Upwork Unveils 2025's Most In-Demand Skills

January 15, 2025

New data highlights surging demand for AI specializations and human-centric skills amid rapid technological change

PALO ALTO, Calif., Jan. 15, 2025 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Upwork Inc. (Nasdaq: UPWK), the world's work marketplace that connects businesses with independent talent, today released its annual In-Demand Skills report, spotlighting the most sought-after skills across key work categories on its platform. The findings highlight a dual emphasis on advanced technical skills and human-centric roles, underscoring the evolving demands of a workforce shaped by emerging technologies, digital transformation, and global disruption.

While job postings requiring advanced AI skills, such as generative AI modeling and AI data annotation, are growing rapidly—along with the freelancer earnings associated with these skills—the report also highlights a significant rise in demand for roles like career coaching and training & development. This reflects businesses' growing need for adaptability and guidance, highlighting how human-centric roles are essential to complement advanced AI capabilities in a fast-changing work landscape.

"The data reveals a dual narrative," said Kelly Monahan, managing director of the Upwork Research Institute. "On one hand, there's explosive demand for technical expertise in areas like AI. On the other, businesses are investing in coaching and human development to help their teams navigate technological change. Businesses are recognizing that the future of work isn't just about technology—it's about empowering people to leverage that technology effectively."

Key findings from the report include:

- **Unprecedented growth in specialized AI skills:** Generative AI modeling and AI data annotation have grown by as much as 220% year-over-year, reflecting the rapid integration of AI into industries like healthcare, finance, and marketing.

- **Shift toward deep expertise over generalist roles:** Businesses are prioritizing deep, technical expertise over generalist roles. Skills like generative AI modeling now command premium rates, with freelancers in these areas earning up to 22% more on an hourly basis than traditional roles in AI & machine learning.

- **Surge in career coaching and development roles:** Human-centric roles like personal coaching have emerged among the fastest-growing skills on the platform, with demand increasing by 74% year-over-year. This underscores the growing importance of guidance and adaptability as businesses invest in reskilling their workforces to navigate technological change.

- **Freelancers drive business innovation:** Nearly half of businesses (49%) are turning to freelancers to address critical skill gaps, and 48% of CEOs plan to increase freelance hiring over the next year. Freelancers are enabling companies to innovate rapidly and adapt to changing market demands.

- **Less about degrees, more about proven expertise:** A growing 74% of executives say degrees are irrelevant when hiring freelancers, focusing instead on proven expertise. In fact, 78% of CEOs assert that their top freelancers contribute more value than degree-holding employees. As the reliance on degrees diminishes, businesses are prioritizing demonstrated capabilities to stay competitive.

"Earning premiums for advanced skills like generative AI modeling reflect the value businesses place on AI technology," said Teng Liu, economist at Upwork. "These premiums highlight the scarcity of these specialized skills and their significant role in driving business productivity and competitive advantage."

"As organizations adopt advanced technologies, they must also cultivate the skills and resilience needed for their teams to thrive in an era of rapid transformation," Monahan added. "One way to do this is through highly specialized freelancers who can help drive adaptability and innovation. For professionals, there's significant opportunity in focusing on niche specializations or combining technical skills with human-centric expertise to stay competitive."

Read the full report findings and insights at https://www.upwork.com/research/in-demand-skills-2025.

Upwork's Top 3 Fastest-Growing Skills by Category for 2025:

Accounting & Consulting

1. Personal Coaching
2. Career Coaching

3. Training & Development

Coding & Web Development

  1. Scripting & Automation
  2. Web Design
  3. UX/UI Design

Customer Service & Admin Support

  1. Supply Chain & Logistics Project Management
  2. Construction & Engineering Project Management
  3. Qualitative Research (e.g. survey coordinator, interview transcriber, focus group moderator)

Data Science & Analytics

  1. AI Data Annotation & Labeling
  2. Knowledge Representation
  3. Generative AI Modeling

Design & Creative

  1. Pattern Design
  2. Product & Industrial Design
  3. Video Production

Sales & Marketing

  1. Display Advertising
  2. Campaign Management
  3. Email Marketing

Upwork's Top 10 Most In-Demand Skills by Category for 2025:

Accounting & Consulting

  1. Accounting
  2. Bookkeeping
  3. Recruiting & Talent Sourcing
  4. Financial Analysis & Modeling
  5. Management Consulting
  6. HR Administration
  7. Tax Preparation
  8. Instructional Design
  9. Business Analysis & Strategy
  10. Financial Management/CFO

Coding & Web Development

  1. Full-Stack Development
  2. Front-End Development
  3. Web Design
  4. Mobile App Development
  5. Back-End Development
  6. Ecommerce Website Development
  7. UX/UI Design
  8. Scripting & Automation
  9. CMS Development
  10. Manual Testing

Customer Service & Admin Support

1. [General Virtual Assistance](#)
2. [Data Entry](#)
3. [Digital Project Management](#)
4. [General Research Services](#)
5. [Executive Virtual Assistance](#)
6. [Ecommerce Management](#)
7. [Market Research](#)
8. [Manual Transcription](#)
9. [Medical Virtual Assistance](#)
10. [Business Project Management](#)

Data Science & Analytics

1. [Data Analytics](#)
2. [Machine Learning](#)
3. [Data Visualization](#)
4. [Data Extraction](#)
5. [Data Engineering](#)
6. [Data Processing](#)
7. [Data Mining](#)
8. [Experimentation & Testing](#)
9. [Deep Learning](#)
10. [Generative AI Modeling](#)

Design & Creative

1. [Graphic Design](#)
2. [Video Editing](#)
3. [Presentation Design](#)
4. [Image Editing](#)
5. [Illustration](#)
6. [3D Animation](#)
7. [Video Production](#)
8. [Product & Industrial Design](#)
9. [Cartoons & Comics](#)
10. [Brand Identity Design](#)

Sales & Marketing

1. [Social Media Marketing](#)
2. [SEO](#)
3. [Sales & Business Development](#)
4. [Lead Generation](#)
5. [Search Engine Marketing](#)
6. [Telemarketing](#)
7. [Email Marketing](#)
8. [Marketing Automation](#)
9. [Marketing Strategy](#)
10. [Campaign Management](#)

For more research from the Upwork Research Institute, visit: https://www.upwork.com/research.

Methodology

Skills data was sourced from Upwork's proprietary database, analyzing freelancer earnings and job postings from January 1, 2024, to October 31, 2024, with demand originating in the United States. The analysis focused on completed jobs where each skill generated at least $100,000 in aggregate freelancer earnings during the period. Year-over-year growth was calculated by comparing freelancer earnings in 2024 to those from the same period in 2023.

About Upwork

Upwork is the world's work marketplace that connects businesses with independent talent from across the globe. We serve everyone from one-person startups to large, Fortune 100 enterprises with a powerful, trust-driven platform that enables companies and talent to work together in new ways that

unlock their potential. Our talent community earned over $3.8 billion on Upwork in 2023 across more than 10,000 skills in categories including website & app development, creative & design, data science & analytics, customer support, finance & accounting, consulting, and operations.

Learn more at upwork.com and join us on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and [X](X).

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