



Upwork December Monthly Hiring Report: Operational Roles Rise as Businesses Brace for Macro Uncertainty in 2026

January 8, 2026

Rising demand for project management and accounting show companies shifting from experimentation to execution

PALO ALTO, Calif., Jan. 08, 2026 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- [Upwork Inc.](#) (Nasdaq: UPWK), the world's human and AI-powered work marketplace, today released its [December Monthly Hiring Report](#), revealing a clear shift toward hiring focused on operational execution as businesses prepare for a potentially volatile start to 2026. 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 digital knowledge work market, which is expected to reach \$1.3 trillion by 2028.¹

With fewer than one in three business leaders describing macro conditions as favorable in December,² hiring activity on Upwork shows companies narrowing their strategic focus to roles that help them execute with precision rather than build or experiment with new systems.

Top Hiring Insights: December 2025

Operational roles led hiring growth in December to shore up planning and execution amid rising uncertainty. Demand on the Upwork Marketplace rose for:

- Project Management: +23%
- Accounting & Bookkeeping: +15%
- Virtual Admin Assistance: +3%

Meanwhile, some categories tied to experimentation and expansion cooled on a short-term basis, reflecting typical year-end budget resets and seasonal planning cycles rather than broader, structural shifts in demand. Hiring on the Upwork Marketplace declined for:

- Ecommerce Development: -56% month-over-month, but +14% year-over-year
- Branding & Logo Design: -17% month-over-month, but +21% year-over-year
- Marketing, PR & Brand Strategy: -15% month-over-month, but +43% year-over-year

Hiring in December was driven by small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs). Among SMBs, hiring for Project Management rose 70% month-over-month, while SMB demand also increased for Virtual Assistance (+18%) and Accounting & Bookkeeping (+9%), a sign that smaller firms in particular are relying on flexible talent to stay productive and maintain business momentum without taking on fixed risk.

"In uncertain macro conditions, execution matters, and we're seeing that shift most clearly among small and medium-sized businesses," said Anthony Kappus, chief operating officer at Upwork. "They have less room for error and are driving demand for operational roles like project management, using flexible talent to get operations tight and keep projects moving."

"Additionally, after months of momentum in AI building and adoption, December hiring points to a more pragmatic phase," said Teng Liu, economist at the Upwork Research Institute. "Demand is concentrated around skills that support coordination, quality control, and reliable execution in everyday operations."

Most In-Demand AI-Enabled Skills in December 2025

- Python
- Video editing
- Graphic design
- ChatGPT
- AI-generated video
- Data entry (new)
- Virtual admin assistance (new)
- Machine learning
- Web design (new)
- Adobe Photoshop

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 independent talent economy. 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 digital knowledge work market, which is expected to reach \$1.3 trillion by 2028.¹

Methodology

Upwork Marketplace data reflects month-over-month (MoM) changes based on new contract activity in the U.S. from December 1–31, 2025, compared with November 1–30, 2025. Year-over-year (YoY) comparisons reflect changes in new contract activity compared with the same period in the prior year. High-value work is defined as contracts of at least \$1,000. Top freelance skills are based on new contract activity in the U.S. from December 1–31, 2025. Client size data are based on self-reported and/or estimated information and may be subject to revision.

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](#); and learn more about Lifted at go-lifted.com and follow on [LinkedIn](#).

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¹ Estimated 2028 market size from Upwork Market Study, a commissioned third-party study that estimates the size of the flexible digital knowledge work market based on data from, among other sources, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, World Bank, and International Labour Organization (October 2025).

² December Business Pulse Survey from the Upwork Research Institute.