

DAN PAGE

# Are You THE Complete Package?

Nine nontechie skills that hiring managers wish you had (and how to get them). **BY THOMAS HOFFMAN**

**W**HEN it comes to technical skills, you either have them or you get them. This year's hiring survey shows that there's demand for a broad range of skills, many of which have been hot for several years (see charts, next page). But what else makes for a great IT hire? In their continual struggle to align IT with the business, IT executives say they're increasingly looking

for staffers who have, in addition to technical chops, solid business acumen and so-called soft skills, like strong communication and listening abilities.

*Computerworld's* most recent hiring and skills survey confirms that. Survey respondents said writing and public speaking are two of the most important soft skills they look for when hiring new employees.

Classes that teach technical skills

are easy to find, but what's the best way to learn soft skills? Here's a look at nine skills employers are looking for, with IT executives and career experts' advice on how to get them.

**1. Writing ability.** Communication skills are a requisite for IT workers, says Tom Casey, senior vice president and architect of the workforce transformation practice at BSG Concours, a Kingwood, Texas-based consultancy.

Many community colleges and online universities offer continuing education courses on business writing, says Robert Keefe, incoming president of the Society for Information Management (SIM) and senior vice president and CIO at Mueller Water Products Inc. in Atlanta.

**2. An understanding of business-process mapping and tools.** "If there's one group in the company that needs to excel at process mapping, it's the IT group," says John Roulat, vice president of IT at Carl Zeiss Inc., a Thornwood, N.Y.-based medical technology manufacturer. Although flowcharts can be used, swim charts, which offer a visual depiction of how business processes flow across functional areas, are very effective, he says. Roulat says there are "books galore" on the subject, but he recommends bringing in consultants to train IT workers on how to use swim charts.

**3. An aptitude for public speaking.** They may be a throwback to the 1960s, but Toastmasters International clubs can help IT workers refine their public speaking skills and get past their jitters. Also, SIM's Regional Leadership Forum can help up-and-coming IT professionals polish their leadership skills, including their speaking ability, says Keefe.

**4. An understanding of accounting.** Universities, training firms and even professional organizations such as Omicron, an Atlanta-based consortium of IT associations, offer courses in accounting and financial principles. Alternatively, in-house financial experts from a company's accounting or finance department can offer tutorials to IT professionals, says Roulat.

*Continued on page 50*

*Continued from page 48*

These skills are a great start, but most IT managers want to see even more in their potential hires. Hiring managers say they also look for attributes like entrepreneurship, intellectual curiosity and traits like these:

**5. The ability to work well with a team.**

"Anyone can muscle their way through an already overburdened IT group," says Roulat. But a person who is able to gain consensus and sell an idea "not only gets the job done, but makes the group stronger," he adds. Still, it's not easy identifying and finding people with these traits. "You have to see how they do in the field," he says.

**6. Initiative.** "Being a small [IT] shop, I like to hire people who have demonstrated they can deliver without constant oversight," says David Dart, regional head of IT at HSH Nordbank AG in New York, where he oversees a 10-person staff. Dart says his management style is to create a vision or a goal and allow his staff to "make it happen without too much supervision."

**7. An inquisitive mind.** IT professionals "need to be able to learn on their own" and acquire needed skills through a variety of venues, including online classes, blogs and networking sites, says Roni Krisavage, vice president of IT at World Wrestling Entertainment Inc. in Stamford, Conn.

**8. The ability to get a point across.** IT professionals should possess not only an ability to speak to business people in terms they understand, but also strong writing skills and a talent for conversing with people who are in a variety of roles, says Didi Raizen, IT applications manager at Flatiron Construction Corp. in Longmont, Colo. While these types of skills can be developed, some people are just natural-born communicators, notes Raizen.

She encountered people like that at a previous job she had as manager of globalization software at J.D. Edwards & Co. There, a team of business analysts and nontechnical workers she oversaw "blew me away with the recommendations they came up with to solve problems on a low-scale budget," says Raizen. "Those types of folks are difficult to find."

**9. A willingness to take risks.** "I believe the modern IT person is more of an IT entrepreneur," since he is constantly looking to improve upon existing ways of doing things or identify other business and operational opportunities, says Roulat. He notes how the increasing use of Web-based applications and open architectures is providing opportunities for IT organizations to present approaches that are affordable, quick to implement and disposable.

The bottom line, says Roulat, is to "keep your eyes open, take a risk, learn from it, and move on." ■

**METHODOLOGY**

Computerworld's 21st Annual Salary Survey was administered via the Internet. Responses from both *Computerworld* print subscribers and visitors to *Computerworld.com* were included in the survey results.

The collection of survey data began May 14, 2007, and concluded July 20. A total of 9,998 people responded to the survey. Of those respondents, 9,290 were employed full or part time and were eligible to complete the entire survey.

At the 95% confidence level, the margin of error for this sample size is less than +/- 1 percentage point. Compensation figures for 2006 were calculated based on the percentage change reported by the respondents.

**WHO THEY ARE**

Eighty-three percent of respondents were men, 92% were employed full time, and 46% said a bachelor's degree was their highest level of education. Respondents had worked an average of 15 years in IT, and their average age was 43. The companies they work for employ an average of 9,682 total employees and an average of 1,044 IT staffers. The average 2007 revenue of their employers is \$2.9 billion. Thirty-nine percent work for public companies, while 36% work for private companies, 10% work in government, 8% at nonprofits, and 7% in education.

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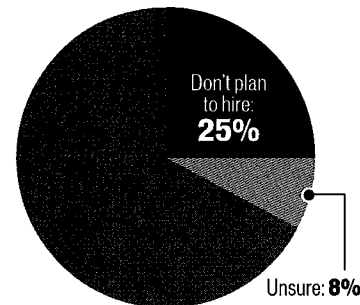
**MORE ONLINE**

For a detailed look at how we conducted this survey, visit our Web site: [computerworld.com/07/salaries](http://computerworld.com/07/salaries)

**21<sup>st</sup>  
ANNUAL  
SALARY  
SURVEY**

**HIRING FORECAST**

More than two-thirds of the respondents said they expect their companies to hire new IT staffers within the next 12 months.



At employers that plan on hiring new IT staffers, an average of 85% of new recruits will be from outside the company.

**SKILLS MOST WANTED**

The technology areas where respondents said they are experiencing the greatest skills shortages:

Application development	
Database analysis and development	
Security	
Web design and development	
Help desk and IT support	
Business intelligence	

NOTE: MULTIPLE RESPONSES ALLOWED.

**TECH APPEAL**

97% of respondents reported that their IT organizations are seeking certain technical qualifications. Here are the areas of IT expertise that were most frequently cited as being in demand:

SQL Server	
Network technician	
Microsoft .Net Framework	
Java	
XML	
Oracle database and applications	

NOTE: MULTIPLE RESPONSES ALLOWED.

SOURCE: COMPUTERWORLD HIRING & SKILLS SURVEY, JULY 2007; 204 RESPONSES