

Salaries climbing in IT field / Staffing experts say Richmond-area gains may top U.S. average

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Information-technology salaries are climbing, especially for folks with computer and business smarts.

Starting salaries in the IT field are expected to increase by a national average of 5.3 percent next year, according to the Robert Half Technology 2008 Salary Guide. The study was released this week, based on thousands of temporary and full-time placements made by the global staffing firm.

Salary increases in the Richmond region may be above the U.S. average, experts here say. The area is home to a number of IT firms serving the region's Fortune 1000 corporations and boasts one of the nation's lowest unemployment rates. That tightens the pool of available talent, already waning as veterans retire, fewer college students major in computer-science fields and the IT industry blossoms.

Andy Frank, principal at Henrico County staffing firm UDig Technologies, said he hasn't seen salaries increase in the region this much since before the Sept. 11 attacks. And with companies growing and investing in the latest technologies to make their operations run better, demand for IT pros has hit its highest level in at least five years, Robert Half said.

"There's definitely some pressure in bringing new people in. We're having to pay higher starting salaries," said Sandy Williamson, chief executive of consulting firm CapTech Ventures Inc. in Richmond.

Companies are searching for workers who can talk business, not just a "heads-down developer" who just speaks geek, said David Ingram, president of Richmond-based Capital TechSearch Inc., an IT placement firm.

"The people who can bridge the gap between IT and business are always in demand," Williamson said.

According to the salary guide, lead applications developers will see the largest starting salary gains because of their expertise in technology and business concepts. The jobs manage software development teams and projects, and the compensation is expected to rise 7.6 percent, to between \$80,250 and \$108,000 annually, Robert Half said.

That figure is likely at the upper end in central Virginia. "We have several clients that are working on projects for next year, and the salaries are like 9 percent increases," Ingram said.

But it's not only about wages when recruiting. Also pertinent are perks. "We're having to offer full packages now, with health-care plans, 401(k), paid time off" and bonuses to employees who refer others, Ingram said.

Some of the largest salary increases will be seen for developers of code-heavy software applications and Web projects, two of the most in-demand positions in this market, Frank said.

For a solid candidate with those skills, "as soon as we meet you, you're going to have a job pretty quickly," said Gary Henning, regional manager for Robert Half.

Industries expecting particularly strong demand for IT workers next year include financial services, health care and commercial construction, Robert Half said.

Where's the big money?

IT isn't the only industry that will see salaries go up next year. Finance and law should see gains, too. Here are the national average increases and respective annual salary ranges, according to staffing company Robert Half.

-- First-year associates, large law firms with 75 or more attorneys: up 9.1 percent, to between \$111,750 and \$137,000

-- Attorneys, large firms, one to three years' experience: up 8.2 percent, to between \$114,000 and \$147,500

-- Attorneys, large firms, 10 or more years' experience: up 7.9 percent, to between \$167,500 and \$234,000

-- In-house corporate attorneys, 10 or more years' experience: up 4.1 percent, to between \$126,000 and \$210,750.

-- Entry-level financial, budget, treasury and cost analyst: up 6.9 percent, to between \$38,250 and \$47,500

-- Commercial lenders, more than five years' experience: up 4.7 percent, to between \$82,000 and \$107,500

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