

CareerLine Q & A

by Jack Wilson



ACM's career consultant, Jack Wilson, answers questions from students about their forthcoming careers in computing and information technology.

Q: I know there are salary surveys for regular employees in the computer field, but I'm interested in going to work for a consulting company. How can I find out about pay for IT consultants?

A: In addition to publishing an annual salary survey for regular IT jobs, Computerworld also publishes one for consultants, most recently in the April 13, 1998 issue. Job titles range from Research Associate to Senior Partner, and salaries within each job title vary by level of experience: low, mid, or high. For a graduating student, your target would probably be the Entry-level Consultant, which averaged \$30,000 (low level) to \$59,000 (high level) in total compensation.

In a previous issue, Computerworld inserted a Directory of Consulting Employers, which you may find helpful in targeting certain consultancies (www.computerworld.com).

Q: I'm debating whether to join a consulting company or do independent contracting on my own. What are the trade-offs I should consider?

A: There are many differences, both legal and professional, between working for a consulting firm and working for yourself. In the former case you are salaried and in the latter your income is derived directly from your clients. There is also a significant difference in responsibility, as you are solely accountable for meeting the terms of contracts as an independent.

One of the major considerations should be whether you are prepared to do your own self-marketing, devoting both time and energy to selling your own services. As an independent, you can easily spend half of your time developing business and only half doing income-producing work. Until you develop a client base, your marketing may need to be a continual effort, interleaved with your billable activities.

Q: I recently heard about something called a techno-MBA. In looking at graduate programs, should I consider this versus an MS?

A: A techno-MBA is an advanced business degree with a concentration in Information Technology. It is increasingly popular with students who want to combine a technical undergraduate program with a business degree and who have a career objective on the management side of technology. The MS in Computer Science is generally the preferred choice for those individuals wishing to direct their careers to the technical side. In either case, I believe one should look carefully at the curriculum before making a decision.

Q: I saw an ad recently that required resumes to be sent in a "scannable" form. How do I need to change mine?

A: Electronic scanning of resumes is becoming more prevalent as companies and agencies are soliciting for an increasing number of jobs. To be "scannable" your resume should be in plain text format on white paper with a standard 12-point type font. Do not use any boldface, italics, underscoring, graphics, or columns. This should not be the only version of your resume. You should also maintain a human-friendly version with all of the appropriate highlighting techniques and the same content.

Q: How do I know which version of my resume, human or scannable, to send?

A: Normally, if you are responding to an ad, it will say whether a scannable version is wanted. If in doubt, you can send both, mentioning so in your cover letter. If you are sending an unsolicited resume to a recruiter or a target company, I would suggest the human version.