

Press release
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Business growth prospects and hiring priorities for 2021 International Robert Half survey

- 77% of Australian business leaders are somewhat to very confident about their growth prospects going into the first half of 2021.
- 32% of Australian hiring managers plan to expand their workforces and actively add new positions in the first half of 2021 – significantly higher than Continental Europe and the UK (with an average of 18%).
- Information Technology and Healthcare are the top sectors currently driving demand for new hires in Australia.

Sydney, 27 January 2021 - Australia's latest budget update has revealed better-than-expected economic performance as well as rising employment since October 2020,¹ and this is reflected in the nation's business growth confidence. The latest independent C-suite research across six major international markets by specialised recruiter [Robert Half](#) indicates that more than three-out-of-four (77%) Australian business leaders are somewhat to very confident about their growth prospects going into the first half of 2021. Growth sentiment is highest in Brazil (88%), followed by France and the UK (78%), Germany (72%) and Belgium (69%).

Factors influencing growth sentiment for the first half of 2021

Expanding business opportunities (56%), a stabilising economy post-COVID-19 (51%) and adoption of new technologies (38%) were cited by Australian business leaders among the top influences on increasing growth prospects in 2021. Meanwhile, 48% of survey respondents respectively said a lack of financial resources and reduced business opportunities were factors limiting their level of confidence in growth prospects for 2021. The top factors affecting confidence in Australia are in line with global averages, according to the survey results.

"Our latest employment market data suggest the majority of business leaders have a growing degree of confidence about their growth prospects at this stage of the COVID-19 pandemic cycle," said **David Jones, Senior Managing Director Asia Pacific** in announcing Robert Half's latest survey results.

"Even with similar levels of confidence revealed globally, there is no single, over-arching business trend evident because COVID-19's impact has been far from uniform across various industries and countries."

"The global shift to remote and hybrid working and the pivot towards online and e-commerce revenue generation, nationally and internationally, are influencing the positive hiring intentions and priorities going into the New Year. More companies are expected to switch very fast from managing headcount via freezes to a focus on business investment and revenue generating to avoid falling behind their competitors."

"With increasingly positive sentiment and encouraging employment numbers in Australia, early indications are that 2021 is going to be a year of recovery and rebuilding for both companies and individual workers alike. Australian companies are expected to experience year over year growth trends in 2021, with many already experiencing sequential improvement. Uncertainty will gradually be replaced by certainty and pessimism by optimism."

¹ [ABC, 2020, What does the mid-year budget update mean for the economy?](#)

Hiring trends in 2021

According to the December budget update, 90,000 jobs were added to the Australian market in November while unemployment has fallen from 7% to 6.8% since October. The recent Robert Half survey confirms the positive trend. Whilst continued pandemic-induced market uncertainty sees 44% of Australian employers planning to maintain headcounts² (against a six-market average of 66%), almost a third (32%) of those companies surveyed plan to expand their workforces in Australia in the first half of 2021 by actively adding new positions – significantly higher than Continental Europe and the UK (with an average of 18%). Conversely, 14% of Australian companies intend to freeze headcounts entirely (compared to a six-market average of 8%) and an even smaller number (6%) plan to reduce workforce numbers during the first months of 2021.

The top five sectors currently driving demand for talent in Australia include:

1. Information Technology
2. Healthcare, Hospitals and Social Assistance
3. Retail
4. Financial Service
5. Non-Profit

The top 5 priority hires* for the first half of 2021 spanning technology, finance and accounting and business support are:

For CIOs/CTOs	For CFOs	For general hiring managers
Helpdesk Support Officer	Financial Accountant	Customer Service Officer
Systems Engineer	Financial Planning & Analysis Manager	Administrative Assistant/Coordinator
Security Engineer	Financial Analyst	Facilities Coordinator
Cloud Engineer	Financial Manager	Operations Manager
Developer	Financial Controller	HR Manager

*Permanent/full-time positions

“Since the beginning of the pandemic, companies have refocused their business priorities and hiring needs in response to changing consumer demands and by using more data-driven operational and strategic planning processes. In 2020, fast-tracking talent transformation strategies has helped organisations build more resilient and agile workforces with demand for new skills expected to increase in 2021.”

“In a business environment where change remains the only constant, companies need candidates who are adaptable and who can help organisations improve their forward-planning capabilities. But – simultaneously - companies are already struggling to find specialised skillsets which are vital to support short and longer-term business priorities such as post-pandemic recovery in the New Year and evolving for the future of work. To recruit and retain top professionals employers must differentiate themselves from the competition by offering competitive salaries and benefits, career development opportunities and work-life balance initiatives,” Jones concludes.

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² Only filling vacated positions over coming months due to voluntary quits or involuntary terminations

Notes to editors

About the research

Robert Half commissioned a survey of 1,800 executives throughout November 2020 using an online data collection resource. This comprised of 300 interviews each in Australia, Belgium, Brazil, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. Respondents included hiring managers, including general managers, CFOs and CIOs with hiring responsibilities across small (50-249 employees), medium (250-499) and large (500+ employees) companies from private, publicly-listed and public sectors across the six markets.

About Robert Half

Robert Half is the world's first and largest specialised recruitment consultancy and member of the S&P 500. Founded in 1948, the company has more than 300 offices worldwide providing contracting, interim management and permanent recruitment solutions for accounting and finance, financial services, technology and business support professionals. Robert Half Australia has offices in Brisbane, Melbourne, Mount Waverley, Perth and Sydney. More information on roberthalf.com.au.

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