

# Eight Underrated IT Skills in 2011



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### SUMMARY

As technology advances, the need for new skills in IT continues to emerge. Wireless management, social media networking, search engine optimization (SEO), and mobile application development represent just a few of the technology-related skills that were almost non-existent ten years ago. Moreover, IT is steadily moving from a solely support-based resource to a consumerized, profitability model where it offers services on-demand, much like a business.

While the need for new capabilities continues unabated, there are certain time-tested skills that are fundamental to solid IT practice. These often underrated abilities comprise both hard and soft skills and represent the evolving nature of IT, such as the expansion of job roles and the need for increased versatility. As IT's value proposition moves beyond the build-and-run model to an enhance-and-exploit role, a balanced grounding in basic hard and soft skills will ensure that IT professionals are well prepared.

### Soft Skills

The term *soft skill* applies to abilities that involve facilitating interactions between people and groups. These include skills such as active and passive communication, process-oriented solution approaches, leadership, and negotiation, to name a few. Soft skills highlight the fact that while technical skills are important, collaboration, communication, and leadership represent the kinds of capabilities that hiring managers are increasingly searching for.

#### 1) Communication

Communication comprises both written and oral modes. It involves creativity as well as critical thinking and it can include a range of abilities, from active listening to public speaking. The ability to effectively communicate technical concepts to business units, co-workers, and customers alike is a crucial skill for anyone in IT. For example, bypassing jargon to clearly explain technical procedures and concepts in precise, simple language can improve working relationships, reduce project time allocation, and increase productivity.

Successful communication also entails other people skills, such as assertiveness, diplomacy, leadership, and negotiation—all important skills in the high-pressure world of IT.

#### 2) Collaboration

Collaborative skills are important because they are valuable in both the business unit and within IT itself. For example, many large-scale projects can involve geographically dispersed development groups as well as diverse functional teams within an organization. Effective collaboration can make the difference between project success and failure. It requires an ability to manage relations between different groups, communicate technical requirements, and integrate solutions into successful outcomes. Moreover, there's a hard aspect to this skill as it relates to understanding, designing, and implementing collaborative tools and architectures.

Web 2.0, company portals, wikis, and applications, such as MS Sharepoint, represent ways in which organizations—and the business culture in general—rely on the ability to collaborate successfully.

### **3) Innovation/Vision**

While this ability can be considered somewhat abstract, it's seen as being in short supply in many IT departments, and it's a crucial skill for achieving success in IT. Innovation relates to creativity and represents an ability to take risks, to question pre-conceived ideas/concepts, to think "outside of the box," and to see the bigger picture. For example, skills such as problem-solving, forging and carrying new ideas through to completion, or building a business case for a new investment represent the more concrete aspects of this skill.

### **4) Project Management**

IT is the locus for constant technological development—Web and mobile initiatives, storage architecture, and networking that includes social media are just a few of the kinds of complex initiatives undertaken in IT departments. Possessing good project management skills means that you have the ability to juggle, prioritize, execute and follow through on tasks. As datacenters—and company infrastructures—become increasingly complex, professionals who have the capacity to organize, coordinate, and execute a multitude of intricate processes will attract great value. While it includes hard skills, project management also entails a number of key soft skills, such as collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and goal setting

## **Hard Skills**

The term, *hard skill*, refers to functional abilities acquired through an applied learning process, and consists of the technical capabilities and skill sets unique to an IT position.

### **5) Help Desk – Tech Support**

While it is often taken for granted, quality Help Desk support across the spectrum of technology issues means increased productivity and profitability for companies. CIOs are well aware of this fact. For that reason a competent, well-informed, and responsive tech support person is a valuable asset to any company. The ability to relate technical issues to non-technical colleagues is a skill that many advanced IT experts lack. While a tech support person's entire training may have focused solely on technical development, the ability to create quality interactions and find solutions is more complicated to learn. Often it is the bedrock on which successful SMBs and enterprises are built. In terms of a rise in tech support demand, analysts often cite the impending crossover to Windows 7 that will soon occur in companies across the spectrum. Quality tech support will be key in managing a flawless switchover.

### **6) Security**

Not every IT professional must be able to perform a penetration test against their network. However, they do need to have a solid grounding in security and what it takes to prevent such attacks. Malicious software, DDOS (Distributed Denial of Service), cyber attacks—these represent the reality of corporate computing today. While security specialists continue to be in high demand, even general IT team members need to have a level of proficiency in defending against threats.

Skills such as security assessment, network vulnerability, data loss prevention, Web content filtering, and threat analysis are just some of the capabilities in which all IT professionals should be knowledgeable and at least minimally competent.

### **7) Rapid Programming/Application Development**

While programming as a skill set, in general, has never been undervalued, it has gone through periods of lower and higher demand. RAD (Rapid Application Development), rapid programming, and agile programming represent specific skill sets that address today's current needs. The increase in Web and mobile applications as well as the expansion of Web 2.0, SaaS (Software as a Service), and cloud computing mean that the need for applications expertise will continue to grow. In terms of underrated Web 2.0 skills, expertise in Adobe Flex, JavaScript, Ajax, cloud computing, HTML5, Silverlight, and Touchscreen represent a few of the programming capabilities that may be undervalued now, but will rise in demand.

### **8) Storage – Datacenter**

The exponential growth of data—multimedia, mobile, and corporate content—means that knowledge of NAS (Networked Attached Storage), SANs (Storage Area Networks), ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library) best practices, and other storage configurations will go a long way.

Similar to the area of Security, while storage specialists remain in demand, a reliance on all information workers to have general storage proficiency, or abilities in particular storage areas, will be critical. Moreover, skills mentioned previously such as analysis, strategy, coordination, and innovation will be crucial for handling future storage and data center complexity. Combined with the skill to communicate and explain complex structures, knowledge in these two areas will make certain IT team members indispensable.