

HR & Recruitment

Temping can be right on the money for some

More people are temping by choice – but screen your agency, writes **Wendy Taylor**.

WORKING as a temp and hopping between workplaces has traditionally been viewed as a poor alternative to full-time employment, with few prospects and little training on offer. However, this perception is becoming outdated and some temping spots are sought-after.

Today, temps are more commonly known as "on-hired workers". Typically, workers in this segment of the workforce are employed by a labour supplier, such as a recruitment firm, that is responsible for their induction, superannuation, Workcover and pay. The labour supplier then places the "on-hired worker" with a "host employer" who is responsible for their day-to-day supervision.

For a growing number of people, employment as an "on-hire worker" is more attractive than permanent work.

Carmen Borg, 44, has been temping for eight years and "hasn't looked back" since leaving her job as a PA to an executive at a big bank. She enjoyed the job but not the daily two-hour commute across town. "I look at it this way: I'm in my 40s, the best time of my life, and I want to enjoy it," she says.

She is registered with two agencies, Advance Recruitment and Select, and has undertaken reception, general office duties, PA, switchboard and debt collection assignments. As well as enjoying the variety and skills development that temporary work provides, temp work enables her to

work only three or four days a week.

For her, job security has not been an issue. "In the last eight years, I have had back-to-back work and I have actually had choice. And the greatest distance I have worked from home would probably have been about 10 kilometres," says Ms Borg. "Sometimes I start off somewhere for two weeks and I'm still there eight or 10 months later. And most of the time I get offered permanent positions. The only downside is that I don't get holiday pay, but then I get paid a better rate than the permanents."

She attributes obtaining continuous work to simply being reliable, well presented and polite in the workplace and to always being honest with agency staff.

People like Ms Borg, who are temping in office and administration roles, account for about 40 per cent of all those working as on-hire workers. Blue-collar workers are the next-largest group, accounting for 30 per cent, and the rest work in a range of occupations and industries including engineering, IT, health care and construction.

Luba Charlton is the managing director at Advance Recruitment, which places as many as 1500 on-hire workers each week in the western suburbs of Sydney. According to Ms Charlton there is no typical on-hired worker. Their on-hired staff range in age from early 20s to 60s and choose this mode of work for a variety of reasons. Some do it for the money, she says, others for the variety or the chance to develop a range of skills, and others because of the



Skilled workers like Carmen Borg can have their pick of temping jobs say agencies.

PICTURE: MARCO DEL GRANDE

flexibility it gives them to manage their families.

"Many working parents are working as on-hired employees to save on day-care costs. In the blue-collar arena especially, because a lot of these people would find it hard to pay for day care. But if mum can work during the day and dad at night it's a perfect scenario for them," she says.

money into the family but have time to apply for jobs during the day."

According to Ms Charlton, attitudes towards casuals in the workplace have improved markedly since she started the company. "Because these people are impacting on the bottom line there is a greater commitment to the casual worker than there was years ago."

One of the most recent and comprehensive Australian studies about on-hired workers was a 2003 study initiated by the Australian Services Union and conducted jointly by RMIT, Swinburne University and Customer Focus Research. It found that two-thirds of on-hired workers were working this way by choice. Most commonly they did so to avoid taking work home and doing unpaid overtime, so that they could screen workplaces when looking for permanent roles, because they felt employers valued their contribution and/or because they liked variety in their work.

At the same time, however, the study revealed that conditions under which on-hired workers were employed varied between agencies — not only in their rate of pay, but the opportunities on-hired workers had for induction and training, including OH&S training. Such variations suggest people need to do their research before registering with a labour hire firm.

Michelle Beard, national HR manager at Weststaff, a large employer of on-hire workers and a winner in the 2005 Hewitt best employer of the year awards, suggests people first talk to colleagues and friends they know employed by labour hire firms.

Ms Beard says among the things that differentiate the best firms from the average firms are availability of the training programs they offer to on-hired staff and the support they offer them "to help them manage their careers and become more marketable in the workplace".

"There's also the worker who is new to the country who has lots of skills and is trying to break into the workforce. Often skilled migrants enter the workforce through the blue-collar arena.

"We also have senior managers who have been retrenched during downturns in their industry who are working night shift or afternoon shift. They can still bring