

How to Keep Up With Big Tech's Hiring Spree



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Even as hiring freezes and furloughs are happening at many businesses, big tech is growing. Google, Apple and Facebook, in particular, are scooping up talent in droves.

As the executive director of a nonprofit that offers free training in computer programming, I'm always looking for opportunities to place students in apprenticeships and to help them land their first jobs in technology. I keep an ear to the ground when it comes to the hiring landscape. And I predict that the tech giants' hiring sprees could result in big problems for almost everyone else.

Facebook alone is seeking to hire 10,000 new workers.

Considering that about 70,000 computer science graduates enter the workforce each year, that's a substantial chunk of available tech talent. Smaller companies and those in smaller cities might not have felt threatened by the big dogs before, but the job market is about to tighten for everyone.

As the world moved to remote work in response to the pandemic, tech giants such as Facebook and Twitter followed suit, allowing them to recruit more broadly across the country. Smaller cities are viable targets for having their talent scooped up by the big players.

Overall, the impact of this global crisis has left the tech industry relatively unscathed. CompTIA's analysis of May employment data released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics revealed that less than 1 percent of the country's 12.1 million tech workers lost their jobs. This is because, as more companies are moving to work-from-home setups, the country is more reliant on technology and the internet than ever before. Companies need IT workers to facilitate the shift.

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What's more, companies in every industry, such as small retailers and local restaurants, have shifted their businesses entirely online for the first time due to stay-at-home orders. The current moment and post-pandemic times make for even greater reliance on digital resources. The demand for tech talent will keep growing, but the talent gap will persist. And as big tech companies hire in mass surges, it's only going to expand. Smaller companies will need to seek out new hiring strategies if they hope to stay competitive.

How smaller companies need to re-think their hiring strategies

The good news for smaller companies that need to fill tech roles is that, while only 70,000 computer science grads enter the market each year, there are more ways than ever for people to learn tech skills outside the college or university tracks. With the last few months causing disruptions in the training and education industries, more people than ever are learning new skills online.

As you navigate the staffing challenges the coming months and years will present, keep these three strategies in mind for ensuring you have the technical capabilities you'll need to compete:

1. Identify opportunities to upskill existing employees

If you're realizing you need more tech skills to handle the new digital demands of your industry, look first at your existing workforce. Instead of spending time and money on hiring, look for ways to upskill employees interested in a more technical career path and have demonstrated an aptitude for learning. For example, someone in an administrative role who has quickly adapted to remote work might be a good candidate for a scrum master or project management role. If you don't have the ability to train employees in-house, consider a partnership.

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Guardian Life Insurance Company recognized the need to improve its workforce's technical proficiency to effectively use the customer health data generated by new technologies such as Fitbit monitors and in-home sensors. It partnered with General Assembly to equip actuaries with new digital skills through

hands-on workshops and bootcamps. By showing you're invested in your employees' professional development, you'll also be able to create the type of culture that is essential for attracting and keeping top talent.

2. Diversify your recruitment efforts

Hiring, in general, is starting to pick up again. When the pandemic finally subsides and companies begin hiring in full force, most will be looking for talent in the same places. Instead of sourcing recent college grads, look for graduates from coding boot camps and other alternative skilling programs, or target self-taught learners. This crisis has demonstrated that online learning isn't just possible; it's a critical part of today's young people's development.

The talent acquisition team at IBM has made a point to target so-called "new collar" workers to bolster its 360,000-employee workforce. The company has developed a robust learning program for people both inside and outside of the company interested in learning new technical skills. Participants get digital badges as they complete various education stages, and the program allows prospective hires to demonstrate competence and initiative – two traits that every company wants in its employees.

By looking beyond traditional educational institutions, you can tap into a pool of people who have valuable life and work experience, as well as demonstrated ability to learn new skills.

3. Institute apprenticeship models

Apprenticeships allow less experienced entry-level technologists to work alongside your team in a way that minimizes risk and maximizes proficiency development. Moreover, you can mold an apprentice to fit highly specific roles within your company.

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Targeted programs, such as my nonprofit's apprenticeship track, can work in partnership with businesses to help onboard students with the potential for tech careers for specific roles. Employees receive specific on-the-job training as apprentices, so you know they have the knowledge and skills necessary to fulfill your tech needs. While the risk associated with hiring entry-level employees is relatively low compared to more senior positions, apprenticeships allow you to ensure that candidates are as close to a perfect fit for your company as they can be on their first day.

For top tech companies, recruitment capabilities are a serious competitive advantage. If you're serious about competing for talent in the post-crisis world, you need to capitalize on the alternative recruiting channels available to everyone, but still mostly underutilized. In doing so, you can build a workforce that isn't just equipped to take on today's challenges but is also ready to innovate through whatever challenges tomorrow might bring.

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