Upwork Monthly Hiring Report: Demand for Quality Assurance, Project Management, and Other Human-Centric Skills Rose in September as Businesses Combat AI "Workslop"

October 2, 2025

58% of businesses say they'll prioritize AI proficiency and understanding when hiring freelancers in the next three months [4]

PALO ALTO, Calif., Oct. 02, 2025 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Upwork Inc. (Nasdaq: UPWK), the world's human and AI-powered work marketplace, today released its Monthly Hiring Report for September, revealing rising demand for skills that combat AI "workslop," such as quality assurance and project management. The report illuminates real-time trends signaling how business leaders are hiring, providing a more comprehensive picture of the U.S. labor market by focusing on the freelance economy – a dynamic sector of the workforce that generates an estimated $1.5 trillion in annual earnings.[1] It draws upon data from more than 1 million job posts in the U.S. on Upwork's marketplace annually and a monthly business pulse survey from the Upwork Research Institute.

"Our real-time platform data gives us a unique view into what companies are hiring for, what skills are rising, and how work is evolving in the age of AI, which is changing and enabling new types of work in virtually every category," said Erica Gessert, chief financial officer at Upwork. "The trends in this month's report underscore the powerful truth that the future of work is human-AI collaboration, not substitution. From quality assurance to translation, human involvement is essential to turn AI's potential into quality outcomes and actual business value. Companies are hiring for these and other uniquely human skills to ensure their AI investments pay off."

Top 3 Hiring Insights: September 2025

Demand for translation & localization grew 29% as businesses prioritize human oversight to course-correct AI "workslop."[2]
As businesses rapidly adopt AI tools, they are simultaneously recognizing the costly side effect of subpar AI output and hallucinations, referred to as "workslop." Forty percent of employees have experienced workslop, and it takes an average of two hours to resolve each incident. [3] To combat this productivity drain, businesses are turning to flexible talent to provide oversight and quality assurance across types of work that require validation, deep context, and creative refinement.

- Data from Upwork's marketplace:
  - **Translation & localization** grew 29%.[2]
  - **Sales & marketing copywriting** grew 12%.[2]
  - **Quality assurance testing** grew 9%.[2]
- 39% of businesses say a lack of trust in AI's accuracy is a barrier to implementing AI. [4]

Digital marketing contracts saw a 9% jump as businesses seek human guidance to adapt in the age of AI and generative search.[2]
As the shift toward generative engine optimization (GEO) and answer engine optimization (AEO) fundamentally changes how businesses reach customers, companies are relying on flexible talent to drive their digital strategies.

- Data from Upwork's marketplace:
  - **Digital marketing** grew 9% overall; among small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), **search engine optimization (SEO)** and **search engine marketing (SEM)** grew 8% and 7%, respectively.[2]
  - **Video & animation** grew 8%.[2]
- 53% of businesses anticipate hiring freelance digital marketers in the next three months.[4]

Project management among SMBs soared 102% as businesses ramp up for annual planning.[2]
As the majority of businesses head into the annual planning cycle, there's a renewed focus on reinforcing core operations and ensuring they have the necessary human oversight and structure to achieve their 2026 goals.

- Data from Upwork's marketplace:
  - **Recruiting & human resources** grew 26%.[2]
  - **Project management** grew 17% overall; among SMBs, it grew 102% – making it the fastest-growing category of work within this segment.[2]
  - **Virtual assistance** grew 11%.
  - High-value contracts for **financial planning** and **accounting & bookkeeping** both grew 5%.[2]
- 35% of businesses expect to hire freelance project managers in the next three months.[4]

"The dramatic surge in project management hiring, particularly among smaller businesses, is a telltale sign of organizational adaptation under AI pressures," said Professor Nicholas Bloom, Stanford University. "This reflects more than a cyclical planning push, with companies investing in the necessary human infrastructure – the project managers, recruiters, and financial planners – to execute with precision and operational efficiency in a

rapidly changing, AI-enabled economy."

Top 10 Most In-Demand AI-Related Skills in September 2025[5]:

1. Python
2. Video editing
3. Graphic design
4. ChatGPT
5. AI-generated video (new)
6. Machine learning
7. Virtual assistance (new)
8. Content writing (new)
9. Data entry (new)
10. Adobe Illustrator (new)

"The top 10 AI-related skills this month, including virtual assistance, content writing, and video editing, demonstrate that businesses are leveraging AI to augment and streamline core operations, not replace their workforces," said Dr. Teng Liu, economist for the Upwork Research Institute. "This demand for foundational human skills shows that businesses' focus is shifting. AI is handling the heavy lifting of redundant work, but human talent is still the critical layer responsible for quality control, context, and creative refinement."

The Upwork Monthly Hiring Report is 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 marketplace and a monthly business pulse survey from the Upwork Research Institute.

Methodology and Sources
[1]Upwork Future Workforce Index, April 2025.
[2]Upwork marketplace data reflecting month-over-month (MoM) changes based on new contract activity in the U.S. from September 1-24, 2025 compared to August 1-24, 2025. High-value work is defined as a contract of at least $1,000.
[3]The Hidden Costs of Workslop from BetterUp, September 2025.
[4]September Business Pulse Survey from the Upwork Research Institute.
[5]Upwork marketplace data reflecting top freelance skills hired for based on new contract activity in the U.S. from September 1-24, 2025.

About Upwork Inc.
Upwork Inc.'s (Nasdaq: UPWK) family of companies connects businesses with global, AI-enabled talent across every contingent work type including freelance, fractional, and payrolled. This portfolio includes the Upwork Marketplace, which connects businesses with on-demand access to highly skilled talent across the globe, and Lifted, which provides a purpose-built solution for enterprise organizations to source, contract, manage, and pay talent across the full spectrum of contingent work. From Fortune 100 enterprises to entrepreneurs, businesses rely on Upwork Inc. to find and hire expert talent, leverage AI-powered work solutions, and drive business transformation. With 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 family of companies enables businesses of all sizes to scale, innovate, and transform their workforces for the age of AI and beyond.

Since its founding, Upwork Inc. has facilitated more than $30 billion in total transactions and services as it fulfills its purpose to create opportunity in every era of work. Learn more about the Upwork Marketplace at upwork.com and follow on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X; learn more about Lifted at go-lifted.com and follow on LinkedIn.

Contact
press@upwork.com