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RECRUITING FOR THE FUTURE:  
HOW TO FIND AND HIRE  
EMERGING TECH TALENT



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# EMERGING TECHNOLOGY IS TRANSFORMING BUSINESS



## CAN THE TALENT MARKET KEEP UP?

Today, even long-established businesses are undergoing radical transformations as new, disruptive technologies change the way we live and work.

“ Every industry will soon be driven by digitization and every winning company will be using algorithms ... to shape the end-to-end customer experience. Any advantages you have now will pale in comparison with a great set of algorithms that differentiates the customer experience.<sup>1</sup> ”

**RAM CHAN**  
Corporate Advisor

Such large-scale digital transformations require new kinds of talent, and organizations are ramping up their efforts to find that talent.



As a result, demand for professionals with emerging tech skill sets — from blockchain developers to machine learning engineers, data science specialists, and beyond — has skyrocketed.<sup>2</sup>

The challenge, however, is that there may not be enough of these candidates to go around. Consider the following in-demand — and hard-to-find — skill domains:



## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

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Demand for AI talent has more than doubled since 2015, and experts predict AI will create 2.3 million jobs by 2020.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, with only 300,000 AI practitioners and researchers currently available around the world, many companies will struggle to fill their AI needs.<sup>4</sup>



## CYBERSECURITY

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Companies are scrambling to find cybersecurity engineers, analysts, and administrators, lest they end up the target of the next high-profile data breach. However, reports show there are three available cybersecurity roles for every two cybersecurity professionals. In other words: We have about 33 percent fewer cybersecurity professionals than we need.<sup>5</sup>



## BLOCKCHAIN

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As companies find uses for blockchain that go far beyond cryptocurrency, demand for blockchain developers has increased by 517 percent since 2018.<sup>6</sup> That means there are now 14 open blockchain jobs for every one qualified blockchain developer.<sup>7</sup>



Recruiters and employers have dealt with skills gaps before, but the emerging tech talent shortage is different. A perfect storm of factors is at work in the talent market, making these candidates particularly hard to find.

To understand what those factors are, we tapped three experts who specialize in emerging technology:

+ **JEFF MAZUR**

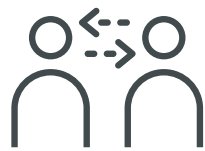
Executive Director at LaunchCode - a nonprofit organization aiming to fill the gap in tech talent

+ **ADRIAN CERNAT**

CEO and Founder at SmartDreamers - a platform that helps companies automate recruitment marketing activities

+ **ARRAN JAMES STEWART**

Co-owner of blockchain recruitment platform at Job.com



The most effective recruiting is always a partnership, but collaboration matters even more in a market this competitive.



## HERE'S WHAT EMPLOYERS AND RECRUITERS ARE UP AGAINST — AND WHAT THE EXPERTS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT IT:



### EMERGING TECH FIELDS ARE EXPANDING RAPIDLY

#### CHALLENGE

One of the simplest reasons for the shortage is one of the hardest to overcome: These fields have grown too quickly for the talent market to keep up. Technology develops exponentially — but people do not.

#### PRO INSIGHT

“It’s mainly down to the pipeline,” Cernat says. “Emerging technology is just that — ‘emerging.’ Whenever a new technology appears on the scene, it takes time for adoption to reach a level where the talent pool can catch up.”





## EDUCATION LAGS BEHIND

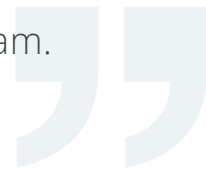
### CHALLENGE

Much like job seekers themselves struggle to keep up, so do the educational institutions that produce tech talent. Many emerging tech fields are so new that colleges and universities don't have formal degree programs in place yet. The new candidates entering the market haven't even had the chance to learn the required skills.

### PRO INSIGHT



With technology rapidly evolving, college graduates are often taught tech skills that aren't necessarily industry-relevant by the time they graduate from a two-year or four-year degree program.



**JEFF MAZUR**



## RECRUITERS AND EMPLOYERS STRUGGLE TO KEEP UP, TOO

### CHALLENGE

Meanwhile, recruiters and employers know they need these candidates — but they're not exactly sure what a qualified candidate looks like, or where to find them.

Compare emerging technology to a more traditional field, like nursing. There's a talent shortage in that field, too, but nursing is an established profession with a formal set of skills, education requirements, and certifications. Recruiters and employers in need of nurses know what to look for, where to look, and how to determine whether a candidate has what it takes. Not so with emerging tech, which is such a recent development that it lacks standardized best practices for identifying and screening qualified candidates.

### PRO INSIGHT



Cybersecurity, blockchain, and AI industries have all boomed in the last decade, thanks to massive investments in their rapid growth. This rapid growth has exposed the shortage of workers and the skills gap in the tech industry, so hirers are bearing the full brunt of that challenge.

**ARRAN JAMES STEWART**





## IT'S A CANDIDATE'S MARKET

### CHALLENGE

One final complicating factor: across industries, it's a candidate's market. Candidates have leverage, and they are using it to demand more from recruiters and employers. In this talent-friendly market, emerging tech candidates have perhaps the most power of all. They know they are the rarest breed, so they can set their expectations even higher.

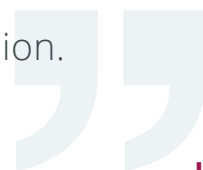
Emerging tech candidates often ask for robust compensation packages, spanning everything from remote work and unlimited PTO to, of course, high salaries. Blockchain engineers rarely get out of bed for anything less than \$155,000.<sup>8</sup> AI professionals routinely earn above \$300,000.<sup>9</sup> Cybersecurity salaries seldom dip below \$100,000.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond material benefits, these candidates are driven by challenging, exciting work opportunities. They want to work for companies where they can put their advanced tech skills to good use.

### PRO INSIGHT



Job candidates today care about the mission of an organization. The generation now entering the workforce is much more aware of and passionate about social issues, and they want to work for a company that values diverse thought and opinion.



**JEFF MAZUR**





# HIRING EMERGING TECH TALENT: 5 STRATEGIES THAT WORK



In a nutshell, recruiting and hiring emerging tech talent poses such a challenge because it is brand new territory. Many recruiters do not yet have an arsenal of tried and true best practices they can rely on to hire these professionals. However, there are strategies that work:

- 1 Invest in the Candidate Experience
- 2 Be Open to Training Candidates
- 3 Don't Lean on Credentials
- 4 Study Up
- 5 Foster Genuine Partnerships Between Recruiters and Hiring Managers



# INVEST IN THE CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

Some of the best practices that apply to recruiting any hard-to-find talent apply just as well to emerging tech talent. For example: You have to give these professionals the candidate experience they crave.

The more in-demand a professional is, the more carefully they'll scrutinize the hiring process.

Emerging tech candidates have high standards for the recruiting process. What those standards are will vary from candidate to candidate and from field to field, which is why the first step to delivering a winning candidate experience is to listen to emerging tech talent. Recruiters and employers will have to spend time getting to know both the general outlines of the industry and the specific wants and needs of certain candidates.

That said, recruiters can lean on a few general principles that are relevant to recruiting most emerging tech professionals. First and foremost, emerging tech candidates want to work at companies that will provide the opportunities, support, and resources they desire.

## PRO TIP



[Emerging tech candidates] want to know they're going to get the support they need to innovate," Cernat says. "If you're hiring for cultural fit and plan on teaching the hard skills, then your candidates need to know they're going to receive the education you're promising. If you're hiring experienced AI developers with established track records, they need to know the [research and development] department is going to be there when they need them. ”

For this reason, recruiters and employers need to place the employer value proposition (EVP) front and center in the recruiting process. The company mission statement, visions, and values should be clearly and consistently communicated across all relevant collateral, from job ads to individual interactions with candidates.

Emerging tech candidates, especially younger ones, want to do work that is positive and meaningful. Whatever your specific EVP is, it should highlight the value your company's pursuits bring to the world.

#### PRO TIP

“If you're developing AI to mine customer data to sell to the highest bidder, you're going to have to work harder to make sure that prospective candidates see your good side,” Cernat says. “This is why it's so important to take control of your employer brand and EVP online. ”

While culture and mission matter to these candidates, employers can't forget about perks and benefits. A competitive salary is a must, but flexibility is also key to these candidates. Stewart recommends offering remote work, flexible hours, or even something like Google's famous 20 percent time.<sup>11</sup>

#### PRO TIP

“Emerging technology candidates are looking to create new technologies that can change markets,” Stewart says. “They want to be employed at companies that encourage exploration and freedom. Companies that have the resources to encourage independent creative work, while also striving to stay at the forefront of the field, will always be attractive to emerging tech candidates. ”



## BE OPEN TO TRAINING CANDIDATES

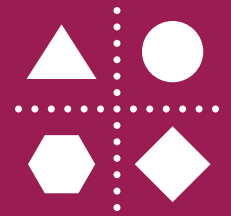
Because the talent market cannot supply enough emerging tech professionals to fill every vacant role, some organizations will have to switch up their strategies. Instead of hiring for hard skills, the better option may be to hire for soft skills and train for hard skills.

This is good advice in general, as 89 percent of new hire failures are caused by a lack of soft skills rather than a lack of hard skills.<sup>12</sup> But this raises the question: What soft skills does an emerging tech professional need to succeed?

Adaptability is key. Emerging technology moves fast, and the most successful long-term emerging tech hires are those who can keep up with that pace of change.

### PRO TIP

“Tech candidates deserve to be assessed for skill and aptitude rather than credentials,” Mazur says. “Since the industry evolves so quickly, it’s important that companies are identifying candidates who demonstrate the ability to learn new skills quickly and adapt to changing trends. ”



Cernat adds cultural fit, problem-solving ability, and work ethic to the list of critical soft skills for emerging tech hires. Other research has identified additional soft skills to seek in technology professionals:<sup>13</sup>

- + Communication
- + Organization
- + Project management
- + Planning
- + Creativity
- + Collaboration
- + Quality assurance
- + Detail-orientation
- + Effective relationship-building



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## DON'T LEAN ON CREDENTIALS

Training for hard skills is not always feasible for any number of reasons. However, because these fields are so new, recruiters cannot rely on credentials to evaluate whether a candidate really has the hard skills they need. Rather than focusing on education or even previous job titles, recruiters should focus on past projects.

“The technologists of today often have unconventional, non-tech educational backgrounds and work histories.”

**JEFF MAZUR**

### PRO TIP

“Recruiters and employers should always look for track records of existing projects when hiring an emerging tech candidate,” Stewart says. “Because the technology is so new and the market so tight, it’s not uncommon for people to pretend to have skills they don’t have in order to secure high-paying roles. To be certain a candidate is credible, look for something they have already worked on and can demonstrate their valuable input.”

By delving into specific projects a candidate has led or contributed to in previous roles, recruiters and employers can gain much more valuable insight about the candidate's relevant skills than they could gain from a degree.

### PRO TIP

“The technologists of today often have unconventional, non-tech educational backgrounds and work histories,” Mazur says. “These candidates are often equipped with industry-relevant skills that add value to a tech role, and coders with a non-tech background may have work and life experience that can easily transfer to a tech team. ”

Employers may also want to look beyond professional responsibilities to inquire about a candidate's personal passion projects. Emerging tech professionals will often put their skills to use on their own side work, which may show off capacities they never get to use in their professional roles.

### PRO TIP

“They may not have a degree in computer science, but their Github repository will give you a better idea of their coding skills than any degree,” Cernat says. ”





## STUDY UP

When software engineers became the hottest talent on the market in the late 2000s,<sup>14</sup> some recruiters responded by becoming specialists. They dedicated time to learning about the field, joined communities of software engineers, and became the go-to experts for recruiting talent in the industry. The same thing is now happening around emerging tech talent, and recruiters have an unprecedented opportunity to become top specialists in the field.

### PRO TIP



There are so many ways to learn to code that don't fit traditional hiring standards,"

Mazur says. "Coders hone their skills online, through coding bootcamps, or through other nontraditional training programs. ”



At a basic level, recruiters will need to read leading industry publications, become fluent in the language of emerging tech, and familiarize themselves with trends and developments in the space. Beyond that, recruiters must also build pipelines they can tap when emerging tech roles open up.

This means identifying the programs and communities that develop new talent.

That includes universities on the forefront of emerging tech, but recruiters cannot stop there.



Recruiters should establish relationships with these nontraditional programs while also expanding their reach beyond job boards, LinkedIn, and other traditional talent sources. Emerging tech candidates don't hang out in the same places traditional talent does.

#### PRO TIP

“Look to alternative sources for your talent,” Cernat says. “In particular, employers can attract and engage candidates on tech forums and other online areas where such talent spends time, or they can take a more direct approach by leveraging third-party recruiters. These recruiters have already started building pipelines of these very candidates, saving you time and legwork.”







## FOSTER GENUINE PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN RECRUITERS AND HIRING MANAGERS

For their part, employers who need emerging tech candidates should partner with these specialist recruiters. The most effective recruiting is always a partnership, but collaboration matters even more in a market this competitive. The company and the recruiter must move quickly and decisively, or else a faster competitor may land the candidate before they do.

A strong partnership between recruiter and employer is a win-win.

The employer gains access to the recruiter's expertise and network of prequalified talent, while the recruiter obtains vital information about the company's business goals and expectations for the role. Not only does this partnership create a more agile recruiting process,

but it also makes it easier to sell emerging tech candidates on the role.

Mission and culture matter to these candidates, and the recruiter will need to accurately represent the employer's EVP to get the candidate on board.

### PRO TIP



We find the majority of job seekers out there, particularly Gen. Z or millennials, are looking for three main things: culture, values, and mission," Cernat says. "This upcoming generation is more values-driven than any that came before, and they want nothing more than to put their considerable talents to work for those companies they deem worthy. ”

# EVEN IF THE TALENT MARKET CAN'T KEEP UP, YOU CAN

Emerging technologies like cybersecurity, AI, and blockchain are reinventing the world of work. The pace of change is unlikely to slow down, and it may take some time for the supply of emerging tech talent to catch up with demand.

However, that doesn't mean your organization has to settle for less or let critical roles go unfilled. You just need to get smart — and creative — about how you approach recruiting for emerging tech roles.

The jobs of tomorrow are already here. Don't wait for the candidates of tomorrow to come to you.

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By investing in the candidate experience, expanding your reach, looking beyond credentials, becoming well-versed and well-connected in emerging tech fields, and forging strong hiring manager-recruiting relationships, employers and recruiters alike can position themselves for hiring success both today and in the future.



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