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Social platform IT jobs

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by Duane Craig

People looking for IT jobs with social media in the title can now find three times as many opportunities as compared to 2009, according to Jill McKay, account manager for staffing firm TrueBridge Resources' Washington, D.C., office. She cites one job board with 1,250 openings just in the D.C. area. However, the field requires job seekers to bring a wealth of other skills to the table.

"A job in the social networking sector is not a pure play technical role; it requires a convergence of skills that follow these primary paths: technical, business analytics and marketing," McKay said. "The most successful professionals have proficiencies in all three camps." This is where IT meets the front lines of business.

"More and more businesses are leveraging social media to engage customers and build brand awareness," Barry Downs, Washington, D.C., branch manager for staffing firms Robert Half Technology and The Creative Group said. "Even when hiring for positions that don't directly involve social media, firms prize candidates who understand how to use these tools effectively."

Downs says companies want broadly skilled people who understand business from a wide perspective and who are adaptable, versatile and creative.

"Creativity is often the first requested skill set from this type of employer," Tammy Miller, senior vice president at Yoh, a staffing agency specializing in technology-related recruiting, said. "Additionally, sales, and business intelligence/demographics analysts, marketing managers, brand strategists and Internet analysts will be in demand throughout 2011."

There is no specific background that is a classic fit for today's IT social media jobs; however, Downs said people with Web-based media backgrounds are often requested.

The entry points for companies to social media are blooming beyond Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. More companies are now using third party offerings like Ning to create their own branded social networks. McKay said many social networking companies may be technology companies, but because they are advertising-based, they also have jobs in sales, operations, business development, recruitment and payment management.

Downs reports increased demand across all business types with the most demand coming from mid-sized nonprofits, ad and design agencies working with clients involved with the Rehabilitation Act's Section 508--which requires that federal agencies' technology be accessible to those with disabilities--and financial organizations and banks improving online banking through extensions to mobile devices.

IT security and privacy and business analytics are high-growth areas as companies try to maximize the value of user content without compromising privacy, according to McKay. She also said media companies, telecommunications, hospitality and tourism are hot spots in the Washington, D.C., social media jobs market.

Some predict these jobs will be short-lived, claiming social media positions will simply morph into a skill set, and "social" will embed seamlessly into the digital fabric. Others see it as a long-term trend.

"It's here to stay," Miller said. "Technology skill sets will be more and more in demand. It will become a very competitive space with very little turn over."

Downs agreed, based on the demand he is seeing. He and McKay both said the job requirements and skill sets will morph and change. If social media is a call for IT generalists, then learning new skills and adapting to new technologies will become part of the job description.