Upwork Monthly Hiring Report: High-Value Work Grew 31% Among Large Businesses as AI Amplifies Demand for Human Skills

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Inaugural monthly analysis of the freelance economy provides an early signal of U.S. labor market shifts, revealing how businesses are engaging flexible talent

August analysis shows demand for human-centric skills like fact-checking and video editing is on the rise

PALO ALTO, Calif., Sept. 02, 2025 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Upwork Inc. (Nasdaq: UPWK), the world's human and AI-powered work marketplace, today announced a new monthly analysis of hiring trends in the freelance economy, revealing demand for the specific skills driving business growth. The report illuminates real-time trends signaling how business leaders are hiring and aims to provide a more comprehensive picture of hiring in the U.S. labor market by focusing on the freelance economy – a vibrant sector of the workforce that generates an estimated $1.5 trillion in earnings annually.[1] It draws upon data from more than 1 million jobs posted annually in the U.S. on Upwork and a new monthly business pulse survey from the Upwork Research Institute.

"Traditional data sources often show us where the labor market has been, but they overlook the part of the economy that shows us where it's going," said Dr. Kelly Monahan, managing director of the Upwork Research Institute. "The freelance economy is a leading indicator for the broader labor market because it's where businesses turn first to innovate and adapt. Our new Upwork Monthly Hiring Report taps directly into this real-time signal, providing a forward-looking, comprehensive view of how companies are using flexible talent to succeed in the age of AI."

Top 3 Hiring Insights: August 2025

High-value work among large businesses grew 31% as companies use flexible talent to fill key gaps and drive growth.[2]
Despite a softer overall labor market, companies are strategically leveraging flexible talent to address temporary gaps in the workforce, access advanced technical skills, and scale resources.[3] This is most evident among large businesses, which saw 31% growth in high-value work (contracts greater than $1,000) on Upwork.[2] Of note, one in four business leaders hired a freelancer to access advanced technical skills in August;[3] and across customer segments, business leaders cited talent acquisition and retention as their top priority,[3] signaling a proactive investment in their workforces to prepare for future growth.

Demand for AI and machine learning skills is up 40% among small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs).[2]
While broader economic reports point to a cooling job market, demand among SMBs for skills in AI and Machine Learning saw a notable 40% uptick in August,[2] while Video & Animation also grew by 27%.[2] This proactive hiring behavior suggests that SMBs are leveraging new technologies to innovate and accelerate in the AI era, turning to freelance experts to help them move faster, create dynamic content, and improve efficiency. Leaders across all business sizes generally display more confidence in their ability to handle macroeconomic shifts compared to previous months, citing access to the right tools and technology as a top confidence driver.[3]

AI is amplifying human talent, with categories vulnerable to disruption like Writing growing, and content creation seeing record demand.[5]
AI is amplifying human talent by creating demand for expertise in new, higher-value work. This is most notable across the Creative & Design, Writing, and Translation categories, where demand for skills like Content Writing and Language Tutoring & Interpretation grew 15% and 162%,[2] respectively, largely driven by high-value work. This trend suggests that categories once thought to be most vulnerable to AI disruption are now evolving, with companies leveraging freelancers for more complex work. The need for human verification of AI outputs is further highlighted by skills like fact-checking, often used alongside AI, being among the top skills hired for in August.[4]

The rise of the creator economy is also evident, with a historical high of 15% of jobs on Upwork coming from content creator demand.[5] Of these content creator jobs, nearly twice as many include AI skills compared to other non-technical jobs on Upwork, demonstrating how AI is expanding possibilities for creative professionals.[5]

Top 10 Most In-Demand AI-Related Skills in August 2025[4]:

1. Machine learning
2. Python
3. English
4. ChatGPT
5. Data labeling
6. Graphic design
7. Data annotation
8. Fact-checking
9. Image annotation
10. Video editing

“The top AI skills we’re seeing businesses hire for, such as fact-checking and video editing, show that the future of work is not about replacing humans with AI; it’s about human-AI collaboration,” said Dr. Teng Liu, economist for the Upwork Research Institute. “AI is reshaping projects, but human expertise remains the most critical component, driving strategic outcomes that prioritize uniquely human skills like quality control and creativity.”

The Upwork Monthly Hiring Report will be released monthly before the Employment Situation from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics is published.

For more insights from the world’s human and AI-powered work marketplace, visit upwork.com/research.

About The Upwork Monthly Hiring Report
The Upwork Monthly Hiring Report is designed to provide an early signal of broader shifts in how business leaders are hiring in real-time and aims to provide a more comprehensive picture of hiring trends in the U.S. labor market with a focus on the freelance economy – a vibrant sector of the workforce that generates $1.5 trillion in earnings annually.[1] It draws upon data from more than 1 million jobs posted annually on Upwork’s platform and a monthly business pulse survey from the Upwork Research Institute.

Methodology and Sources
[1]Upwork Future Workforce Index, April 2025.
[2]Upwork platform data reflecting month-over-month (MoM) changes based on new contract activity in the U.S. from August 1-25, 2025 compared to July 1-25, 2025. High-value work is defined as a contract of at least $1,000.
[3]August Business Pulse Survey from the Upwork Research Institute.
[4]Upwork platform data reflecting top freelance skills hired for based on new contract activity in the U.S. from August 1-25, 2025.
[5]Upwork platform data reflecting job posts in the U.S. from August 1-25, 2025.

About Upwork Inc.
Upwork Inc. is the parent company of the Upwork Marketplace and Lifted, its enterprise-focused subsidiary. Through its family of businesses, Upwork Inc. connects companies with global, AI-enabled talent across every contingent work model.

The Upwork Marketplace is the world’s human and AI-powered work marketplace that connects businesses with highly skilled, AI-enabled independent talent from across the globe. From Fortune 100 enterprises to entrepreneurs, companies rely on the trusted Upwork Marketplace platform and its mindful AI companion, Uma ™, to find and hire expert talent, leverage AI-powered work solutions, and drive business transformation. With on-demand access to professionals spanning more than 10,000 skills across AI & machine learning, software development, sales & marketing, customer support, finance & accounting, and more, the Upwork Marketplace enables businesses of all sizes to scale, innovate, and transform their workforces for the age of AI and beyond.

Since its founding, with more than $25 billion in talent earnings facilitated to date, Upwork continues to deliver on its purpose to create opportunity in every era of work. Learn more at upwork.com and follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X.

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