What Does a Computer Technician Do?

by Ian Linton

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Computer technicians work in company IT departments, retail outlets and IT service companies carrying out installation, maintenance and support of IT equipment for internal or external customers. To carry out their wide range of responsibilities, computer technicians typically require qualifications in a computer-related subject. Some employers specify a bachelor’s degree in a subject such as computer science or computer engineering. Others require evidence of training or certification in IT systems. To improve product knowledge, computer technicians participate in training programs run by manufacturers on specific hardware or software.

Installation

Computer technicians install desktop and laptop computers, configuring them to run on a company network. They load and test operating software, together with any application software that the user needs. They link the computer to peripheral equipment, such as printers or scanners, configuring any necessary drivers. They also set up email accounts and Internet access on the computer. In addition to deploying user systems, computer technicians also may be responsible for installing servers and networking components.

Upgrades

When a company decides to upgrade its IT systems to take advantage of new operating system features or new versions of application software, computer technicians carry out upgrades to all computers. They must complete the upgrade within a short period of time to ensure that all computers are running compatible software. Computer technicians also upgrade individual computers, increasing memory, speed or hard drive capacity to suit users’ specific operating needs.

Troubleshooting

Computer technicians diagnose and resolve hardware problems. They use diagnostic tools to identify the cause of the problem and repair or replace any failed components. For serious problems where a user has lost data, the computer technician tries to recover and restore the data. Computer technicians also diagnose software issues, reinstalling programs if necessary. If a user experiences problems connecting to the Internet, technicians diagnose and re-establish connectivity, consulting network specialists if necessary.

Security

To strengthen IT security at the user level, computer technicians install and upgrade anti-virus software. They also fix any problems caused by computer viruses or malware. To reduce the risk of attack, they provide advice to users on security best practices and ensure that users are aware of company IT security policy.

Support

Computer technicians provide support and advice to computer users. They explain and demonstrate new features to users and provide brief training to ensure a successful deployment. They also provide ongoing support when users report a problem. Computer technicians may provide support remotely by working on a help desk and resolving issues by telephone. They visit users to deal with problems that cannot be resolved by telephone.

2016 Salary Information for Computer Support Specialists

Computer support specialists earned a median annual salary of $52,550 in 2016, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. On the low end, computer support specialists earned a 25th percentile salary of $40,120, meaning 75 percent earned more than this amount. The 75th percentile salary is $68,210, meaning 25 percent earn more. In 2016, 835,400 people were employed in the U.S. as computer support specialists.

### Growth

Not only does the work vary, but the job opportunities in computer support are also on the rise. The BLS indicates an expected growth rate of 18 percent for this position from 2010 to 2020. This is well above the average growth projected for all careers. If this were to play out, jobs would increase from 607,100 in 2010 to about 717,100 in 2020. This not only means great access to employment, but also allows for company changes, promotion opportunities and pay increases over time.

### Importance

While computer techs are often considered entry level IT employees, their value to employers is significant. Companies rely on techs to train and support employees who use technology in major client-facing business activities, such as sales and service. Techs typically have an opportunity to gain many program certifications, which enhance their skills and make them even more valuable and open for promotions.