

UPDATED
FOR 2008!

Navigating Your IT Career



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IT Outlook: Less Confidence, But Plenty of Opportunities

By Jennifer Zaino

As IT pros head into 2008, they may have a little less confidence in their prospects and the economy at large - but it's not time to panic, yet.

Consider, for example, the results of staffing firm Spherion's monthly Employee Confidence Index. The Index showed that confidence among all workers - IT and non-IT - dropped to its lowest level in November of last year, decreasing 3.5 points to 52.9. The Index measures workers' confidence in their personal employment situation and optimism in the macroeconomic environment.

While slightly more workers in November believed they'd keep their jobs over the next 12 months than thought so in October, fewer workers:

- Across all sectors in November believed the economy was getting stronger than in the previous month
- Believed that more jobs are available than in the previous month
- Reported being confident in their own ability to find a new job.

And IT employees seem to feel these concerns more than most when you consider the results on a quarterly basis, says Spherion regional vice president Sean Ebner. From Q2 to Q3, the Employee Confidence Index for IT fell while the Index for all jobs increased modestly, he says.

"The IT industry has been pretty resilient to most economic downturns because of global expansions, but people are starting to feel that with the softening of the economy, that that may have an immediate impact in the IT area," says Ebner.

While Ebner says he's not seeing that himself, IT professionals may be comparing today's conditions to the last time the economy went through a recession, and mentally and financially preparing themselves for the possibility of down times ahead.

"When the economy went through a recession last time, it hit IT fast and it hit IT hard," he says. "So people are a little bit skittish about the coming softening in the markets."

Fears may be fueled by the fact that in the credit and mortgage services industry, for example, where IT is heavily used, there already have been

cost restructurings that have led to workforce reduction in many IT departments.

"And the tendency is to cut farther than you think you need to go, because you don't want to have to do it twice," he says.

Overall Picture Optimistic

Meanwhile, IT staffing provider Robert Half Technology released its IT Hiring Index in early December, based



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on interviews with more than 1,400 CIOs from U.S. companies with 100 or more employees. The IT Hiring Index result is down two points from the previous quarter: Thirteen percent of CIOs plan to add IT staff and 3 percent anticipate personnel reductions in the first quarter of 2008. The net 10 percent hiring increase compares with a net 12 percent increase projected last quarter, according to the firm.

But even if CIO hiring plans are a bit down, that doesn't mean it's time to count IT out, the firm cautions.

"This isn't enough to fully indicate a trend," says Robert Half Technology Executive Director Katherine Spencer Lee. "The IT Hiring Index results over the past year were as strong as any we've seen in five years or more, and the current results might be a dip, but, overall, the outlook for the industry is positive. CIOs appear optimistic about sustainable hiring increases in the industry, as there is still a shortage of highly skilled candidates in a lot of specialties. As the unemployment rate in the United States remains low, and the baby boomer generation nears retirement, companies are struggling to find skilled workers to fill existing and newly created roles."

Ebner agrees that it's still a great time to be in IT.

"It should not be a challenge to find a good job if you are good and you have marketable skills," he says. "There are more good jobs out there than good technical people."

He sees opportunities for IT pros in nearly every space outside of big iron, from business analysis, to ERP modification and integration, to portal technologies, business intelligence, and data mining.

And according to Lee, IT professionals in certain specialties - particularly applications and Web development, database management, systems analysis, and network administration - are often receiving multiple job offers with employers bidding competitively for their services. In addition to raising base pay significantly, employers are more commonly offering performance bonuses and enhancing their benefits packages to secure promising candidates, she says.

"Technology changes rapidly, making it crucial for IT professionals to constantly learn new skills to keep pace with industry advancements and remain marketable," Lee says.

That includes both technology and business skills. "Managers also are emphasizing the importance of business and soft skills as they relate to technology. With IT now integrated into all other aspects of a company's operations, the demand for IT professionals who are able to tie a firm's technical capabilities to its business needs is strong," Lee says. "Employers are willing to pay competitive rates to recruit and retain those who can communicate effectively with people outside the computer world, are familiar with the unique needs of various end-users - both within and outside the organization - and are able to use technology to solve business challenges." ■

Seven Hot Tech Skills That Employers Need

By Katherine Spencer Lee

Constant buzz surrounds some of the hottest areas of IT, especially as newer technologies and strategies such as radio-frequency identification (RFID), software as a service (SaaS), and virtualization continue to emerge. The savviest IT professionals, however, understand that it's not just the headline-grabbing specialties that can provide solid career prospects.

Wireless administration, networking, and other core specialties are equally hot, and consistent demand exists for those experienced in these areas.

Here are a few areas of IT that should remain bright for the foreseeable future:

1. Wireless and Messaging

Wireless communication and messaging administration continue to draw investment as companies examine new ways to connect an increasingly dispersed workforce. Developers are creating more tools and applications for mobile devices, and IT departments are increasingly responsible for supporting users of tablet PCs, portable e-mail devices, PDAs, and smart phones.

On a broader scale, networking professionals are devising long-term plans for the use of wireless technology, managing implementation, and troubleshooting problems. Firms will continue to need individuals who can develop comprehensive security strategies for wireless technology use and who can then monitor those policies to ensure compliance.

2. Lead Applications Development

Ongoing growth in the variety of software content used by mobile and other device manufacturers is fueling investment in software development projects. With renewed budgets in hand, many companies are upgrading old systems, and high on the priority list is the migration to Microsoft .NET technology. Software

developers with PHP, C#, Visual Basic, and Java expertise also are highly sought. The hottest languages may change, but the underlying market for lead developers should continue to grow.

3. Web Development, Front to Back

The growth of desktop-like functionality on the Web continues to drive significant IT investment, as many firms modify their Web applications to enhance communication with customers and support operational strategy.

Web developers are needed to support Web 2.0 initiatives and to provide technical assistance to Web administrators, integrate

Web sites with back-end systems, and write test plans and results. Many firms are relying on skill sets such as AJAX, Microsoft SQL Server, and LAMP for Web development.

4. Network Administration

The employment of network administrators is expected to increase much faster than the average for all occupations through 2014, according to the U.S. Department



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of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics' most recent projections, from 2004. Heavy investments in wireless technologies and security efforts mean that specialists in those areas are in particularly high demand.

Increasingly, IT professionals must understand how government regulations and human resources concerns, such as monitoring and privacy policies, affect security strategies. The heightened emphasis on network security has made specialized certifications, like the Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP) designation, all the more valuable.

5. Help Desk and Systems Administration

Help desk and systems administration may not be among the most talked about areas of IT, but companies will continue to depend heavily on professionals with these skill sets, as well as those who manage them. New technology initiatives are causing a significant increase in help desk call volume. In fact, help desk/end-user support is the IT job category experiencing the most growth, according to the Robert Half Technology IT Hiring Index and Skills Report, which surveyed more than 1,400 CIOs.

6. Windows Administration

Another unheralded but highly sought skill is Windows

administration. Currently, employers are having a tough time finding the skilled professionals they need. Nearly three-quarters of the CIOs we surveyed said Windows administration (Windows Server 2000/2003) is the technical skill set in highest demand within their IT departments.

7. Soft Skills

Underneath the changing technical proficiencies demanded by the industry, one thing remains constant: Companies of all sizes repeatedly emphasize the importance of soft skills such as communication and leadership. Firms seek IT professionals who communicate well, understand business fundamentals, and are able to collaborate with diverse personalities throughout the organization, from engineers to executives. The most sought-after IT professionals don't just know how the technology works - they also understand what it's for.

Keep in mind that while talent shortages exist in a number of specialties, an ongoing commitment to learning and advancing your skills is more valuable than any individual technical proficiency. With an eye on the industry's core specialty areas, you can insulate yourself against changes in the IT field and remain a hot commodity to employers. ■

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Data Center Skill Sets, Keeping It Fresh

By Paul Rubens

One would think it pure madness to work in a data center right now. After all, one of the biggest changes in the data center world is automation and the ability to configure server, network, and storage resources without human intervention. Data center automation is clearly set to rise as these software systems become more sophisticated and prices fall. And this can only have one result: a dramatic fall in the number of staff required to operate a data center. Not much future in data center employment, then.

But appearances can be deceiving. In reality, there's probably never been a better time to work in a data center - if you have ambition and a willingness to learn new skills.

That's because demand for data center staff with the right skills has never been higher, and long-term job prospects in certain areas look very bright, indeed.

That's the position AFCOM, a professional association for data center managers, is taking. It believes the number of available senior technical and management data center professionals will fall by 45 percent by

2015. If these numbers turn out to be anything close to correct, then those with the right skills will be pretty much able to walk into the top data center job of their choosing - and name their salary to boot. That's a pretty attractive career prospect.

But never mind the future. Let's look at the present.

Many - perhaps most - data center operations report having unfilled positions, and vacancies for good systems administrators and programmers often take six months or more to fill. Getting people to fill the positions is hard. Getting good ones is even harder.

Mirroring almost all manufacturing processes, automation is replacing the relatively low-skilled jobs in

data centers. But the increasing use of data centers is resulting in strong demand for technical, creative or managerial jobs that a few thousand lines of C cannot replace. If you want your employment in a data center to be secure, it's vital to start progressing your career up the ladder before you get swept away by the rising tide of data center automation.



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Many — perhaps most — data center operations report having unfilled positions, and vacancies for good systems administrators and programmers often take six months or more to fill.

This, of course, begs question, how do you go about doing that? Which skills have a long-term future, and what qualifications will help prove you have those skills?

Sharpening Your Skill Set

In general terms it's true that systems administrators and security skills are always in demand, but it's difficult - and dangerous - to predict which specialist skills will be hot in the future. That's the nature of the IT business: You never know what innovation is just around the corner, waiting to make your specialist skill set redundant.

The key is to build up experience, a track record, and qualifications in solid IT areas, like systems administration or programming. "I would say that the most popular thing that an employer looks for is a CCNA certification," said Stafford Carrington, a director at IT recruitment agency ImpactIT.

"In fact, Cisco qualifications in general and Microsoft's MCSE are always valuable," he said. If you play your cards right, getting these won't necessarily cost you a cent, he added, concluding, "Many clients will offer the qualifications training as a way of attracting the best people, such is the demand for staff. This was certainly not something we saw two or three years ago."

A mix of Linux and Windows server abilities is extremely desirable, Carrington said, as is a familiarity with working in large server farms. "Experience working in cluster environments is a very high area of demand at the moment - although that could change very quickly in the near future," he said.

There's another factor that will help you walk into the job that you want - the flexibility to work non-standard hours. "Data centers need people 24/7, and if you can work at anti-social hours, that's a big help that shouldn't be underestimated," said Carrington.

If your career is already fairly well-progressed in the data center hierarchy and you are looking to move up to data center management, then there's no doubt IT skills will hold you in good stead. Ironically, at the very top, the emphasis moves toward a mix of IT, management, and other skills. Many managers come from other business areas, although undoubtedly many have

Good News for IT Staffers

By CIO Update Staff

According to staffing firm Robert Half Technology, your starting pay will be much better in 2008.

IT professionals in the United States can expect starting salaries to increase an average of 5.3 percent in 2008, according to the Robert Half Technology 2008 Salary Guide. Larger increases in base compensation are expected in high-demand segments such as applications and Web development, network management, and database administration.

RHT's annual salary survey is based on an in-depth analysis of the thousands of job placements managed by the company's U.S. offices.

"Business expansion and the increased reliance on technology within all sectors has resulted in a competitive environment for skilled IT professionals," said Katherine Spencer Lee, RHT's executive director in a statement. "Many companies are raising base compensation for new hires and offering additional perks, including signing bonuses and equity incentives, to recruit and retain top candidates."

According to the salary guide, lead applications developers, who manage software development teams and projects, will see the greatest starting salary gains of any job classification in 2008, with base compensation expected to rise 7.6 percent, to between \$80,250 and \$108,000 annually. "There is strong demand for skilled developers with solid technical skills as well as the ability to solve business problems," Lee said.

Base compensation for applications architects is projected to increase 7.5 percent, to a range of \$87,250 to \$120,000. Messaging administrators should see starting salaries increase 7.1 percent, bringing them to the range of \$55,000

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a strong IT background, and a few have worked their way up from the lowest data center operator jobs.

The reason for this shift is that many of the key issues facing data center managers have little to do with IT systems directly. Running out of power, coping with the huge cooling capacity required by the air conditioning systems that run in high-density data centers, and the challenges of increasingly important green issues and potential eco-taxes mean that if you are after a senior management job you need knowledge - or at least an understanding - of areas outside of IT, such as facility management, engineering, and probably corporate politics and PR.

It would be convenient to be able to point to a few specialist skills and identify them as keys to a successful career in a data center. The IT industry is not like that, however. If you want a secure and financially rewarding career, pick up core IT skills and qualifications and don't be blind to the non-IT aspects of working in a data center. In five to 10 years you will likely find yourself in very high demand, indeed. ■

to \$77,750 annually. "Messaging administrators are the air traffic controllers of the vast amount of information passed among e-mail systems, corporate networks and, increasingly, hand-held devices like BlackBerrys," Lee commented. "These professionals are in high demand as companies aim to keep their employees, clients, and customers connected."

Other key findings include:

- Data modelers can expect base compensation in the range of \$74,250 to \$102,000, a gain of 7 percent over 2007.
- Network managers also will see average starting salaries rise 7 percent, to the range of \$74,500 to \$98,500 per year.
- Base compensation for senior IT auditors will increase 6.9 percent, with starting salaries of \$86,750 to \$114,750 annually, on average.
- Average starting salaries for business intelligence analysts will rise 6.6 percent, to the range of \$78,250 to \$108,250 annually.

Industries forecasting particularly strong demand for IT professionals in 2008 include financial services, healthcare, and commercial construction.

Five Tips for Staying Employed in IT Through 2010

By James Maguire

One of the perils of toiling in high tech is that you're working in a world of constant change. By definition, IT changes every couple years as businesses roll out upgraded (or totally new) infrastructures.

The challenge is huge for tech professionals who need to keep up with relentless change. Staying employed in an environment in which the rules of the road are continually rewritten requires foresight. When's the next curve coming my way?

To provide some clue as to what the IT job landscape will look in a few years downstream, we spoke with Gartner analyst Diane Morello. Morello is the author of *The IT Professional Outlook: Where Will We Go From Here?* The study looks at the tech workplace through 2010, forecasting key developments that will profoundly affect IT personnel.

Among the report's many findings are these five projections:

1) By 2010, six out of ten people affiliated with the IT organization will assume business-facing roles.

Currently this figure is about three out of ten. Yet the percentage of IT workers who will be required to be business savvy is inarguably headed upward.

"What we're seeing is that the roles tend to be around business relationship management, or business analyst roles," Morello says. There's a greater degree of interaction with business staffers that will be expected of tech personal. The IT worker who's strictly focused on technology is going to be a rarer bird.

In companies across many industries, teams of tech pros are being assembled to advise the business division. "Not just to interpret business requirements, but actually to come back with a model of what can actually be done," in terms of IT, she says.

So this change is already well underway. "In many of the companies that we talk to, there's a clear demand from the business that the IT organization become more business savvy."

(On the other hand - and this will surprise no IT staffer - "There's also kind of a subversive demand within IT organizations that businesses become more IT savvy.")

2) Through 2010, 30 percent of top technology performers will migrate to IT vendors and IT service providers.

There are two large employers of tech workers: 1) IT vendors/service providers, and 2) companies that use technology. Currently, the overwhelming majority of IT workers work for this second group.



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But many companies that merely use technology - but aren't actually in a tech-specific industry - will downsize their tech departments. More and more, they'll hire as-needed contract workers from IT outsourcers for many of their technical needs, keeping only the most essential tech workers on staff. Companies will require their remaining IT workers to be (as mentioned above) heavily business-focused.

Hence, for those IT pros that don't want to delve into business, the service providers are the place to find a job.

"For those people who want to pursue continually detailed technology and don't really care about all the contextual issues about business, they might find that they're perfect candidates for the vendors and providers," Morello says.

3) By 2010, IT organizations in midsize and large companies will be at least 30 percent smaller than they were in 2005.

As noted above, many companies will outsource a percentage of their IT divisions. Additionally, one other powerful factor will drive the miniaturization of IT departments: automation. The daily tasks of certain IT workers will be lessened by automation software, requiring fewer workers to maintain the infrastructure.

"So what you'll find is a lot of the work that's occupying people now will disappear or get absorbed by some of the tools and technologies," Morello says.

The impact could be enormous. "Some of my peers in the data center area anticipate that the automated data center of 10 or 15 years from now will occupy maybe 50 percent of the people it does right now."

4) By 2010, 10 to 25 percent of IT professionals will drop out of the IT occupation.

Working in IT is tough because companies merge, splinter, downsize and reconfigure on a regular basis. And that's not counting the technical revolutions that

occur on a regular basis, reshaping the knowledge base needed to hang on to a job. Staying employed in turbulent waters can wear down even the most resilient soul. Some give up and change careers.

"I think a lot of people lost stamina or morale with the profession because many companies continue to treat IT as a cost-efficiency mechanism and have no problem with disposing of them," Morello says.

Moreover, "Issues around global sourcing have hit people very strongly in this area. And when companies move services to another part of the globe, the people whose jobs are affected don't have anyplace to go within that company."

5) By 2011, 70 percent of leading-edge companies will seek and develop "versatilists" while de-emphasizing specialists.

Notes Morello: "We've predicted that the demand for pure technicians will shrink by 40 percent by 2010."

In their place will be worker-analysts, a group she dubs "versatilists." A versatilist is a staffer with enough multi-faceted expertise - across business, technology and inter-personal skills - to handle several areas of responsibility at once.

If, for instance, a company's strategic agenda is intellectually taxing enough to comprise SOA as well global communication and worldwide process orientation, then it must extract plenty of mental firepower from its staff. Business leaders in this case, Morello notes, will say: "I'm hard-pressed - and can't afford - to have 90 percent of my people be experts on something when so much of the other activity I'm doing requires people to be able to move across teams and projects."

This need for versatilists, however, certainly doesn't mean the specialist is dead. It means that companies will start asking: "How do we increase the likelihood that the people we hire can move into different types of programs and projects based on the level of business dynamics we're facing?" ■

Career Backup Plans

By George Spafford

It can be a very unsettling situation to have a job and know that you're at risk of being let go. The resulting stress can affect your health, family life, and so on in very negative ways. While IT people need to have backup plans for systems drilled into them, they should also take the time to develop a backup plan for themselves.

Plan - Don't Jump. First, don't get so frustrated with your current job that you just quit. You have a job with money coming in so use the time, however much or little it is, to plan your next career steps and still have an income. Part of the frustration and stress comes from not having control. By planning in advance the stress levels become more manageable.

Talk to Your Significant Other. If you have a significant other, the next most important advice I can give you is to talk to him or her and develop your plan together. Discuss the situation, possible solutions, next steps, the risks you are willing to take, and the various elements set forth in this article. Don't hide the truth and lash out at them due to the stress. They

are with you in this incident.

To Be Discrete or Not? Some people worry about whether to be discrete or not. "What if my employer finds out?" At this point you need to weigh the ramifications. What are the ramifications if they do? Might you lose some portion, or all, of an exit package? Might they fire you on the spot? These are all examples

of scenarios you must consider and decide what risks are acceptable.

Finances. When weighing options, you should take finances into account. Given your current savings, how long can you go before you run out of money? What if you use near-liquid assets such as investments or your 401(k) plan? Consider the tax implications of using tax deferred investment funds

such as the 401(k). Yes, you may get immediate funds but there could be a large tax liability.

At the same time you are looking at how to substitute income also look at how to reduce expenses. Identify what you spend first and write it all down. Then identify what items are discretionary and not. For example, a



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Identify what you spend first and write it all down. Then identify what items are discretionary and not. For example, a mortgage payment is pretty important. Spending on video rentals can be reduced if need be.

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mortgage payment is pretty important. Spending on video rentals can be reduced if need be. Understanding how long you have funds for can help you determine the type of position you go after, how long you can assess options and/or when you must decide by. For example, if you have funds for three months of living without income from your job, then should you spend two months soliciting and assessing offers before you accept one?

Severance. If there is a reorganization effort concerning you, some employers will pay exit packages to employees they let go. It may be two weeks, two months, etc. It may include insurance coverage and even employment counseling during that time. Not all employers do this and the levels will vary firm-to-firm and even between organizational levels.

The main point is to decide if this will be offered to you and then if waiting for this makes sense or not given your situation. If you get frustrated and leave early then you are walking away from money.

Insurance. An important consideration these days is medical insurance. Look at your options. A young, healthy single person will be less concerned about this than say a middle-aged person with a spouse and children to worry about. Options include:

- Continuing insurance through the employer via COBRA.
- Obtaining coverage via your significant other's employer.
- Purchasing medical insurance through a third-party insurance company. Talk to your home/car insurance agent and discuss options.
- Some insurance companies have a temporary major medical insurance you can avail of that only covers emergencies.
- Investment firms sometimes have a number of health insurance options including ones with flexible spending accounts (FSAs).

- In some states you may want to verify with your automotive insurance company and confirm that they are the primary insurance for medical coverage in the event of an automotive-related accident. In some states they do not have to be.

Unemployment. Understand the unemployment coverage process. As a professional you may find the reimbursement to be low and the process disdainful but it may mean the difference between covering critical expenses and not. Depending on the state you live in, there may also be job search assistance, etc. This is a social service that you have contributed to. By understanding the application process you will know what to do, if needed, and factor it into your plans.

Non-Competes and Non-Disclosures. When you joined your current/former employer you probably signed some legal documents that you may only vaguely remember now. One was likely a non-compete that identifies what you can not do and for how long in terms of going after the same customers and markets as your them.

Another document, or perhaps in the same document as the non-compete is a non-disclosure agreement spelling out what is proprietary information to the employer that cannot be shared.

To avoid running afoul of these agreements if you have them, search out legal counsel. For some people these documents aren't a concern. For others, though, these are very concerning and need to be reviewed. You should always save copies of these documents when you sign them. If you no longer have copies, request them from HR upon your departure. Again, if you are concerned, legal counsel can draft a formal letter requesting these documents.

Next Steps

At this juncture take a close look at your career and decide if a change is needed. Has the market changed yet your skills haven't? Are you happy with your life? Is there a better use of your time? Is there a unique opportunity to pursue? Questions such as these are examples to consider. You need to make an honest

You need to make an honest self-appraisal and decide what interests you and in what direction to head with your career.

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When assessing what to do next, there are at least three options to look at. On one hand, you can find another full-time employer and for some this is just what they want. Another opportunity is to pursue freelance/contract work. This often appeals to people looking to have more control over their employment and are willing to take on the additional management costs in return for higher pay and more flexibility.

For others, this is an opportunity to start their own business. If you are serious about this route, think through your business plan carefully. Starting your own business can seem great until you carefully analyze the investment to begin, ongoing cash flow and hours required. This can be a great career option for some yet disastrous for others.

The key with all the options is to think them through carefully and discuss your options with friends, family, and colleagues that you trust. Any of the above opportunities may look fantastic to you but a disaster waiting to happen to others. If you believe in the dream, chase it but pay close heed to the counsel of others whom you respect before you jump. The balance of the article will largely focus on those seeking contract or full-time employment.

The Job Market

Carefully research the job market in the geographic areas you can work. Do they need the skills you have to offer or do you need to pick up some training and certifications? In general, it is a good idea to stay up on the market and get training even if you have to fund it yourself to remain marketable.

The main point here is you need to understand what makes people marketable in the field you are looking at and then take the correct steps to be successful in your pursuits.

Dust Off the Resumé

Some people keep their resumé constantly updated while others haven't looked at theirs for a long time.

During your planning, get the resumé out and update it. If you are looking at several types of jobs then consider a resumé tailored for each. In other words be sure that you identify the accomplishments and responsibilities you have experienced that are relevant to the resumé.

Furthermore, get advice and/or professional help with your resumé. There are for-fee services, friends who can critique, etc. Don't try to update and polish your resumé on your own. There are a lot of ways to create

a resumé that work and a lot that do not. Leverage the experience of others.

One important thing: Don't lie. While embellishing and puffing up your resumé is considered an art by some, it can become very apparent during interviews or early on in a new job whether you possess the skills you claim. If you don't, then your reputa-

tion can take a hit and in a small market word can get around.

Social Networking

In the good old days, we met people face-to-face at parties, social clubs, and sporting events and talked about career options. Today, we still have the tried and true methods and now sites like LinkedIn can help facilitate introductions as well.

References make a dramatic difference when trying to talk to the right people about a career opportunity. Don't skip developing and maintaining a network of contacts when times are good because they will become vital if a career change is needed.

Job Sites

Being in IT we have many great job sites that can help us contact prospective employers. Sites such as Monster.com, Dice.com, and CareerBuilder.com have proven track records. These sites are expanding and are offering premium fee-based and free services. Take the time to understand their offerings and craft your responses to their questions in a manner that maximizes employer interest.

Be very careful when putting in salary expectations,

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Take the time to identify local, regional and, if relevant, national recruiters that can help you in your journey.
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whether you want full-time only or will consider contract work, etc. These are all filtering questions and they may very well exclude you from positions that you would have considered had you only known that they existed.

Recruiters

Some bemoan recruiters but the truth is they serve a very important role in that they can leverage networks of employers and job seekers and broker meetings. In return for their efforts they often get some percentage of the starting salary paid by the employer. Take the time to identify local, regional and, if relevant, national recruiters that can help you in your journey.

Serenity

Searching for a new job can be stressful. While it is easy to focus on the logical side of the search, it also helps to realize that there are variables outside of your control. Rather than dwell on them, focus on the positive aspects and where you want to go. It's all too easy to slip into depression and lash out unless you direct your energies to creative goals. Planning can help you do just this.

In closing, changing careers can be a welcome, or unwelcome, opportunity. By preparing for it and choosing the paths that you will follow then you are reducing the number of decisions that you must make in a rush. In the end, where you go from here is entirely up to you. ■

The Guide to IT Headhunters

By James Maguire

In the bad old days of 2001, tech headhunters (also called "job recruiters" or "placement specialists") were driven out of business. No one was hiring, so who needed recruiters?

But as tech hiring has picked up, headhunters are once again glued to their cell phones.

"Now everybody and their brother is getting back into the business," says Stuart Taylor, co-founder and chairman of Integrated Search Services, an IT staffing organization. In fact, "There are lots of people in the [job] search business who weren't there 15 minutes ago."

Which means that before a tech professional uses the services of a headhunter, that IT pro should know the rules of the game. In other words: buyer beware.

Rule One: Don't Ever Pay a Headhunter

An IT professional should never pay a job recruiter, Taylor notes. It's employers who pay the headhunter's fees.

"For information technology people, there should be no circumstance under which the candidate would ever pay."

Not that some firms won't try to charge tech workers. Some companies, referred to in the job placement

industry as "retail outplacement" firms, charge hefty fees.

"They charge you a bunch of money and they tell you how to put a resumé together and claim they're going to put it in front of hundreds of employers - that's not what you want to do," he says.

These firms "are for people who are dazed and confused and want to determine if they want to start an herb farm." They're not for technology workers.



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This no-pay policy is particularly true in today's tech hiring environment, in which the demand for workers exceeds the supply. In 2001, in the wake of the tech collapse, it might have been worth considering paying, "because there wasn't any work, but even then, the market didn't shift," Taylor says.

In fact, "If anyone says, 'we're going to charge you money,' hang up the phone."

Spread It Around (But Not Too Much)

Since tech job seekers pay nothing to headhunters, it's in their best interest to get their resumé into the hands of as many headhunters as possible. Especially since these various recruiters are probably not plugged into the same opportunities.

But don't spread it around too much, Taylor notes. "If

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there's a big employer in town who works with a bunch of recruiters, suddenly your resumé comes from five or six different places."

(But this downside, he notes, is a slight one, far outweighed by the benefits of widely distributing your resumé.)

Giving your resumé to, say, six different recruiters is a reasonable number, he says.

Remember, too, that no matter how many headhunters have your resumé, search firms offer no magic solution. By Taylor's estimate, only about one-third of tech jobs are filled by recruiters.

"Meaning that two-thirds of the time you're getting hired by people you know or people to whom you were referred," he says.

The point: Your best "headhunter" is often the colleague in the data center next to you.

Finding a Headhunter

The term "headhunter" is used to describe a wide array of individuals and firms. To fully understand the job placement industry, realize that there are three tiers of job placement firms:

1) The "million dollar" firms. These placement firms - for instance, Korn Ferry - find jobs for CTOs and other upper level management who command salaries in the \$500,000 and higher pay range.

2) Mid-market firms These organizations find positions for tech professionals who work in the \$100,000 to \$250,000 range.

3) Broad market firms These headhunters find jobs for professionals in the \$50,000 to \$125,000 range.

The majority of IT professionals will, of course, be working with headhunters in this third category, who locate jobs paying \$50 to 125k. Within this third level of headhunters there are, again, three sub groups:

A) Contingency search organizations These firms get paid if they find you an IT job; they receive no pay if they don't place a worker. "What they're doing is mar-

keting your resumé to the existing [hiring] relationships they have contacts with," Taylor says.

B) Retained search organizations These firms work for employers (often big employers) that hire tech workers. In essence, retained search firms are outsourced recruiters for big IT companies.

C) Consulting firms that do job placement These are regional and national firms that supply IT workers on a limited-time contract basis, ranging from two weeks to six months, or longer. These consultancies are sometimes called "staff augmentation" firms, meaning they augment a company's staff on a short-term basis. These firms sometimes find permanent jobs for tech workers. (Alternately, some consultancies are "project firms," meaning they handle short-term IT projects and hire their own short-term tech staff as needed. Project firms rarely find permanent jobs for staffers because they don't want to lose staff.)

Resources for Finding Job Recruiters

As mentioned, one of the best ways to find a headhunter is to ask friends (but don't ask too many friends at work, Taylor cautions).

Additionally, he recommends logging onto Monster and CareerBuilder and looking at the ads, with an eye toward finding a recruiter in your location and/or specialty.

There are also two particularly good resources:

- **Dictionary of Executive Recruiters**

This is a extensive list of job recruiters, accessible for a fee online (or for free at the library). "You spend \$50 and you get access to a relatively sophisticated resource that tells you where these people are located, what they specialize in, etc."

- **National Association of Personnel Services**

This organization offers a free guide to the recruiters who are their members. Click on Membership Directory and search by location or tech specialty.

These two resources aren't exhaustive, Taylor says, "but if you use those two things, you can at least get a reasonable start."

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Taylor estimates that in the tech boom of the late '90s, about 30 percent of workers changed jobs with the help of a headhunter. Yet this number fell sharply with the tech crash. "But now it's way back up again," he says, "Because the employers are finding it difficult to find people, and they're hiring firms to find them."

Using the services of an IT headhunter can help land a hefty raise. But before an IT pro contracts with a job recruiter, they should know the recruiting industry's ground rules.

Communicate Clearly

Some tech workers feel stand-offish about headhunters because they're afraid the job specialist will cajole them into a job they don't really want. But these fears are unfounded, Taylor says.

Simply put, if you don't want the job, don't take it.

"The only secret to using a headhunter is to clearly communicate what you're attempting to accomplish," he says.

"The most common complaint I hear - and it's an amazing complaint - is: 'You know, the guy who placed me the last three times never seemed to listen to me.'" In response to this complaint, Taylor wonders: "Then why did you get placed for the last three times?" If the job choices the recruiter matched you with didn't seem right, why did you take them?

Moreover, that headhunter "apparently provided some service, and eventually he got it right. So maybe it's like real estate. All he did was show you a bunch of houses in a price range and you bought one."

It's up to the worker to speak his mind - forcefully if need be - to the recruiter, to avoid being directed toward inappropriate opportunities.

"You should always remember that someone in that role [a headhunter] has a [financial] interest in mind," Taylor says. They get paid if they place you, so they want to place you even if it's not your dream job.

The point: "If you want something more than 'houses and prices' then you need to communicate what your specific objectives are."

"Not the Brightest People"

"It should be noted that recruiters are not the brightest people on the planet," Taylor says.

For instance, they often don't use sophisticated organizational techniques. "So if you apply to a recruiter and they never call you back, and then a position pops up in a newspaper that you fit, reapply. Because they will not put you in a database, they will not actively key-word search to see if you're still there, they'll just forget about you."

Therefore, making repeated contacts with the same recruiters is OK. You're not pestering them - they'll probably even welcome it if you're qualified.

Recruiters are working on commission, usually with specific assignments. "So if you don't fit one of those specific assignments, they're not interested in you at all." In this case, simply submit your resumé to another recruiter. ■

This content was adapted from Internet.com's Datamation, ServerWatch, and IT Career Planet Web sites. Contributors: James Maguire, Jennifer Zaino, Paul Rubens, Katherine Spencer Lee, and George Spafford.