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For immediate release:

DECEMBER 2008

**Go Virtual: Why Part Time CIOs Are in Demand
Published 12/16/08 - Reprinted from CIOZone.com**

<http://www.ciozone.com/index.php/Management/Go-Virtual-Why-Part-Time-CIOs-Are-in-Demand.html>

By Laton McCartney -

Worried about job security in the current recession or about finding a new position should you lose yours? Tired of fighting the same old battles? Stuck in a rut? Need a new challenge? If the answer to any of the above is "yes", you might consider signing on as a virtual or interim chief information officer.

With the economy in the tank, the demand for the services of non-staff IT chiefs, chief technology officers and the like is on the upswing. This is certainly the case among companies and government agencies that are facing cutbacks but still need the services of a CIO to provide IT expertise and direction to deal with important functions such as drawing up an IT business plan or creating a technology strategy necessary for the client to carry off a critical turnaround.

The demand for virtual or outsourced CIO services is especially high among mid-sized companies and government agencies with IT budgets that are limited even in the best of times. "We've definitely been expanding," says Juliet Silver, CEO of Virtual IT, based in Roanoke, Va. "Mid-sized businesses and local government are our sweet spots."

The company has opened a Metro/DC office in Vienna, Va. and another in Charlotte, N.C. and recently signed technology service contracts with Norfolk and Alexander [sic], Va. Virtual offers consulting services such as project management, but it also provides a CIO Practice, which it defines as a senior management and information technology (IT) leadership team that delivers business and IT strategy services.

And what exactly do members of this team, many of them formerly CIOs from other organizations do? "I provide services for medium sized organizations unable to have 'round the clock strategic information technology thinkers on staff," says Virtual's Kurt Navratil.

"I work with clients to solve particular problems, address particular challenges, or to investigate particular opportunities facing the organization," he adds. "These may be problems, challenges, or opportunities that the client has not been faced with before, or has been putting off due to lack of time or resources."

Typically, says Silver, Virtual IT provides the members of its CIO Practice as both W2 employees and 1099's to provide ongoing service to clients. "The split is about 70/30, seventy percent W2 employees and 30 % 1099 contractors," she says. So-called 1099 workers are independent professionals under contract while employers of

W-2 workers automatically withhold and pay all of the necessary employee income taxes which are required by the IRS as well as benefits.

The 1099 team members deal with four or five rolling clients on an ongoing basis. "They can pick and choose their assignments, have a flexible work schedule and don't have to get on a plane," Silver says, explaining that all clients are located within a couple of hours drive time from Virtual's CIO team members.

New York City-based Brightstack Technologies is another provider of CIO and CTO services—what it terms outsourced CIO services - that has seen a surge in business as the Dow drops. "We believe it's because of the state of the economy," says Matthew Nikraves, a partner in the firm. "IT is usually the first department to get cut, and we have found that many firms are outsourcing it to save money and gain efficiencies."

Brightstack says it can provide a virtual CIO on a part time basis to do everything from determining ways to cut IT overhead and provide security, risk and compliance analysis to acting as the executive technology liaison.

Virtual IT is a full-service information technology consultancy, providing high-level strategic and tactical support for businesses, state and federal government agencies, and city and county governments. Clients look to us for leadership in the areas of Business & IT Strategy, Project, Program & Portfolio Management and Portal & Collaboration Solutions. The firm is headquartered in Roanoke, Virginia with branch offices in Vienna, Virginia and Charlotte, North Carolina.

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