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Contractor Seeks 'Cyber Warriors' to Help Defend U.S.

Saturday, July 25, 2009
FOX NEWS

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By Paul Wagenseil



National Security Agency employees in the Threat Operations Center in Fort Meade, Md., in a 2006 file photo.

Want to be a "cyber warrior" defending your country? If so, there are plenty of well-paid jobs available.

Leading defense contractor Raytheon is looking for a few good men and women — a couple of hundred of them, in fact — to patrol the front lines of America's cybersecurity.

"We're aggressively recruiting," Raytheon Vice President of Information [Security Solutions](#) Steve Hawkins told FOXNews.com.

Applicants need to be a bit aggressive as well, according to the [solicitation Raytheon put online](#) seeking applicants for more than 30 different job descriptions.

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"Our Raytheon cyber warriors play offense and defense, and know how the adversary thinks and can adopt their perspective," says the Web page, which lists positions ranging from "network and security engineers" to "data modeling engineers" to "media sanitation specialists."

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Asked what that last job entails, Hawkins laughed.

"That's where you erase or destroy devices that would have sensitive data on them," he explained. "You try to find individuals who've been trained in doing that. But I'm afraid those positions have mostly been filled."

Nevertheless, Hawkins says the company's made about 50 to 60 hires so far this year, and wants to take on 150 more new cyber warriors by December.

National cybersecurity is a hugely growing field, with the crude but effective shutdown of U.S. and South Korean government Web sites over July 4 weekend coming as the latest example of our weaknesses.

A report released just this past Wednesday found that the federal government is woefully behind in cybersecurity, with the lack of trained personnel the biggest problem.

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For the Raytheon jobs, all you need are very strong [computer](#) skills — a college degree in computer science, math or engineering is preferred, but not necessary — strong ethical standards, and, for most positions, the ability to pass government security clearances, which entails U.S. citizenship.

And while some security companies hire ex-hackers, Hawkins said such formerly shady characters need not

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apply in this case.

"We certainly love ex-hackers' skills, but you have to get ethical people," he said. "There are very extensive background investigations, and you don't usually find criminals making it through that process."

Even former teenage hackers who haven't been convicted of any crime but are suspected of a few would not be considered.

"That would be a very negative thing," Hawkins says. "We would rather take engineers with basic skills and train them from scratch."

Hawkins wouldn't get specific about compensation but said that it's a "typical engineering pay scale, which

varies widely based on level of experience."

A quick online survey shows that systems analysts generally make in the high five figures.

Hawkins added that for those applicants who pass the most stringent security clearances, "which limits the available talent," there's "premium compensation ... I'd say they make 10 to 15 percent more."

While the list of jobs looks pretty intimidating, Hawkins stressed that applicants would be better off if they weren't too specialized.

"We're looking for those individuals who understand the inner workings of computer systems and [software](#), who understand the interaction between hardware and software down to the nitty-gritty," he said. "Not people who've specialized in high-level computer languages."

In other words, Raytheon doesn't need programmers trained in the most modern, efficient techniques, which automate many routine processes, but rather those who know how to get closer to what the [computers](#) are actually doing.

It's a bit like the difference between driving a car with automatic transmission and one with a stick shift, where you have more of a sense of what the engine's up to.

While many private computer firms favor younger applicants over older ones, Hawkins says that's not the case here.

"We're perfectly willing to take mid-career applicants, especially those who've had full military careers," he says. "It really comes down to the thought process they have, the skills they have."

New graduates fresh out of college are welcome, too, as well as recently laid-off Wall Street quantitative analysts.

"If they don't have the skills we need, then we'll send them to our version of boot camp training," he adds.

In a difficult job market, with so many people looking for work, why does Raytheon need to advertise?

"In the past three to four years, the number of graduates in the fields we're looking at has really plateaued," said Hawkins. "The citizenship requirements mean there's a limited supply for a growing field."

"Kids these days tend to lose interest in math sometime in middle school," he added. "We've got a program for schoolkids called [MathMovesU](#). We've reached 700,000 kids and teachers this way in the past few years."

Locations for the jobs are in Garland, Texas (near Dallas), Melbourne, Fla., and as might be expected, two areas near Washington, D.C.: northern Virginia, home of the Pentagon and CIA, and Linthicum and Fort Meade, Md., where the National Security Agency is.

That doesn't mean people working in the latter two would be directly placed in the NSA or Pentagon, Hawkins explained.

"We do support all the major federal customers," he said. "We're not limited by proximity."

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