Demand for Tech Skills Rebounds

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Hot Technical Skills 2002	Hot Non-Technical Skills 2002
• Database Management • Network Architects • Systems Security • Internet Development • Customer Relationship Management	• Sales and Marketing • Call Centre Representatives • Accountants • Financial Analysis • Supply Chain Management

The emphasis on systems security skills in corporations has faded as companies are beginning to focus on database management and "enterprise-wide" network systems, according to a recent survey that identifies the "hot skills" in the labour market.

"The Canadian (technology sector) hasn't been hit as hard as the U.S." over the past year, says Gail Evans, President of The Wynford Group in Calgary.

She says the oil and gas sector in Alberta has contributed to moderate growth and recovery locally because of its dependence on large-scale systems, whereas Ottawa has been hit harder due to the concentration of telecommunications firms there.

The survey, which polled 120 organizations across Canada, also revealed that about 98 per cent of those firms see a "positive economic environment" ahead.

Security concerns after the terrorist attacks last September suddenly shifted the focus onto the need for strong systems security programs.

"Disaster recovery became critical to (corporations) functioning so that they are able to recover all of that data," says Evans. This trend has led to an increase in demand for network architects, Internet developers, and database management as systems security dropped to third from first place as ranked by employers last year.

Call centre representatives and financial analysts were listed among the highest in demand this year on the non-technical side, replacing mergers and acquisitions specialists and business development consultants in 2001.

Evans says that the increasing reliance on the Internet is pushing the demand for related skills among corporations.

"Most organizations now find it necessary to use the Internet to do business and promote themselves regardless of whether they are into e-commerce or not," says Evans.

Jamie Archer, a network specialist in Calgary, says that while the technology sector has been slowly recovering, it appears there is still a long way to go before there is the same level of demand that was seen a couple of years ago. "New graduates are still finding it tough in some areas, but the jobs are certainly increasing and the sector is recovering," says Archer.

Evans says supply chain management has become a high growth area as companies scramble to make the logistical aspect of their business more efficient through technology.

A Calgary company called Moveitonline Inc., for example, is providing software that links all of the aspects of the supply chain into a single Internet-based program that tracks the location of freight in real time and co-ordinates invoicing and other aspects.

Evans says she expects to see more companies pursuing other ventures that use the Internet to co-ordinate various aspects of operations within companies. "The growth of the need to store information . . . has increased dramatically and will continue to grow," she says.

Java programming skills, Oracle Webtech and database analysis skills will be at the front of the growth in the technology sector, says Evans. "A lot of software developers are emerging and have maintained their positions and are now looking for new markets," says Evans.

Customer relationship management has also emerged as a growth area, according to the survey. Evans says firms are concentrating on "getting a better handle on their clients" through database management and customer service roles "so that organizations can be more focused on what their customers want."

It also appears employees are also staying in their jobs longer now. Turnover has decreased from 12 per cent last year to 7 per cent this year, paralleled by an increase in skills training and development spending by companies.