

# Orion boss: recession easing IT staff shortage

Chris Keall | Friday February 27 2009 - 12:36pm



New Zealand's biggest software company says it's now easier to find skilled staff, and that applicants' salary expectations have fallen 15%.

When I last checked in with Orion Health chief executive Ian McCrae (pictured), during September, he was struggling to bring his development staff up to a full complement of 240 (all-told, Orion Health employs 340 staff, the majority centred on its Mt Eden, Auckland headquarters, making it the largest software employer in the country, ahead of Jade; see full profile in today's *NBR*).

Mr McCrae was looking to double his development staff. Orion wants to become New Zealand's first \$100 million software company, achieving that annual revenue goal via products aimed at the notoriously diffuse US healthcare market. The company says its products help hospitals consolidate patient data that can be spread over as many 500 different software systems. A \$4.7 million grant from the government's NZ Technology fund was, in part, bankrolling Orion's employment drive.

The opportunity has expanded since, with President Obama allocating \$US10 billion in federal stimulus funds to help America's mostly private hospitals overhaul their antiquated IT schemes.

## Struggling no more

Today, Mr McCrae is no longer struggling to find staff.

Against the background of today's [Jobs Summit](#), the Orion boss said compared to 12 months ago, most positions were now filled.

"For basic administrative positions we're now getting 100 or more CVs, and they're all good applicants," says Mr McCrae. "I'm talking to some companies who're getting up to 300."

While more specialised software development positions can still be challenging to fill, last year Orion's chosen applicant often had several other offers on the table – a nice bargaining position.

This year, the healthcare software maker's offer may be the only one on offer. "Across the board, we're seeing a 10% to 15% decline in salary expectation," says McCrae.