Thursday, October 2, 2008

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Best Careers

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Best Careers 2008

Audiologist
Biomedical equipment technician
Clergy
Curriculum/training specialist
Dentist
Editor
Engineer
Firefighter
Fundraiser
Genetic counselor
Ghostwriter
Government manager
Hairstylist/cosmetologist
Higher education administrator
Investment banker
Landscape architect
Librarian
Locksmith/Security system technician
Management consultant
Mediator
Occupational therapist
Optometrist
Pharmacist
Physician assistant
Politician/Elected official
Professor
Registered nurse
School psychologist
Systems analyst
Urban planner
Usability/User experience specialist

31 Careers With Bright Futures

The careers listed at left offer strong outlooks and high job satisfaction. Each career is profiled in two parts: an executive summary and a portrait of a typical day in the life.

. Best Careers for a Changing Job Landscape
. How the Best Careers Were Selected

Ahead of the Curve

Here's a look at a dozen cutting-edge careers, viable now and poised for future growth. They stem from megatrends like globalization, digitization, and the wave of environmentalism sweeping the world.

. Ahead-of-the-Curve Overview

Select career »
Asian Business Development Specialist
Behavioral Geneticist
Computational Biologist
Data Miner
Emergency Planning Manager
Green-Collar Consultant
Health Informatics Specialist
Immigration Specialist
Offshoring Manager
Patient Advocate
Simulation Developer
Wellness Coach

Most Overrated

These 13 careers have a mystique that outstrips their reality. They're not bad careers but they do have downsides that career seekers often find an unpleasant surprise and thus shouldn't be ignored.

. Overrated Overview

Select career »
Advertising Executive
Architect
Attorney
Chef
Chiropractor
Clinical Psychologist
Medical Scientist
Nonprofit Manager
Physician
Police Officer
Real Estate Agent
Small-Business Owner
Teacher

Get the Scoop on Salary and More

Our sortable table shows top careers' median pay nationally and for 25 metropolitan areas, plus how they scored on factors like job satisfaction and job-market outlook. Pay data from PayScale.com.

. The Components of 31 Top Careers

Join the Discussion About Best Careers

Are green-collar consultant and behavioral geneticist ahead-of-the-curve careers that are about to take off? Is being an architect or an advertising executive overrated? Offer feedback and trade career tips in our forums.

. Enter the Discussion

VIDEO

The Office and Your Career
These characters may give insight to your career dilemmas.

DISPLAYING 1 OF 4

CAREER CALCULATORS

. Cost of Living Calculator
. What Job is Right for You?
. Salary Wizard: How Much Are You Worth?

U.S. NEWS RANKINGS

. Best Careers   . Best Hospitals
. Best Colleges   . Best Leaders
. Best Graduate Schools . Best Places to Retire

Systems Analyst: Executive Summary

By Marty Nemko
Posted December 19, 2007

The Ace Widget Co. has an ancient computer system. It'd like to upgrade to an Oracle-based operation with wireless capabilities, so employees can access the system with their BlackBerrys. The systems analyst orchestrates the effort. He starts by interviewing users, teasing out what they *need* as opposed to what they want—the nice-to-have things usually cost more than necessary.

Then, members of the team develop a shopping list, plot a step-by-step game plan, implement the system, test it, and troubleshoot. They also might supervise the trainers, who will try their best to convince everyone that the new system "really will make your life easier."

Being a systems analyst requires programming skill, but more important is the ability to see the big picture: translate geek-speak into plain English, identify company needs, and get everybody on board.

Creative liberal-arts types with computer expertise usually make better systems analysts than pure techies. If you'd love playing with leading/bleeding-edge adult Tinkertoys for a living, this can be a dream career. Yet another plus: Because so much sensitive communication is involved, this is among the most offshore-resistant computer-related careers.

Median Pay

National: $91,000. More pay data by metropolitan area

(Data provided by PayScale.com)

Training

A bachelor's degree is normally expected, but not necessarily in computer science. Computer expertise acquired through real-world experience is often acceptable. An M.B.A. is a plus, though for most positions it's not required.

Smart Specialty

Government agencies and universities hire lots of systems analysts, and they're often the most stable employers. Increasingly, the private sector is using temporary employees, hired just for a specific project.

Other Resources

Department of Labor profile: Computer Systems Analyst

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Systems Analyst: A Day in the Life

By Marty Nemko
Posted December 19, 2007

The Federal Emergency Management Agency has just hired you through a temp agency, and you've agreed to a six-month contract to help develop a new system for accounting and budgets. You start your day talking with key players in the agency. After the initial meetings, you start researching the best approaches to data security and disaster recovery. After an hour on the computer, you take a break—your eyes are getting tired, and it will also help avoid repetitive strain injury. Next, you meet with the in-house programmers who will be customizing and debugging some off-the-shelf programs that will be part of the new system. You end the day by heading back to your computer to fill in flow-chart boxes on the master plan you've started to develop.

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Ahead of the Curve: Data Miner

By Marty Nemko
Posted December 19, 2007

Data Miner. There's always a new magic pill that's supposed to make businesses more successful. Some examples from the past decade: the Six-Sigma approach to quality improvement, team-based decision making, diversity training, and data mining. Those fads appear to be fading, except for data mining, the use of statistics to predict or explain customer behavior. Examples: Did a new drug really work better than a placebo (let alone than the gold-standard drug)? What products should be pitched to each of your previous online customers? Which times of the year and for which markets should production be increased? How likely is it that certain credit card spending is fraudulent? Data mining is a great career for people who'd enjoy using statistics to unearth patterns in data, using ever more powerful software. Opportunities are particularly good if you also have business sense.

More info: "Career Advancement in Data Mining"

Tags: careers | data | consumer behavior

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Ahead of the Curve: Simulation Developer

By Marty Nemko
Posted December 19, 2007

Simulation Developer. Whether for entertainment, training, education, or predicting the future, we enjoy and learn more if we're immersed in a subject. Governments use simulations to predict terrorist strategies. Scientists use them to predict how a synthesized molecule will work. Surgeons use them to learn a new technique without endangering patients. Corporations and, to a lesser extent, schools are moving from the instructor who attempts to keep people awake by telling anecdotes and jokes to immersive simulations of critical real-world situations. For example, Pitney Bowes had its managers trained using a simulation game called Executive Challenge, in which each team of managers was given a virtual company, and presented with a series of challenges requiring effective management skills.

The use of simulations for training will continue to grow because of the wide availability of broadband and mobile Internet access. That will enable you to receive, on your BlackBerry or other device, training filled with video scenarios in which you are the protagonist—all while you're actually lying on the beach in Hawaii.

More info: *e-Learning and the Science of Instruction* by Ruth Clark.

Tags: careers | technology