

Set yourself up for a successful career in IT

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We live in the digital age, and many forward-thinking school leavers and students are considering a career in IT. After all, in an era of cloud computing, burgeoning artificial intelligence and smart interconnected everything, the IT sphere supports every aspect of contemporary life.



Source: pixabay.com

We can't make do without computers. In fact, in Career Junction's October 2018 analysis of the South African job market, software development was listed as the country's most in-demand skill, and IT ranked as the nation's most active recruitment sector.

This said, despite a multitude of opportunities, the realm of IT (and ICT) is always evolving, and with ever-greater speed. New digital technologies, new programming languages and new positions are continually emerging. So how do you sidestep the risk of outdated knowledge, and set yourself up for a long and fruitful career? Our industry experience at EOH has shown us that the following key principles will help aspiring IT professionals succeed.

Prioritise ongoing learning

The good news with IT is that the barrier to entry is not as great as some other professions. A formal degree isn't a prerequisite to enter the field, which means many young South Africans without formal digital skills or education shouldn't feel discouraged. If you can navigate an operating system, then you have a credible starting point for your career in IT.

More important than anything else is a person's internal drive to continually learn new things amid the industry's every-

changing landscape. IT employers look for passion, enthusiasm, good interpersonal communication skills and the fundamental enjoyment of all things technical.

Pursue these capabilities and qualifications

With IT, you can pick up knowledge and certifications while working. A great deal can be achieved through online training, whether via instructor-led classes or self-paced learning. YouTube videos are also exceptionally useful for self-teaching at any level.

In terms of formal qualifications, A+ and N+ certification is a good place to start and will help you decide on your industry area of interest. As for programming languages, given the pace at which they change, it's advisable to study a combination of established and newer options. Currently, JavaScript, Python and Swift are singled out for their usefulness in profitable app development.

A formal degree isn't necessarily essential, but it will affect your ability to reach more senior positions. A BSc Analytics or BSc Security are excellent options, along with a fundamentals-centric BCom in Informatics.

Consider these specific industry roles

IT is a broad industry but there are some sectors aspiring IT professionals should focus on to give themselves a future advantage, such as mobile app development. Security will also remain in the spotlight as cyber threats become increasingly sophisticated. Out-of-the-box thinkers will be essential in this arena to thwart cybercriminals, and we already see increased demand for digital security professionals with titles such as Head of Security and Chief Information Security Officer (CISO).

The South African IT industry also currently lacks trained, experienced data analysts, data scientists and AI programmers. These positions will need to be filled if next-generation data collection and interpretation is to truly add value to businesses. Likewise, more public cloud architects familiar with the likes of Microsoft Azure and AWS are necessary to support the adoption of Software as a Service (SaaS) and Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS).

Make yourself an AI master

While AI as the general population envisions it has a long way to go, there's no question that the technology will play a large role in humanity's future. Therefore, becoming skilful in this domain – which the industry is starting to term Human Intelligence Augmentation – will keep you employable for a long time to come.

AI and its companion process, Machine Learning, will likely see many business processes automated in future, including advanced functions such as battling security breaches and optimising system health. There may be staff reductions in some spheres but the need for IT professionals won't decline. This is because just as big data and AI have combined to create the need for data scientists, other evolving and merging technologies will demand new IT roles.

Once again, IT professionals who commit to consistently updating their knowledge have a huge advantage in achieving futureproof careers that are never stagnant. By consistently learning, especially outside of your area of expertise, you can more easily morph with the times, orientate your skills around new industry developments, and set yourself up as an indispensable expert as the next wave of IT solutions appears on the horizon.

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