

# Select tech workers are in high demand

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Thousands of people in Silicon Valley are unemployed and looking for work. But for tech workers with the right skills, work is looking for them.

They have what it takes for the booming fields of social media, mobile software and cloud computing and juggle multiple job offers - some in the six figures - as they benefit from a tech job market that hasn't been this overheated since the dot-com bubble in the late 1990s. Internet giants like [Google](#) are competing with startups for increasingly rare talent: senior software engineers, data analysts, [Web designers](#) and [application developers](#).

"If you can write code at a high level, you can write your own ticket," said Tom Silver, a vice president for the technology job site Dice.com.

Just ask Kristal Pollack, a 29-year-old [software engineer](#) who programs what's known as the "back end" or innards of Internet-based services. Six companies were actively courting her when she started in April with Yammer, a social network for businesses.

"Engineers are in demand right now," she said. "And everybody that's writing a software platform needs somebody who is a back-end programmer and knows what they're doing."

Gur-Saran Varma, 49, a software engineer with a five-page resume, had offers from seven companies and in February signed on with SeaMicro, a Sunnyvale energy-efficient server company. He's still hearing from

potential employers. "Sometimes I turn off my phone, because I get lots of calls," he said.

Although many who lost jobs in the downturn are still on the sidelines, Pollack, Varma and others like them - some still in school - have the backgrounds that recruiters value.

Varma taught computer science for 10 years in India and came to the U.S. in 1995. Having worked for a smorgasbord of Web, networking and chip companies, he was drawn to SeaMicro by the prospect of "taking a totally new technology to greater heights." Pollack, who has worked at IBM Almaden, a location-based [advertising company](#) and a solar company, is skilled in popular programming languages and is writing software that will allow Yammer to support large numbers of customers and applications. "I think of it as solving hard problems. How to do that in a creative way," she said.

But there aren't enough like them to fill all the available jobs.

"It's been extremely difficult to hire," said Adam Pisoni, co-founder and chief technical officer of Yammer, which is based in San Francisco. "You've got all these established companies hiring people, and then you've got all these startups. We're all hiring the same people. Exactly the same people."

Thanks in part to that competition, salaries for [Silicon Valley](#) tech professionals averaged \$99,000 a year by late 2010, up nearly 3 percent from 2009 and 20 percent more than the national average, according to Dice.com. The tech job site said its latest survey of hiring managers and recruiters shows the growth in hiring "has reached a level where positions are staying open for months due to a shortage of qualified technology professionals."

Still, because the valley has a higher concentration of talent than almost anywhere else, companies from out of state, like Dell and Groupon, are opening offices here, hoping to make hires but adding to the competition.

Lakshmi Raj, co-founder and chief executive of the Calgary-based time sheet software company Replicon, moved herself and her managers to an office in San Mateo last year to take advantage of the local talent pool. Many job candidates she sees already have two or three offers. "We've got to move fast with them," she said.

"All the top developers that are looking are getting multiple offers," said Greg Mikulin of Clarity Technology Partners in Palo Alto. "Even candidates that aren't looking are getting offers every day, because they are listed on LinkedIn or other places."

With the current level of demand, skilled programmers can pretty much decide where they want to work.

Ardit Bajraktari, 30, a software engineer, targeted two companies before deciding on Yammer. He had a good job at a tech company in Cupertino, but wanted to work in San Francisco for a company that was more fun.

During his interview with Yammer, "I remember at some point asking, 'Do you guys go out once in a while and have fun?' 'Yes we do.' That was a big sell to me."

The company recently threw a party for employees at the House of Air in the Presidio, dividing up in teams for a trampoline dodge ball tournament, followed by dinner at a neighboring restaurant. Once a month, it has "Yammer Time," which starts out with presentations by various teams and executives, followed by a beer or two and hanging out

at neighborhood spots.

Several trends are driving the increased competition for a small pool of workers: a rapid growth in mobile computing; open-source software, which is free and makes it much easier to launch a startup; and the accumulation of mountains of data that companies are discovering can be turned into new products.

"There's more things that people can do, and so you need more people to do them," said Scott Nicholson, who signed on as a data analyst with LinkedIn in Mountain View in the fall after finishing a doctorate in economics at Stanford and working with a startup. Nicholson had several other offers, including some from academia, but wouldn't say how many.

It was the work that drew him to LinkedIn.

"LinkedIn has this incredible set of profile data on people's careers, how they move through their professional life. As a data scientist it's kind of this dream opportunity to be able to drive value to the product through insights that data scientists can provide."

Steve Cadigan, vice president of people operations at LinkedIn, said the conversation with job candidates is about more than money and stock.

"It's: Do you like the kind of work you're doing? Do you think you make a difference? Do you like the management? Do you like the culture? Do you think they have a green strategy you believe in? Do you feel like you've got a career progression? These things are really important."

Because senior engineers are increasingly scarce, LinkedIn is focusing on recent computer science graduates.

"If you want to build for the future you're going to have to hire college students aggressively right now. Because it's very expensive to hire only

senior talent, it's very hard and it's very time consuming. So, that's where we've shifted our focus. We had over 50 interns here last summer, many of whom have accepted full-time offers."

That creates a real temptation for computer science majors like Feross Aboukhadijeh, a 20-year-old Stanford student. Aboukhadijeh said he gets two or three personal emails from recruiters every day. He created a small sensation with a search app for YouTube called YouTube Instant. He wrote it in three hours using several open-source programming tools, posted it and watched it get 1 million hits in 10 days.

Then, he said, he got a Twitter message from Chad Hurley, who was CEO of YouTube. Aboukhadijeh posted the tweets on his blog.

"Loving YouTube Instant. ... Want a job?" Hurley tweeted.

"At first I didn't know who Chad was. I had to look up his name." Aboukhadijeh asked, "Is that a real job offer?" Hurley replied, "Are you ready to leave school?" Subsequently, Aboukhadijeh met with Hurley at YouTube's San Bruno headquarters.

"I was seriously thinking of dropping out. There were all these successful people who dropped out. Then I came back to reality."

He figures a good job will be waiting for him when he graduates next year. "The pace at which technology is changing the world is crazy. I'm very fortunate that this thing I'm interested in, computers, is also a thing that's in demand right now."

Other students make other choices, like Ivan Lee, on leave from a master's program in computer science to launch Loki Studios, a location-based gaming startup in Palo Alto.

Even though he's already running a company, Lee, 23, is getting regular offers from recruiters.

" 'Hey, Amazon would appreciate someone like you on the team, would you like to talk further?' Amazon, Google, Facebook, all the names," he said. "If you can show you are above average all way up to an amazing superstar, it's so easy to find a place to go these days."

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