

In demand

The IT industry needs more people. Here's how to join this growing field.

INTERVIEWED BY ADAM BURROUGHS

Since 2013, IT jobs in Northeast Ohio have grown from 11,000 to over 20,000 in 2015. Demand has continued to increase, and it's projected to follow its upward trend.

"IT is one sector in Northeast Ohio in which the demand for candidates outpaces the supply," says Monique Wilson, college-wide dean and executive director for the IT Center of Excellence at Cuyahoga Community College.

Smart Business spoke with Wilson about how people can get started in this growing career field.

What are the more critical skills IT employers are looking for in an employee?

The technical skills vary by position, but the most consistently sought-after skills IT employers want in an employee, regardless of the specific position, are:

- Communication.
- Organization.
- Writing.
- Problem solving.
- Planning.
- Project management.

Employers often say writing and customer service skills are hard to find in IT candidates. The ability to perform the requisite technical skills must exist, but no matter how good candidates' technical skills are, if they can't effectively communicate with colleagues, superiors or customers they are not as desirable as those who can.

For those who want a career in IT, where should they start?

There are many different pathways, but there are four that are most used.

Development and programming is one of the most in-demand pathways. Entry-level positions are software engineer, developer/

junior developer as well as any first tier quality assurance (QA) testers.

Networking is another career path. Entry-level positions include help desk technician, Network support specialist, and computer support specialist.

Internet and interactive media are also popular career paths. Entry-level positions include front-end web work in positions such as mobile app developers, web masters or administrators, e-commerce specialists and business publication specialists.

The fourth is the business integration or systems administration pathway. Entry-level positions are business software specialist and office software user/data entry clerk.

Traditionally, many people have assumed a four-year college degree was necessary to obtain an entry-level IT position. However, national attention is being focused on the shortage of 'middle-skills' jobs. These positions target someone with more than a high school diploma but less than a bachelor's degree. The newly launched federal TechHire initiative is designed to help governments, employers, training providers and other stakeholders build tech talent pipelines through accelerated training strategies to position individuals for those middle-skill positions. Candidates can also earn entry-level industry certifications or an associate's degree and be equipped to apply for these positions.



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What misconceptions are keeping some from pursuing a career in IT?

A popular misconception is that candidates must major in computer science, but that ignores networking, programming and industry certifications.

People also tend to think one has to be a geek to work in IT, so those who don't identify with that stereotype self-select out. The 'tech bro' stereotype often dissuades women and minorities from identifying with the profession. But if a person has analytic abilities and communication skills, they're likely a good fit.

People also wrongly think working in IT means working in isolation. But those who can communicate well bring immense value to IT companies and can have a great career.

How can those people currently working in IT keep up with new IT technologies?

Staying abreast of industry trends can be done through industry journals and media entities dedicated to tech news. Follow the social media accounts of IT professionals and thought leaders in areas of interest. Keeping up with blogs is also a good way to learn about the latest trends.

IT is affecting so many aspects of everyday life and that requires many talented people to keep the candidate pipeline full. Fortunately there are lots of ways to get started in this fulfilling career. ●