Upwork Monthly Hiring Report: Hiring for Customer-Facing Skills Increased 30% in October as Businesses Prepare for Holiday Demand

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78% of businesses plan to hire independent talent in the next three months, outpacing hiring for full-time knowledge workers[1]

PALO ALTO, Calif., Nov. 05, 2025 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Upwork Inc. (Nasdaq: UPWK), the world's human and AI-powered work marketplace, today released its Monthly Hiring Report for October, finding that businesses are turning to independent professionals to meet seasonal hiring needs. The report draws from more than 1 million job posts in the U.S. on the Upwork Marketplace annually and a monthly business pulse survey from the Upwork Research Institute. It offers a real-time view of how businesses are hiring in the freelance economy that generates an estimated $1.5 trillion in annual earnings.[2]

"Flexible talent is an essential extension of the workforce," said Anthony Kappus, chief operating officer at Upwork. "The data shows how businesses are hiring independent professionals to connect with and serve customers through the busy holiday season, drive creative and technical work, and fill key roles faster."

Top Hiring Insights: October 2025

Flexible hiring for customer-facing skills grew 30% ahead of the holiday season.[3]
As companies prepare for holiday demand, many are relying on flexible talent to handle customer support, maintain service quality, and optimize e-commerce performance.

- Data from the Upwork Marketplace:
  - **Customer service & tech support** grew 30%.[3]
  - **Community management & tagging** grew 29%.[3]
  - **E-commerce development** grew 9%.[3]
- Flexibility (25%) and speed to hire (23%) are top reasons businesses engage independent talent.[1]

Data mining & management grew 26% as businesses focus on quality and reliability in digital operations.[3]
As AI becomes embedded in workflows, companies are prioritizing human expertise to ensure accuracy, accountability, and trust.

- Data from the Upwork Marketplace:
  - **Data mining & management** grew 26%.[3]
  - **AI & machine learning** (AI data annotation & labeling, deep learning, generative AI modeling, etc.) grew 15%.[3]
  - **Quality assurance testing** grew 7%.[3]
- 55% of businesses expect to hire data analysts and data scientists in the next three months.[1]

High-value creative contracts are on the rise, led by a 38% increase in game design & development.[3]
Creative categories are gaining momentum as companies need original storytelling, design, and brand strategy that blends technology and human creativity.

- Data from the Upwork Marketplace:
  - **Game design & development** grew 38%.[3]
  - **Branding & logo design** grew 19%.[3]
  - **Marketing, PR & brand strategy** grew 14%.[3]
- Businesses say they most need AI proficiency (61%), digital marketing (53%), and strategic and creative thinking (44%) in flexible talent skill sets.[1]

Top 10 Most In-Demand AI-Enabled Skills in October 2025[4]:

1. Graphic design
2. Python
3. Video editing
4. Machine learning

5. AI-generated video
6. ChatGPT
7. Adobe Photoshop (new)
8. JavaScript (new)
9. Adobe Illustrator
10. Content writing

“The mix of creative and AI skills shows that AI and imagination now work side by side,” said Dr. Teng Liu, economist for the Upwork Research Institute. “Teams are using AI to ideate and refine, forming scalable content systems that are fueling a new wave of creative collaboration.”

“We’re seeing AI adoption evolve from experimentation to execution,” said Professor Nicholas Bloom, a member of Upwork’s Economic Advisory Council from Stanford University. “Companies are shifting resources to building AI infrastructure. It seems AI is moving from the lab to the balance sheet, becoming more operational than experimental.”

The Upwork Monthly Hiring Report is released monthly to provide timely workforce insights. 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 dynamic sector of the workforce that generates an estimated $1.5 trillion in earnings annually.[2] It draws upon data from more than 1 million jobs posted annually on the Upwork Marketplace and a monthly business pulse survey from the Upwork Research Institute.

Methodology and Sources

[1]October Business Pulse Survey from the Upwork Research Institute.

[2]Upwork Future Workforce Index, April 2025.

[3]Upwork Marketplace data reflecting month-over-month (MoM) changes based on new contract activity in the U.S. from October 1-26, 2025 compared to September 1-26, 2025. High-value work is defined as a contract of at least $1,000.

[4]Upwork Marketplace data reflecting top freelance skills hired for based on new contract activity in the U.S. from October 1-26, 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.

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