

New career paths emerge in IT

Information technology is changing in scope and function. As it changes—and its place in the corporate structure shifts—so will the career paths and job titles for IT professionals.

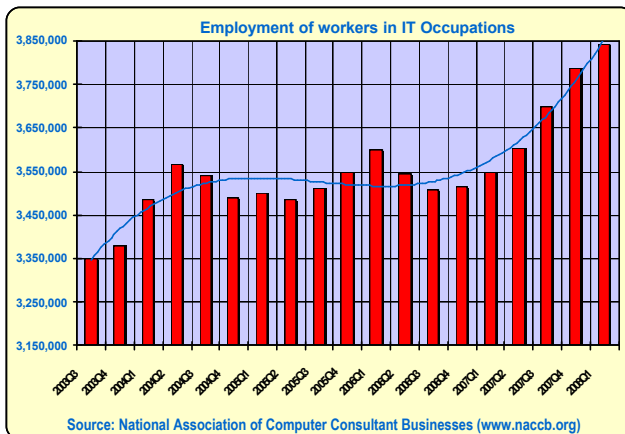
With advancements in software and workers generally more computer savvy, the traditional support function of the IT department has changed. IT is being pushed up the corporate food chain as it becomes embedded in different business departments. While the world will always need pure technical skills, IT is being asked to do much more.

As IT successfully masters the process of generating and gathering data, the next steps are figuring out what to do with that data, which requires more than just technologists. All of these changes are creating different IT-related job titles and career paths focusing more on analysis and the development of products and services. For example, instead of “computer programmer” or “network engineer,” job titles are changing to “product architect” or “solutions architect.”

C-level titles are changing as well. For example, the title of chief process officer (CPO) has been around for a few years although not widely used. The title and function arose from the realization that IT itself, although a necessity in many companies, is not a competitive advantage by itself.

The competitive advantage is what sits on top of a company’s technology and successfully bridges it with the company’s business operations.

Enterprise Systems magazine reports that a business process management (BPO) company created a CPO position a few years ago. The need for the CPO position became apparent because of the requirement that “senior people who understand the business requirements and [are able to] translate those into the IT infrastructure, basically are able to design and define the business processes... That’s where the CPO comes in.”



H-1B visa quota quickly depleted

The shortage of highly skilled IT workers in the U.S. has increased the demand for H-1B visa workers by U.S. companies. According to the U.S. Citizen and Immigration Service (USCIS), nearly 163,000 applications for H-1B visas were received in the first week after the application process was opened—triple the FY 2009 allotment. More than 31,200 of the petitions were for the special visa allotment available to petitioners with advanced degrees from U.S. Universities. The number of visas was capped at 65,000, with another 20,000 visas offered for graduates with advanced degrees from U.S. universities.

To determine who receives an H-1B visa, the USCIS will run a computer-generated random selection process. The lottery for the advanced degree petitions—those with masters' and doctoral degrees—will be conducted first. Those not selected will be able to participate in the random selection process used to allocate the 65,000 visas.

Many business leaders are pushing for a moderate increase of the visa cap and to tie future adjustments to a demand-based mechanism. They argue that America needs the talent to remain competitive in a global marketplace. They point to various studies that have found that each highly skilled tech worker brought into the U.S. on an H-1B visa generates an additional four to seven jobs.

Where companies cannot find the IT workers necessary to complete their critical projects, it is expected there will be an increasing reliance on IT staffing companies to recruit the talent.

IT unemployment remains low; wages mixed

IT workers continued to experience lower unemployment rates than the general labor force in 1Q2008. While the overall unemployment rate was 4.9%, it was less than half that for many skilled IT and computer positions such as computer and information systems managers, computer software engineers and database administrators.

Occupation	1Q2008 Unemployment rate
Computer and information systems managers	1.7
Computer support specialists	4.9
Computer, automated teller, and office machine repairers	1.3
Computer programmers	2.7
Computer scientists and systems analysts	3.0
Computer software engineers	1.2
Database administrators	2.2

Network and computer systems administrators	3.4
Network systems and data communications analysts	2.7
<i>Source: unpublished tabulations of Current Population Survey data furnished by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.</i>	

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Additionally, wages in some IT/high-tech sectors continued to be higher than the national average, rising 3.8% in the past year. Wages for workers in computer systems design services saw their wages rise 6.4%, which was faster than either the IT/high tech sector norm or the national average. Wages in Internet publishing and broadcasting and Web search portals were up 3.1%, which was just slightly below the average wage increase.

The IT/high-tech sectors most susceptible to offshore competition experienced wage growth below the national average. Custom computer programming services saw wage increases of only 1.6%-below average for IT professionals. Data processing, hosting and related services also saw below average wage increases of only 2.1%.

Finding work through social networking

Social networking Web sites have become an attractive venue for companies. Often thought of as a way to market to a large number of potential customers, they also have great potential as a recruiting resource.

Some of these sites are designed as a forum for specific demographic groups to meet while others have a more professional/business networking leaning. Recruiters are using all of them to source candidates.

Using these social networking sites is not without risk. Even where an individual is not using it for his or her job search, employers are increasingly looking at personal profiles. One should be careful about the information posted on-line. The ability to "hack into colleagues' personal e-mail" is probably not a talent to be touted on any site.

TechServe: cost effective insurance for independent contractors

For many independent contractors performing IT services, obtaining business insurance coverage is a "necessary evil" --- a requirement to do business with many companies. While client requirements may be the motivation for obtaining business insurance, you should also understand the role insurance can play in protecting both your livelihood and your personal assets. Fortunately, appropriate cost effective insurance for ICs is now readily available.

TechServe, the NACCB Sponsored Insurance Program, in conjunction with its strategic partner Telcom Insurance Services and a leading technology insurance company, has developed a quick and easy process for you to obtain cost-conscious insurance coverage.