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BEST IT CAREER PATH FOR HIGH EARNINGS

There are a variety of job opportunities in the IT field, from infrastructure and operations to support and project management. While work in each of these categories has offered above-average salaries over the past few years, one area currently provides the best IT career path in terms of compensation: work as a developer.

This trend should continue for the next several years as:

- Salaries in the field are expected to rise annually.
- The growing number of jobs available in this space makes it easier for developers to keep a position or to find a new one.
- The advent of new tools and technologies should provide new professional roles as well as maintain developers' interest in the field.

Agile's technology staffing firm assists professionals with securing IT jobs in Atlanta and in the surrounding area. Below is a breakdown of the typical title progression and salary ranges our company has seen for developers as well as for candidates in other areas of IT work.

The Development Career Track

While many factors affect whether one profession or another offers the "best" IT career path, development is a great option if salary is a defining factor for you. According to Agile's branch director Matthew Marini, "Young developers, by time they're 30, could be making as much as \$140,000." He adds that development jobs are also typically paired with nice perks such as health benefits, paid time off, and work from home flexibility.

Marini breaks down compensation at the following levels:

- The median starting salary for a developer with no experience is approximately \$55,000.
- Talented developers can go from an entry-level position to a mid-level role in only a year or two and can see a \$20,000-\$40,000 bump.
- After another two years, candidates will start to qualify for senior-level positions with six-figure potential, even having only 5-7 years of total professional experience.

Skills in Demand

Right now, developers with expertise in JavaScript are the most attractive to employers, particularly those who can build in Angular or React. Agile's recruiters have found that a mid-level candidate that is proficient within either of these frameworks can expect a salary between \$100,000 and \$130,000; senior-level candidates with this knowledge can make \$130,000 to \$150,000, says Marini.

Developers with experience in other JavaScript libraries and frameworks have also been well paid in recent years. "If you are a JavaScript developer focused on the back end, you may make \$50,000 to \$75,000 as a junior. After three-to-five years, these employees can bring in \$80,000 to \$110,000, and after 7 years, between \$120,000 and \$140,000."

What To Expect Along The Way

Once you decide that being a developer is the best IT career path for you, you may find it useful to create a [personal marketing plan](#), which will help define your individual steps along the way. Agile's IT recruiters typically see two basic educational paths for developers.

1. Attending college and graduating with a degree in computer science or in another technical area.
2. Participating in a coding camp or completing a certificate program.

Regardless of which of these two options you pursue, most companies, big or small, will hire you as a "junior developer," meaning you are coming to the job market with good core fundamentals. The company for which you work will generally teach you about its tech stack. "Usually, you'll be in this role for only for one-to-two years," explains Marini. "However, for those without a college degree, it could be longer."

Once you establish yourself as a knowledgeable developer, you can seek promotion to senior software engineer or principal engineer. Agile's recruiters say this typically occurs within 5-7 years. From these positions, you have another choice to make in creating the best IT career path for yourself.

OPTION 1: TECHNOLOGY FOCUS

You can continue to dedicate yourself to technical work and eventually become a lead architect. In this role, professionals generally do design work that stays close to the technology.

From there, Marini says, this might lead to being a senior lead architect for a single product or overseeing multiple solutions. "The highest rung on this ladder is chief architect. In this role, you would oversee all technical direction for a company or its product lines."

OPTION 2: MANAGEMENT FOCUS

You may choose to go into a managerial role. In this case, you would move from principal engineer to lead developer or principal developer.

With these positions, you may spend more time leading others and mentoring than with hands-on development work. The next position you take may be as a director of technology or director of development, then vice president of technology or development, and, ultimately, a chief technology officer (CTO).

"People who choose this path are more interested in being involved in leadership than in the day-to-day of the technology," says Marini. If you are considering this path, a [management resume](#) that outlines your foundational knowledge in development and highlights your leadership skills will be important in the interviewing process.

Alternative IT Career Paths for High Earnings

For job seekers who prefer development operations, Marini suggests looking into opportunities in infrastructure, DevOps, and cloud computing. These areas offer high earning potential, challenging projects, and the chance to work in IT "but not sit behind a computer all day, every day."

INFRASTRUCTURE

A job in infrastructure presents one of the best IT career paths on the non-development side. These positions include roles in continuous integration, continuous deployment, and automation. Companies are currently investing in each of these areas.

Candidates for infrastructure positions come from many different educational backgrounds. Job seekers frequently have experience maintaining servers or other operational technology for companies. In a typical career progression:

- You will start as a junior systems administrator, junior database administrator, or junior network administrator.
- Once you have proven yourself, you may move on to a more senior position in one of these areas, eventually reaching
- the manager level.

A job in infrastructure often deals with real-time issues, which provides a degree of excitement but also may have less predictable hours than a standard role in development. Still, this might be the best IT career path for you based on your skill set and what you enjoy doing professionally.

DevOps

DevOps brings together the full complement of development and operations activities of a company. This role is generally in charge of releasing new updates to software and coordinating efforts for new deployments.

In general, you can expect to start out as a junior DevOps engineer. After mastering the tasks at this level, you may be promoted to a senior role and eventually to running the DevOps practice.

CLOUD COMPUTING

Many companies are now using cloud-hosted solutions, which has led to the creation of high-paying jobs to help in their management. "These opportunities appear strong for next few years," says Marini.

Professionals working in cloud management often enter the field with a degree in computer science, engineering, or management information systems. Agile's recruiters recommend that candidates look for starting positions as a junior systems administrator or network engineer. Then, they can move to a job as a cloud or platform engineer, followed by a senior engineer role.

The director of infrastructure services — or director of cloud operations — is the top level in this area. Cloud computing opportunities are highly compensated at this stage as well as along the full career path, and they offer fast advancement to higher earnings.

"As with infrastructure jobs, there are not as many ranks in these positions as there are with development opportunities," explains Marini. However, cloud management can be the best IT career path for you if you have strong technical skills, a natural curiosity about technology, and the ability to apply your IT knowledge to the business world.

Learn more about opportunities for mid-level and executive candidates by [reaching out to Agile's team of IT recruiters](#).

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IT EXECUTIVE SEARCH EXPERTS ON HIRING C-LEVEL TALENT

Filling technology roles has grown more challenging as the gap has increased between the number of open positions and the number of qualified candidates. The problem is even more severe with C-suite positions because of the additional experience employers require.

Agile, an [Atlanta technology staffing firm](#), recommends that businesses follow three basic guidelines when conducting an IT executive search. Whether your company is looking for a chief information officer, vice president of IT, or vice president of architecture, following these guidelines can improve your company's interview process and create more meaningful interactions with candidates.

Make It Personal

Sought-after technical leaders want to work for companies that take a special interest in their recruitment and that are enthusiastic about hiring them. This outlook is easy to lose during the prodding, testing, and negotiation that take place in candidate interviews.

Kim Angle, a lead IT recruiter with Agile, recommends that employers meet a candidate for lunch or coffee before beginning the process of formal interviewing. "This can help establish an individual connection and give you time to get to know the applicant," she says, and it is a great first step towards creating a relationship-driven process.

In most cases, Angle says, IT executive search candidates want to know as much as possible about the company. Whether this means introducing candidates to potential team members or touring the offices and facilities, try to give applicants the chance to ask questions and emphasize the benefits of working at your organization.

As an [IT staffing firm](#) with experience on both the employer and candidate recruitment sides, Agile strongly promotes this two-way interview process because:

- Preparing for the questions a candidate may ask can help your business better define the responsibilities and perks of the position.
- Showing transparency in your operations and respect for the questions that top candidates have can make a job more attractive to them.
- Taking these steps creates a more relaxed environment for the formal interview process, allowing both companies and candidates to be candid about what they offer and what they seek.

Set Expectations Up Front About the Hiring Process

Candidates typically do not like surprises during job applications and interviews. They may sour on the prospect of a position if they are required to take part in one evaluation after another without any forewarning.

When conducting an IT executive search, you should outline the process from the start, especially if your company's practice is to have multiple steps or request anything beyond a traditional interview, Angle says. "If you require a psychological assessment, business plan presentation, or other steps toward the end of your hiring process, and if you don't communicate these steps to candidates early on, it can derail the process."

SKILLS TESTING IN INTERVIEWS

Skills testing is not common in an IT executive search because professionals at this level are fairly removed from day-to-day development work. Requiring a skills test, especially if your company has not mentioned it at the outset, can be a turn-off to C-level applicants. Instead of verifying a certain skill set, you might instead investigate a candidate's depth of knowledge about your industry and in its general area of technology.

IN-DEPTH EVALUATIONS

Some organizations conduct comprehensive candidate evaluations using methodologies such as CIDS (chronological in-depth structured interview). If this is part of your company's process, candidates will need time to prepare for the day-long commitment and to gear up for the interview. Going through a CIDS evaluation, which is designed to cover 50 competencies in six categories, can be an exhausting experience for even the most polished and knowledgeable executive.

Know What Makes a Compensation Package Attractive

Whether you are managing a position internally or with the help of an [IT staffing company](#) like Agile, decide on the structure and levels of compensation you plan to offer before beginning the search. Employers should be prepared to outline salary packages clearly, especially when recruiting C-level talent.

"Most IT executive search candidates expect some sort of equity stake in the company as part of the job offer," says Angle. "Top applicants will have several opportunities that they are comparing, so try to make the best offer you can." Candidates who are already in a C-level position elsewhere likely have received equity for their current role and will want to find a similar benefit with your company.

Employers can provide the equity piece via one or a combination of the following:

- Stock grants.
- Stock options.
- Profit sharing.

Angle recommends that employers clearly outline the equity stake they are offering as part of the IT executive search, along with how and when the candidate will receive this benefit. Some businesses require an employee to be with the company for a certain amount of time before they can realize the equity stake. A time contingency paired with an equity benefit can protect your company from paying out an employee who leaves after a brief stint.

You may also want to consider how the base salary and equity piece will work together. High-quality candidates are usually confident in their skills and leadership abilities, and they know what they are worth in the open job market. [Agile's IT recruiters](#) suggest creating an incentive-based package to attract candidates that salary compensation alone might not. The strategy is particularly useful for small companies, which can offer a smaller base salary with an exciting bonus attached to job performance. Combined with the other recommendations above, this approach can give employers the best chance possible to find and hire the right C-level talent.

If your company is planning to conduct an IT executive search, [contact Agile](#) to learn more about its process for recruiting corporate leaders.

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SOFTWARE ENGINEER RECRUITERS SHARE THEIR BEST ADVICE FOR EMPLOYERS

Your company can expect to face increasing challenges in recruiting and retaining software engineers as a result of an extremely competitive landscape, rapid technological advancement, and a changing employment culture. These professionals are in high demand because there are more specialized jobs available than individuals with the expertise to fill them. With these realities, prospective employees have advantages over companies looking to hire top talent.

Software engineer recruiters help companies find appropriate candidates for these roles every day. Agile, an Atlanta IT staffing company, shares its advice for employers to help in not only searching for qualified people but also in creating a culture that will lead to long-term employee satisfaction.

1. Jobs Are Expanding, Talent Is Contracting, Plan Accordingly.

Software engineers have one of the lowest unemployment rates of any profession in the United States, making it one of the most competitive job markets right now. The saturation of jobs and limited number of qualified candidates makes it difficult for employers to find the ideal person, and this may only become more challenging.

According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, these jobs are expected to grow an average of 15 to 25 percent per year through 2026 while the U.S. population will only increase at a rate of 0.8%. According to Agile's software engineer recruiters, this uneven growth means that the job market may get more competitive in the coming years.

Justin Ellis, an IT recruiter with the staffing firm, says, "Companies need to follow trends in the marketplace if they want to be successful filling their positions." In particular, he advises employers to stay current in the compensation packages that they are being offered. To the extent possible, they should update their own approach to recruitment to compete with other job opportunities.

2. Broaden the Search Criteria by Focusing on Fundamental Skills

Employers often define applicant criteria as narrowly as possible. While this approach will limit the candidate pool to those who are an exact fit for a position, it can have unintended consequences. "The more specific you are in a search," says Ellis, "the harder your search will be, and the price tag for the job you are trying to fill will be higher." Ideal candidates can frequently command a bigger salary, and that compensation may be more than a small or mid-sized company can afford.

Instead, Agile's software engineer recruiters recommend that employers widen their scope when reviewing résumés. Companies are more likely to find a quality hire if they are willing to speak with candidates who have broader experience. There are many developers with deep software engineering knowledge who can apply this expertise to learning a new industry or coding language. IT staffing companies frequently use this strategy to identify overlooked candidates.

3. From Interview to Offer, Expect a Five-Day Window

The competitive nature of the job market means that developers often have their pick of positions. Agile's software engineer recruiters have found that quality developers come on and off the market within an average of five days, and many interview for several opportunities simultaneously.

Ellis recommends that employers act quickly on the candidates that they want to hire. Instead of having a lengthy interview process, condense vetting to a single phone interview and in-person interview. While this compresses your timeline, it still allows you to get to know a potential employee's strengths, weaknesses, and personality. You can also use this timeframe to ask for work samples that will give you a clearer illustration of an individual's skill level.

4. Develop a Recruiting Mentality

Typically, employers use a thought process of "What can the candidate do for me?" Software engineer recruiters suggest that companies shift away from this approach and instead use a two-way hiring process. This means evaluating candidates while at the same time selling the opportunity and recognizing the value that a candidate could bring to the position.

Ellis says, "I tell my clients to view the interviews they conduct as a chance to reflect their company culture." For example, employers can explain to candidates what makes their organization stand out, including these details in the job posting as well. Sharing what makes an opportunity special can help an employer win over a candidate even if another job offers more in the way of traditional compensation.

5. Invest in Technology and Training

According to Agile's IT recruiters, developers highly value the chance to learn and work on new projects and technologies. Focusing on these areas can help a company recruit and retain top talent even amid competition from other businesses.

Some businesses code in older languages that are not essential to modern development projects. As a result, that company's software engineers may grow concerned that their skills are becoming obsolete in the open market. Other companies divide staff into those that maintain older technology and those that work on new products. Working solely on legacy systems can limit a developer's ability to explore new areas of coding.

Neither of these outcomes is attractive to top-tier developers. Both are reasons that Agile's software engineer recruiters see developers leaving their positions after only a couple of years on.

Fortunately, they suggest, employers can address both of these concerns even if they do not have the resources of a large business. Companies can offer legacy system developers opportunities to work on new products, at least in a limited capacity. Businesses can also adopt new, open, and free systems to replace older technical stacks. There may be a time investment to implement new coding languages, but the decision can go a long way towards retaining talent.

Access to new projects and technology is only part of the equation. Software engineers also may require ongoing training to keep their skills fresh. Consider paying for developers to attend professional conferences in the area. If your company cannot afford this option, consider sponsoring in-office training with a local expert.

6. Compensation and Flexibility Both Matter to Quality Developers

In Agile's local market, the Atlanta region, it is highly unlikely that a junior developer will accept the same starting salary offered to candidates 10 years ago. Entry-level candidates with a computer science (or related) degree typically earn \$65,000-\$90,000 right out of school.

Agile's software engineer recruiters suggest offering a salary and total compensation package that is at or above 90 percent of the market average. Just as importantly, employers should consider flexible work days and times.

In the software development world, some jobs have become 100 percent remote, and two days per week out of office is quickly becoming the norm. On the days that employees come to the office, consider having flexible hours to eliminate traffic concerns. Companies frequently opt for core in-office hours of 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. so that colleagues can collaborate in person. During the rest of the time, developers are trusted to accomplish their assigned tasks following a daily schedule that meets their needs.

Agile's Ellis advises hiring managers to discuss salary ranges and scheduling options early in the process. "Being clear that you are open to meeting a candidate's needs can make all of the difference," he says. By taking these steps, employers will be better positioned to retain and grow talent.

If your company is looking for top candidates in the competitive market for developers, contact Agile's team of software engineer recruiters to discuss hiring solutions.



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