IT Professional Career Guide

Looking for the scoop on IT careers? You've come to the right place. From the skills and certifications needed to get employment in the IT industry, to the top jobs available, and what it's like to work in the sector, this comprehensive information technology career guide has it all. This guide also contains salary and hiring data as well as expert advice.

Let's jump right into it.

Is now a good time to start an IT career?

The answer to this question depends on who you ask. For some, this is the best time to jump into the industry, while others feel it's the worst time ever. The reason behind these widely varying views is because of the rapid growth and change that has been going on in the industry due to social media, cutting edge consumer technology, and recent innovations like cloud computing. These changes obviously have had an effect on the IT market, the skills needed to be in the industry, and the salaries paid.

Those who view the IT industry as a hopeless cause often cite the massive layoffs that have taken place or blame companies for hiring "cheap tech labour" via immigrants on work visas. These people also often point at the poor work life balance, lack of appreciation businesses show towards IT professionals, and the reduced salaries.

On the other side of the coin, those who are optimistic about what the future holds for the IT industry feel that despite the many new challenges like rapid technology growth, offshoring, globalization, and the economy, the industry has its best days ahead of it. These people believe that the IT jobs of the present and future will only make those in the industry more well-rounded and versatile, which prepares them for other business roles. As IT companies continue to change their structure due to new technologies like cloud computing, more tech will inevitably be pushed onto businesses (instead of being managed directly by corporate IT). This means IT professionals will have more opportunities to work in positions with professionals from other sectors.

Also, despite the layoffs we have seen in the past several years, IT jobs seem to be getting more stable as an increasing number of companies are moving away from short tenures towards long ones. Today's huge corporations want IT professionals that will be with the company for the long haul. This is because of how hard it is to replace the knowledge these professionals gain over the years about the vast architecture of the IT structures these corporations run off.

Those who wish to pursue careers in the IT industry must be flexible and open to change. Members of Generation Y have a slight advantage in today's market since most of them are already familiar with the consumer technology that is constantly changing the industry.

What are IT careers like?

Here's the reality: IT jobs are stressful, fast-paced, and demanding. They require long hours (anywhere from 50-60 hours per week is the norm for all levels all the way up to the CIO), they offer little recognition, yet, they come with huge responsibilities.

So why even bother with such a demanding field? Most join the industry because they love working with technology and because they enjoy things that simulate their logical and analytical minds.

What kind of IT jobs are available and how are roles changing?

When you pursue a career in the IT industry, you have a wide range of options available to you in terms of the career path you can follow. You can decide to work for a software or hardware manufacturer, you could work for a corporate IT department, or you can join a web or telecommunications company. Within these different employers, there are many roles to choose from. These include:

- Program Manager
- Project Manager
- Software Engineer/Software Developer/Programmer
- Hardware Engineer
- Database Administrator
- Systems Administrator
- IT Security Manager
- Vendor Manager
- IT Procurement Manager
- Vendor Relationship Manager
- Enterprise Architect
- Network Administrator

It is worth noting that some of these jobs won't be available much longer in corporate IT departments. Discrete roles like network engineering and programming are expected to vanish from corporate settings as cloud computing becomes more common and technology becomes more closely integrated into businesses. Some corporations have already started phasing out these roles. Obviously, even though these roles will slowly vanish, software manufacturers and the like will always need programmers.

While certain jobs are expected to disappear from the corporate IT department setting, new roles are also being created. Roles like: integration architect, cloud architect, cloud infrastructure administrator, and cloud capacity planner. Some old roles like enterprise architects, project managers, and business analysts will remain an integral part of corporate IT departments. Matter of fact, enterprise architects remain one of the most sought after roles in the IT industry.

IT employment experts and CIOs foresee that IT jobs of the future will fall into two categories. IT jobs that are technical in nature and those that are business oriented. The many technical IT roles that exist in many corporations today will eventually be replaced with business-oriented roles.

The technical IT professionals that will remain in corporations will be the ones who are responsible for creating and maintaining the company's IT architecture. These people will be responsible for integrating a wide range of technology into the company's framework. They will need to be well versed in IT security, networking, and virtualization.

On the other hand, the business specialists will be tasked with identifying technologies that the company can use to generate profits or run more efficiently. These are the extremely IT savvy business experts who understand how and where technology can help or hurt the company. The hottest IT

opportunities in this sector will likely be those in the areas of business analytics, innovation, and risk management.

What IT skills are the most valuable?

Due to the rapid infusion of new technologies into the IT world, the hottest IT skills are always changing. In today's market, the most sought after IT skills include: web development, IT security, network administration, database management, virtualization, and technical support. Cloud computing skills are also becoming increasingly popular.

Those who want to become IT managers need a wide range of technical and soft skills to be successful in those fields. These professionals need to be able to build relationships with people in other departments, communicate effectively, and efficiently lead teams.

CIOs on the other hand need more business and leadership skills than technical skills. They need to be able to comprehend the company's business objectives and how it makes money, and communicate this information to board members, business clients, or subordinates. Their long terms strategies, leadership, and ability to spot and capitalize on business opportunities are some of their most sought after skills.

What certifications will improve my odds of landing a job?

Many in the IT industry are constantly looking for new certifications to keep their skills sharp and beef up their resumes. It's a decent strategy since IT professionals who regularly look to acquire new skills and certifications give off the impression that they are heavily invested in their careers. That's something that impresses many hiring managers, especially nowadays when an ever decreasing number of employers are willing to pay for their employees' certifications and other forms of further learning.

Just as is the case with IT skills, IT certifications are frequently falling in and out of fashion. Some of the hottest certifications right now include: VMware Certified Professional, IBM Certified Administrator, Cisco Certified Design Professional, HP Accredited Systems Engineer, Cisco Certified Network Professional, RedHat Certified Technician, CompTIA Security+, and Microsoft Certified Professional.

When choosing certifications to add to your resume, it's often best for IT professionals to go with certifications that are in alignment with their work experience and career path. Go with certifications that genuinely increase your ability to help your current and/or your future employer.

So for example, if you are an IT security professional, go for a security certification instead of one for project management simply because it sounds like something that would look good on your resume.

Show me the money! What are salaries like?

A career as an IT professional won't bring in as much money as one as an investment banker, but you won't be slumming it either. There are lots of complaints going around the IT industry right now about offshoring, outsourcing, work visa holders, and high unemployment rates pushing salaries down. However, there have been slight increases in the average pay of IT professionals in recent years.

Here are the average salaries to expect in today's market:

- Applications architects: $90,000 - $120,500
- Systems analysts: $70,000 - $95,000

- Project managers: $75,000 - $115,000
- Lead application developers: $82,000 - 115,000
- Programmers/developers: $60,000 - $100,000
- CIOs: $140,000 - $250,000

I'm tired of the corporate IT scene, what are my other options?

It's not uncommon for IT professionals of all levels to turn to consulting and working as independent contractors after losing their jobs or simply getting tired of the corporate scene. It's a natural transition for many since they can simply apply the skills they have sharpened over the years to better their clients' IT infrastructure.

The IT professionals who are the most successful with consulting independently are the ones who have a strong understanding of how businesses work. You need to be able to sell yourself to prospective clients, build strong relationships with current clients, and build relationships with others you might end up subcontracting to as your business grows.

That's not the only option available to those who are tired of the corporate IT scene though.

There are also opportunities in the healthcare, insurance, research, and IT security industry. In other words there are lots of options available to those who are interested in the IT industry, but not necessarily the corporate world.