

LAN Administrator



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What made you choose the computer field?

Being previously employed for over 23 years as a medical laboratory technologist, my institution downsized and I subsequently lost my job. After six months of actively seeking employment in the same area and finding nothing available, I realized that I needed to retrain in an area that would empower me with more marketable skills. Computer related fields appeared to hold a great deal of potential in the job arena, so with the encouragement of close friends employed in the industry, I returned to college to pursue a degree in Informational Technology. I guess you could say the main impetus for my mid-life career change was due to both the economic and political atmosphere in the 1990's coupled with the rapid expansion of information technologies, or in two words, job security.

Do you have any regrets about choosing the computer field?

I have no regrets, but I do consider myself extremely fortunate. Due to my personal contacts, tenacity and willingness to work for significantly less money than more experienced applicants, I was able to secure a position as a network administrator. This is not considered an entry level position, however my manager decided to hire me based on my intelligence, tenacity, professionalism, and the fact that his first choice refused the position based on the offered salary. Network administration is a very mentally stimulating field. Technology is advancing at a rapid rate and you have to keep pace if you want to stay in the game. Pursuing a career in information technology is similar to pursuing an education; it is not a destination, but an ever changing journey. I enjoy the challenge; it keeps me from becoming stagnant and bored.

Would you recommend this field to others, if so why?

It would depend on the individual and their respective aptitudes. If they are a creative and artistic type, I would definitely not recommend this field. I would point them in the direction of the end-user graphics programs, desktop publishing, web design, CAD, or 3-D design and animation. If they have a logical, analytical mind and an aptitude for problem solving, then computer networking, hardware support, and programming are all viable options. If an individual's desire is for less hands-on, more management oriented, I would suggest they investigate the field of

systems analyst. Above all, whatever area may seem appropriate, working with computers is guaranteed to be extremely frustrating at times, so one must possess patience. This coupled with intelligence, tenacity, and a strong desire to succeed will go a long way toward establishing a successful career in any computer related field.

What is the money like?

Good question! I keep hearing radio ads claiming that MCSEs (Microsoft Certified Systems Engineers) maintain a mean salary range of approximately \$65,000 per year. I can only tell you that I make significantly less; of course, I do work for local government. I am aware that experienced administrators in major metropolitan areas do make up to \$70,000 or \$80,000. Salary is dependent on geographic location, level or expertise, and the type of industry; private industry and consulting firms usually pay better than government jobs. Entry-level jobs can start anywhere from the mid 20's to high 30's and from there it's all up to the individual.

Would you say your job is more or less stressful than other jobs and why?

I can only relate to my own personal experience. In comparison to working in a hospital laboratory, I can definitely say that, while my current job does indeed maintain a level of stress, it is significantly lower. Putting it into perspective, in the hospital, a person's life very often depended upon the speed and accuracy with which you could deliver vital information to the attending physician; in my current position, it's only local government. Nobody is going to die if the server went down. It's a nine to five organization. That is not to infer that all jobs in the computer field have lower stress levels. In business, when the server is down it costs the company money. If you are maintaining the equipment for a 911 center, it is imperative that your servers are operational 24/7/365. In this scenario lives do depend on the system being up. Stress is not necessarily related directly to the computer field, but rather to the organization or employer.

Is there room to advance and grow in the computer field?

Yes, however this often requires leaving your current place of employment. As you move from entry-level experience, you will probably need to move to another company to obtain a higher level position and salary. With each job you should develop new skills in different areas. The more skills you know, the farther you can go. You need to match your skills to those requested by prospective employers, keeping in mind that employers often ask for more than they will actually hire for. As an example, you may start with Microsoft training at your first position, you may then move to a company where you can also gain Novell experience and Cisco router experience, you may then move to a company where you can obtain Unix experience. Your growth and advancement will depend on your willingness to move from job to job and your desire and ability to develop and expand your skill level.

What types of entry-level positions are available to recent graduates with an Associate's degree in Information Technology?

I'm not sure that I can accurately answer that question. The entry-level position is probably the most difficult to obtain. I would consider any type of desktop support as entry level, or a position with a firm that handles cabling and wiring for new networks. There does not appear to be a shortage of entry-level candidates and there are only a finite number of these jobs available. Don't limit yourself to applying for only level positions. If you are interested in a position, go for it. The employer may see some qualities in you that he desires in an employee that may have nothing to do with experience. I would strongly urge any recent graduate to obtain some type of certification to add to their resume, be it A+, MCP, or any others. The combination will give them an edge over those that possess either one or the other.

Geographically speaking, where are the highest paying computer jobs?

According to the results of Microsoft Certified Professional Magazine's 2000 salary survey, regional data indicates that the highest compensation is found in the Northeast sector, lead by Connecticut, followed by Southeast with Maryland at its top and the west with Nevada. The highest paying metropolitan areas included Los Angeles, Oakland, Washington D.C., St. Louis, New York, and Houston.

Aside from a paycheck, what do you get out of your job?

My specific job involves providing data communication to and between all police agencies in Lancaster County. This allows officers to directly query the state and national crime databases as well as the county criminal history databases. Also, providing data communications allows e-mail connectivity to every officer. Therefore I have the self-satisfaction of knowing that I am making a positive contribution to my community. Now since officers can exchange information quickly, they can coordinate cross-jurisdictional tactics to capture criminals and/or prevent a crime from occurring.

What is your typical work day like?

My typical day would involve troubleshooting any problems that might arise in the police departments regarding county connectivity and/or e-mail, maintaining the NT servers on the network, adding and deleting new users, and performing, maintaining, and monitoring systems backups. I am responsible for administering and maintaining the Microsoft Exchange e-mail servers, configuring new NT servers as needed, working with vendors and consultants, and planning for and expanding network resources as needed. Any of these responsibilities have the potential for monopolizing my entire day. I also spend 4 to 5 weeks a year in training for new products and Technologies that I plan to introduce into the network.

Interviewed by Nick Rittenhouse Jr. for a College 101 assignment on 04/01.