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What Tech Skills Are Hot for 2006?

Thomas Hoffman

December 27, 2005 (Computerworld) Whether you're looking for a job or looking to fill one, expect hiring to heat up this year, driven by small but consistent gains in IT budgets. And if you're a job seeker with the right skills, 2006 could be your big year.

Despite the notion that hordes of U.S. IT jobs are being sent offshore, in reality, less than 5% of the 10 million people who make up the U.S. IT job market had been displaced by foreign workers through 2004, says Scot Melland, president and CEO of Dice Inc., a New York-based online jobs service. The numbers of jobs posted on Dice.com from January through September for developers, project managers and help desk technicians rose 40%, 47% and 45%, respectively, compared with the same period in 2004, says Melland.

In fact, an exclusive *Computerworld* survey revealed that two of the top four skills IT executives will hire for in the coming year are perennially linked with outsourcing, namely, application development (ranked first) and

IT help desk skills (ranked fourth). Information security skills ranked second, and project management came in third. Here's what staffing experts have to say about the demand in these hot skills areas.

1. Desperate For Developers

There's a lot of talk about developer jobs being sent overseas, but "most of the stuff that's going offshore is low-level coding jobs," says Craig Symons, an analyst at Forrester Research Inc. in Cambridge, Mass. Over the past year, companies have started working through their backlog of IT projects. As a result, says Symons, demand for developers with .Net and Java skills has increased, as has the need for business analysts and IT relationship managers who work with business managers to understand their divisions' requirements. Case in point: An employer that was working with Talenthire.com, a job placement service in Atlanta, was recently negotiating salary terms with an entry-level

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C++ and .Net developer. The technician, who had graduated from college in 2004 and probably started his career making $40,000-plus per year, quickly moved up in salary by about $10,000, says Mike Veronesi, a managing partner at Talenthire.com. After Talenthire.com's customer offered the candidate $60,000, he demanded $62,500. "In this marketplace, those people are just tough to get," says Veronesi.

"Customer requirements [for developers] are getting much more specific," says Jim Lanzalotto, vice president of strategy and marketing at Yoh Services LLC in Philadelphia. "The requirement used to be 'Give me a good CRM developer,' " says Lanzalotto. "Now, the requirement is 'Give me a good CRM developer with specific experience in the pharmaceutical industry.' "

NStar, a Boston-based energy utility, is hunting for developers with the power-industry experience needed to support its supervisory control and data acquisition environment, says Eugene Zimon, senior vice president and CIO at the company.

"I would see the need for application developers as much more specialized in terms of developing integration components, user interfaces and reusable components," says Zimon. "It's application development, but it's much more specialized and targeted to make use of your existing infrastructure."

2. Seeking Security Mavens
There's continued demand for people with information security skills, say Symons and others. And even though long-term demand is expected to remain strong, the growing ranks of people who have obtained IT security certifications has had a short-term dampening effect on compensation.
David Foote, principal and chief research officer at Foote Partners LLC in New Canaan, Conn., says there has been strong demand for people with Cisco security skills as well as those with IT auditing certifications. Still, he says, compensation for security skills has tapered off in recent months as many unemployed and underemployed IT workers have obtained security skills to become more marketable. The resulting increase in security specialists has helped to deflate wages, at least in the short term, says Foote.
Dice's Melland says he's starting to see skills shortages in different geographies, including a need for network security experience and government security clearances.
To meet its own changing business requirements, NStar is adjusting its skill mix of full-time IT workers and contractors through attrition, new hires and retraining, says Zimon. High on its list are security analysts because NStar is in the final throes of a four-year effort to create a team of security and risk management specialists.

3. In Pursuit of Project Managers
As the economy continues to improve, companies are beginning to attack their backlog of projects, which is helping to fuel the demand for project developers. As a result, project managers with specific expertise -- like those who have worked on projects related to Sarbanes-Oxley Act and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act compliance -- are becoming harder to find, says Frank Enfanto, vice president of health care services systems delivery at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts Inc. in Boston.
"There are a lot of security- and compliance-related requirements that are driving a lot of the spending in projects these days," says Enfanto.
Location is another issue. "It's really frustrating trying to find project managers in this geography," says Mark Uihlein, vice president of information systems at Mohegan Sun, a gaming and resort company in Uncasville, Conn. Aside from the casino, Uncasville, which is in the southeastern corner of Connecticut, is rural, says Uihlein, and most employers in the greater Hartford area are in insurance and financial services.
Many big companies are working on multiple projects simultaneously, which is fueling a "critical need" for project managers, says Andy Baker, senior recruiting manager at Allstate Insurance Corp. in Northbrook, Ill. In addition to finding the right people in an ever-tightening labor market, Allstate is also wrestling with determining whether the business units in need of project managers have funds they can set aside for possible relocation costs, he adds.