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10 Hot Skills for 2009

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Introduction

Whether we are in a down economy, seeing jobs go offshore, or witnessing jobs being cut altogether, there are certain IT skills that will never go out of style. With spending on cost-saving technologies such as virtualization rising, and the maintenance of networking and enterprise Microsoft software keeping IT professionals constantly in demand, here's our top 10 hot skills that will take us from a down economy and beyond.

10. Business Skills

Employment surveys have been telling us for a number of years that IT pros must possess business skills as well as technical expertise, and in a down economy IT folks who understand the business could be considered more valuable than those who don't. A survey by CompTIA of 215,085 IT pros found that employers valued "interpersonal and communication" skills in addition to "strategic thinking" and "project management" know-how. The survey, which was conducted in 2007, found that 73% of respondents said they planned to upgrade their business skills within two years, with the majority studying for project management skills.

9. Programming Languages (C, C++, C#)

Forget about programming jobs being outsourced, experts with C, C++ and C# skills "have emerged as a highly desired skill set, being cited as 'in demand' just as often as Business Intelligence and Enterprise Solutions skills," according to the Veritude 2009 IT Outlook Report. Demand for software engineers increased from 27% to 32%, according to Veritude's survey of IT hiring managers.

Those programming languages are also consistently the top most wanted programming skills in Dice reports. In February and March, Dice posted 9,881 and 10,465 Cx jobs, respectively.

Software engineering topped Money Magazine and Salary.com's list of Best Jobs in America 2007, noting that the number of programming jobs would balloon from 800,050 in 2004, to 1.2 million in 2014. The profession, with an average annual salary of \$80,427, beat college professor and financial advisor in the list.

8. Telecommunications

The government's \$7.2 billion broadband stimulus initiative to extend broadband to rural and unserved communities will mean jobs for pros with telecom skills. Telecom providers operate in a very competitive market, and

while operators cut costs in stagnant areas of their markets, they're still investing in others. For instance, AT&T this year cut its capital expenditure by \$3 billion but it is investing in 3,000 new jobs for its mobility, broadband, and video initiatives, reports Unstrung.

Telecoms knowledge is also sought by CIOs. In Robert Half Technology's Q209 report, telecoms support was the fifth-highest skill sought by respondents, up from the sixth highest in the previous quarter.

7. Wireless

Cisco generated buzz in its training community late last year when it launched the expert-level CCIE certification in wireless networking. As part of the launch, it commissioned a study conducted by Forrester Consulting, which found that 36% of global companies surveyed predicted that the number of dedicated wireless specialists on their IT staff would almost double in the next five years.

"In our research we found a pervasive need for wireless skills, and not just in North America," says Sanjay Mehta, Cisco product marketing manager for wireless and mobility. "The need for experts to design, deploy, manage and troubleshoot is growing exponentially." He says the wireless certification is particularly popular in emerging markets, such as Brazil, India, and China, where new wireless infrastructures are being built from the ground up.

6. IT Security

This skill was called out by Foote Partners as one of three certification groups that saw significant gains in pay. A total of 18 different security certifications, including Check Point Certified Master Architect and Cisco Certified Security Professional, were listed among the IT certifications that earned the highest pay premiums in Foote Partners' 2009 IT Skills and Certifications Pay Index.

Security will never go out of style, even during a recession, as businesses are required to comply with regulatory controls and data protection requirements. Meanwhile, hackers continue their assaults no matter what the economy is doing. A survey by the SANS Institute showed that through the end of November 2009, 79% of respondents saw no cuts to their security staffing levels.

5. IT Architect/Project Management

The same Foote Partners report also notes that "nothing has been hotter" than IT architect and project management skills and that "they will still be hot commodities long after the economy improves." Certified folks in that category reported pay increases of 10% in the last 12 months to January 2009, according to the Foote Partners report.

The Open Group's IT Certified Architect and the Project Management Institute's Project Management Professional designations were the certifications that commanded the highest pay premiums, according to the report.

4. ITIL

The Information Technology Infrastructure Library is a business framework that was developed by the U.K.'s Office of Government Commerce. It is the subject of much buzz on this side of the pond, with firms such as DHL and General Motors adopting the IT services efficiency framework. A quick search of the Indeed job search aggregator site netted 6,266 jobs, with salaries ranging from \$50,000 to \$130,000. ITIL is cited by Foote Partners' IT Skills and Certification Pay Index report, for the last three months of 2008 as a skill that is seeing a sharp increase in pay and demand.

Foote Partners notes a "sharp increases in pay and demand for ITIL, CoBIT and similar expertise" in 2009, and that "while valuable in short range cost reduction initiatives, these are also core enterprise skills with high re-use value long term."

3. Networking/Windows Administration

Proving that networking and Microsoft Windows administration skills will likely never go out of style, these two skills consistently appear as either the first, second, or third most sought after skill in Robert Half Technology's quarterly skills surveys. A full 65% (the second highest number) of CIOs surveyed for the Q209 report said they required network administration skills, while 64% (the third highest) of executives said they needed Windows admin experts. The skill most in demand in Q209 is desktop support, according to the survey.

Networking/systems admin jobs were cited in the Top 20 Most Recession-Proof Professions report by Jobfox from data collected during November 2007 to July 2008. The report noted that there is a limited supply of qualified workers in that profession, and reported that the median salary in the U.S. for such roles is between \$65,000 and \$75,000.

2. Web 2.0

Organizations have moved beyond establishing Web sites for their brands. Now they are embracing social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook, where you can find such household names as Ford Motor Company and AT&T. CIOs in a wide range of organizations are demanding IT professionals who can keep them up to speed with the fast-moving Web 2.0 world. Web development and Web site design first appeared as a sought-after skill in Robert Half Technology's Q408 report, when 42% of CIOs surveyed said they were in needs of such expertise. In Q209, 39% of respondents had a demand for Web skills.

According to PayScale.com, the typical salary for a Web designer in the U.S. range from \$37,285 to \$59,070. This compares to \$60,000 for a Web developer, \$40,000 for a graphic designer, and \$60,000 for a programmer, according to Simply Hired a search engine for jobs.

1. Virtualization

Virtualization is hot. Vendors are jostling for lead position in the virtualization stakes and user organizations are seeing virtualization benefits through increased efficiency, lower costs, quick return on investment, and a more flexible computing model. But virtualization is complex; it encompasses the entire IT infrastructure, from the

desktop to servers and storage systems. That's why IT professionals with virtualization experience are much in demand.

According to a recent article in Virtualization Review, jobs Web site Dice.com reported that the number of jobs advertised from January 2008 through the first week of November increased by 43% and 37% for VMware and general virtualization skills, respectively. That compares with a total job count that was down 12% during the same period.

Virtualization skills was cited by 35% of the 1,400 CIOs surveyed for the Robert Half Technology IT Hiring Index and Skills Report for the second quarter of 2009, up from 30% in the Q1 report. Virtualization as a skill first appeared in the Q208 survey when it was cited by 26% of respondents.

The IT pro who can understand how his employer's business works and can articulate how technology can be used to meet and exceed the company's goals is a true gem.

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About the Author

Linda Leung is a senior IT journalist with 20 years' experience editing and writing news and features for online and print. She has extensive experience creating and launching news Web sites, including most recently independent communities for customers of Cisco Systems and Microsoft. As an experienced journalist in the U.S. and the U.K., she has led teams of journalists and industry experts to produce compelling content delivered via blogs, news, features and podcasts for all levels of technology executives.

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