

November 25, 2011

Hot Jobs in a Cold Economy: Demand Grows for Web and Mobile Apps Developers, Cybersecurity Analysts

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Hot, promising and lucrative are not words most people would use to describe the current job market. But those are adjectives being used to describe promising jobs in the technology sector for 2012. Many of them are in areas created just in the past few years and focused on making company websites safer, easier to navigate and more interesting.

Robert Half Technology has identified seven jobs that will see demand grow in 2012. They include: mobile applications developer, for which salaries are expected to increase 9.1 percent to between \$85,000 and \$122,500; data warehouse analyst, for which salaries are expected to grow 6.7 percent to between \$88,000 and \$119,000; and user experience designer, for which salaries should increase by 6.2 percent to between \$71,750 and \$104,000.

“A lot of the positions that are in high demand are helping companies take advantage of emerging technology to promote their services,” said Kristen Johnson, regional vice president at Robert Half International in Boston.

Boston digital marketing firm Genuine Interactive is looking for user experience designers who work on making websites easy to use and nice to look at. It created the Museum of Fine Arts Boston’s website, among others.

“User experience designers — that’s a hot career for people,” said Chris Pape, executive creative director at Genuine Interactive, who notes that growth in this area is being driven by the fact that “people are realizing how hard it is to build a world-class website.”

Bentley University’s Human Factors in Information Design provides training for such jobs, focusing on teaching both product-design and technology.

Other positions with high growth potential — per Robert Half — include: data security analyst, for which salaries are expected to rise 6 percent to between \$89,000 and \$121,500; SEO/SEM

specialist, for which salaries are pegged to rise 6 percent to between \$63,750 and \$87,500; network engineer, which should see a 5.8 percent salary increase to between \$75,000 and \$107,750; and web developer, for which salaries should rise 5.4 percent to between \$61,250 and \$99,250.

More broadly, average salary increases next year in Massachusetts will be between 2.5 and 2.8 percent, according to the latest salary survey from the Associated Industries of Massachusetts. It got responses from 368 companies.

Cyber security is another up-and-coming area that experts say will continue to explode, as government, companies and individuals all have tremendous need to keep their information secure on the Internet, as cyber criminals step up their efforts to profit off of people and companies' information.

"We all are on the Internet for everything. From our jobs, to personal finance to health records," said Tanya Zlateva, director of Reliable Information Systems and Cyber Security at Boston University. "Because of the computerization and networking across all areas of both work and leisure activities, we rely on computers and if they are not secure ... that's a direct threat to our daily life."

Some universities carry degrees in cyber security, which encompasses digital forensics, networking security systems, database security, legal and regulatory issues and cyber warfare.

Boston University, for one, offers a variety of cyber security classes and degrees.

Still, Zlateva said often the best combination is someone who is an expert in his field, whether that be law or computer science or engineering, who has also gotten some cyber security training.

"That would be my preference, someone who is really good in their traditional degree and then adds something on top, that gives him or her an understanding of the technical side," said Zlateva. Still, it's possible to snag one of these high tech jobs, without formal training.

"Over the last five years we've seen a real explosion in the amount of cyber attacks," said Roel Schouwenberg, a senior researcher for Kaspersky Lab in Woburn. Schouwenberg says that at this point there are few universities that can prepare people for a career in cyber security, but it's possible to be part of the profession, even if you're self-taught.

"Especially in this area, you can be self-taught ... it's not like you're a doctor," said Schouwenberg.

Art Papas, cofounder and CEO of Boston's Bullhorn Inc., agrees that while a computer science degree is nice, when he hires software engineers, he doesn't require computer science degrees.

“It’s about problem solving,” said Papas. “You can teach yourself to program. You can’t necessarily teach yourself how to problem-solve.”