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AI is shaking up IT work, careers, and businesses - and here's how to prepare

AI is here - and it's not all bad news for IT professionals.



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ZDNET's key takeaways

- AI is changing the IT industry.
 - In-demand skills and hiring are also changing.
 - You can do these things to be prepared.
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While IT professionals have remained constant through every technological wave of change, helping people adopt new technology, it doesn't make the industry immune to change itself -- the AI revolution is no exception.

The emergence of generative AI has had a profound impact on how IT professionals develop their skills to stay in demand, allocate their budgets, and adopt the latest technologies. At SpiceWorld, Spiceworks' annual developer IT conference, a session titled "What Generative AI Means for the Future of IT" delved deep into all these topics. (Spiceworks is owned by ZDNET's parent company, Ziff Davis.)

I had the opportunity to sit on a panel with fellow experts in the space, and I gathered some top insights into what you can do to prepare yourself as an IT professional.

Upskill, upskill, upskill

While the most popular rhetoric surrounding AI and job security suggests that jobs will continue to diminish -- [a new Gartner report](#) predicting AI will cause "jobs chaos," -- the IT industry is experiencing a slightly different reality.

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that IT jobs are projected to grow three times faster than all jobs, at a rate of 9% versus 3% for all other jobs from 2024 to 2034. This growth can be attributed to the new security concerns that AI implementation raises for organizations seeking to leverage the technology, according to Peter Tsai, head of technology insights at Spiceworks.

"AI opened a whole new can of worms for security," said Tsai. "Overall, the demand for IT jobs is going to increase at three times the rate of all jobs."

This generally presents a positive outlook for the IT industry, but it's also fueling a shift in how companies conduct hiring and what they are looking for. Spiceworks previewed its 2026 State of IT report, a survey that gathers insights from over 800 IT professionals at small and medium-sized companies on current trends, and found that the skills most in demand are reflecting the growth of AI.

In particular, the report found that 63% of respondents believed AI prompting skills are important, which is a 53% increase from last year. Yet, the respondents with confidence in their AI skills were less than half, with 49% reporting confidence compared to 42% last year.

"If you are in IT, perhaps upleveling your skills, learning about AI is a very smart thing to do now. It can make you very productive, and it can help you do more or less," said Tsai.

Taking it upon yourself to do this work is especially important because, as I cited during the panel, companies are investing a lot of money into AI solutions, but training is increasingly left behind or not prioritized.

For example, a Wharton School study is often cited when discussing the space, and investment in training has softened, as well as confidence in training as the primary path to fluency. Yet, the same study found that a lack of training resources was one of the top 10 barriers to adopting AI.

Growing investments: How to get it right

Organizations across all industries are investing substantial amounts of money in AI, including those in the IT sector. The 2026 Spiceworks State of IT found that AI initiatives were listed among the top investments, with AI Software (on-premises and cloud-based) accounting for 2.7% (median) of IT Computing Infrastructure spending.

While this number may seem low, Jim Rapozza, VP and principal analyst at Aberdeen Strategy & Research, the firm powering the State of IT report, noted that we can quadruple or quintuple that number when accounting for all other

infrastructure improvements or investments made to support it, showcasing the magnitude of these investments.

"When it comes to AI, whether it is bringing in completely and maybe doing a small language model to AI, or doing inferencing, or you can run many of the LLMs internally," said Rapozza. "Businesses are building up your construction to support those kinds of things."

Does this level of investment mean companies are seeing an immediate ROI? Not exactly, but there is progress being made in that direction. As Rodrigo Gazzaneo, senior GTM Specialist, generative AI, Amazon Web Services (AWS), noted, companies are already seeing positive outcomes.

Gazzaneo said one of his customers is in the manufacturing business and started testing AI tools, using them to study existing ERPs and supply chain services that routinely threw exceptions that required human attention. Without using AI or data scientists, the team was able to regain time.

This was an example of a strategy he recommended: crawl, walk, run. As Gazzaneo explained, the process is simple. Crawling represents the initial point at which the organization must set out smaller, attainable goals that can be achieved within a short time. This success can then feed into later developments.

Then, the team can move into the middle phase known as "walk," which is characterized by experimentation. During this phase, the goal is to build upon previous accomplishments to create something perhaps better, faster, or more ambitious. Then, the company can proceed to the final phase, which involves taking a leap.

"There's a moment before going from walking to running, which is the key. It's the leap of faith. But it's not based on faith. It's based on the judgment of the business impact," said Gazzaneo.

Lastly, the run phase refers to the final stage, in which the organization analyzes the business impact of scaling or accelerating developments. It is here that companies often see the most notable impacts on ROI, with outcomes such as improved

customer satisfaction or achieving financial wins.

"Run is a generative AI project that's producing a lot of value and adding a lot of value to the company," said Gazzaneo.

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