National average starting salaries for internal audit managers at large companies (more than \$250 million in sales) are expected to climb 6.7 percent in 2008, to a range of \$81,500 to \$109,500 annually.

Before Sarbanes-Oxley, if you asked many CEOs about internal auditing functions, "You would have gotten a really puzzled look" said Brett Good, a director at Robert Half International.

But now, various corporate scandals, Sarbanes-Oxley legislation, and a renewed focus on protecting stakeholder interests are driving the growth of the internal audit profession, according to the Institute of Internal Auditors.

The global professional association said this is creating a record number of jobs for internal auditors, higher salaries for internal audit practitioners, and an enhanced perception of internal auditing's true value within the business community at-large.

IIA said common misconceptions of what internal auditors do include negative stereotypes, such as "the gotcha-guys," "the financial police," and "the IRS," when in actuality, internal auditors are business generalists who specialize in efficiency and effectiveness for the good of the organization.

"One of the internal audit profession's greatest challenges is clarifying its role, responsibilities, and true value," said IIA Chief Advocacy Officer Dominique Vincenti, CIA. "The global business community is starting to understand that internal auditors serve as a safety net and sounding board for management and the board; not only by bringing improprieties to light, but also by examining and assessing the organization's strategic, operational, information disclosure, and compliance risks."

The number of internal auditors who have earned their Certified Internal Auditor (CIA) designation, a global designation that demonstrates internal audit competency, has risen 80 percent since 2001. IIA membership has increased 72 percent to more than 130,000 over the last five years.

"This is the largest job market we've seen in 22 years," said Glenn Summers, CIA, PhD, director of the internal audit studies at Louisiana State University, which is one of the nation's leading Internal Auditing Education Partnership schools. "The demand for internal auditors is now so high that many companies are extending early job offers to college juniors in the hope of securing them early for employment."

"Internal audit is a great step for people coming out of public accounting because it's the most similar role to what they were doing in audit," says Jenny Pitkin, CPA. "After Sarbanes-Oxley, internal audit is the place to be. It's the place where you go in, work, and then expand out into an organization. There's a lot more prestige and respect for internal audit within organizations now."