

8 Hottest Skills for '08

By Thomas Hoffman, Computerworld, 01/03/08

"There is a distinct shortage of certain IT [skills], and that shortage seems to be growing," says Neill Hopkins, vice president of skills development at The Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA) in Oakbrook Terrace, Ill.

Although the talent shortage is being exacerbated by dramatic declines in enrollments in university computer science programs, along with the first trickle of baby boomers starting to head for the exits, specific skills shortages are weighing heavily on CIOs' minds. "If you're looking at emerging technologies such as Adobe Flex, there are some boutique firms that have resources, but to get those skills in-house, it's a much smaller pool," says Frank Hood, CIO at The Quiznos Master LLC in Denver.

Here are the top 8 skills in demand for 2008, as identified by Computerworld's first-half 2008 Vital Signs survey.

1. Programming/application development. As companies continue to Web-enable their existing applications and plow deeper into Web 2.0, demand is red-hot right now for people with AJAX, .Net and PHP skills, says Katherine Spencer Lee, executive director at Robert Half Technology in Menlo Park, Calif.

Plus, as a growing number of organizations begin adopting Microsoft Corp.'s Silverlight 1.0 rich-media software tools, expect to see rising demand for people expertise in that area, says Spencer Lee (also see 12 IT skills that employers can't say no to. And, for a different take, don't miss Top 10 dead [or dying] computer skills).

2. Project management. CIOs are hungry for project managers who have extensive experience overseeing complex efforts that have delivered clear business benefits -- not just someone who has obtained a Project Management Professional (PMP) certification from Project Management Institute Inc., says David Van De Voort, principal consultant at Mercer International Inc. in Chicago.

Many organizations, such as Sabre Holdings, are applying agile development test-driven development techniques. Finding people with finely-honed skills in these areas "is extremely important," says Sara Garrison, senior vice president of product and solutions development at the Southlake, Texas-based air travel data company.

Also, expect to see heightened demand for quality assurance specialists to help test and check new systems that are being rolled out, says Dan Reynolds, CEO of Princeton, N.J.-based staffing firm The Brokers Group LLC.

3. Help desk/technical support. Do the math. As companies continue to expand their application portfolios, more help desk and technical support experts will be needed to support those systems. And much of that expertise will need to be on-premises, with only a fraction of the work being shifted to overseas call centers in places like Bangalore, India.

Demand for support staff will remain strong as commercial applications from vendors such as IBM and Microsoft continue to become more complex, notes CompTIA's Hopkins. "You'll need higher-skilled workers not only to implement but [also] to manage these systems," he says.

And as operations for multinational organizations become increasingly globalized, demand for multilingual help desk staffers will also rise, says Spencer Lee.

4. Security. There will always be demand for IT professionals with core security credentials, such as intrusion-detection capabilities and government security clearances, but database and wireless security projects will drive that demand even higher this year.

Thanks to the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, "there has to be a way to control security on databases and networks to a level that we've never had to lock it down before," says Joel Reiter, an application analyst at U.S. Bancorp in St. Paul, Minn.

5. Data centers. There has been a flurry of activity among companies and government agencies to upgrade or relocate their data centers to take advantage of virtualization and other recent data automation and efficiency gains. The data center gold rush is also being fueled by expanding data management and storage requirements being imposed by regulations such as the Sarbanes-Oxley act and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

And as organizations place greater reliance on open systems to run mission-critical applications, many companies are recruiting experienced mainframe technicians to apply the same type of "industrial-strength computing" disciplines they've acquired to distributed systems, says CompTIA's Hopkins.

Meanwhile, demand for database management experts is growing "simply because organizations are putting a heck of a lot more of their business [data] on these very large databases," says Hopkins.

6. Business knowledge. As IT organizations strive to align more closely with the businesses they support, demand remains strong for people with business acumen, whether they're specialized business analysts, business liaisons or application developers and other technicians with business-specific knowledge.

"It's not impossible for us to find a technical person, but it is more difficult to find someone who can be a jack of all trades [across technical skills] with the business acumen to be a combination business analyst/systems analyst," says Quiznos' Hood. "It's hard to find that total package of skill sets."

That's also helping to drive demand for technologists who can serve as IT/business "translators," says Robert Rosen, immediate past president of Share, an IBM user group, and CIO of the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases in Bethesda, Md.

7 & 8. Networking and telecommunications. All sorts of networking skills are hot right now, including general network administration capabilities and network convergence, wireless and network security talents, as organizations collapse their voice and data networks with wireless and voice-over-IP technologies, says Mercer's Van De Voort.

"There's a great opportunity for people in the infrastructure space as well, including messaging administrators and network/systems administrators who act as the air-traffic controllers for e-mail, corporate networks and PDAs," says Robert Half Technology's Spencer Lee. There's also huge demand for people with wireless know-how, particularly those with security skills, as a growing number of organizations try to build secure mobile applications, says Sabre's Garrison.

"The Achilles' heel in the networking world is how to handle security in a networked environment," says Garrison.

This article is reprinted courtesy of NetworkWorld.com

Copyright ©2008 Global Knowledge Training LLC All rights reserved.

<http://www.globalknowledge.com/training/generic.asp?pageid=1755&country=United+State>