

# CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

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## A Hybrid High-Tech Career

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By Douglas E. Welch

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Reader letters over the last year have had me thinking about the exact definition of a high-tech career. Just a few years ago, it would have been easier to describe. If you worked in high-tech, you were either a programmer, in network management, or tech support. Today, though, as technology has crept further and further into our everyday lives, high-tech workers might show up anywhere in a business, with titles not necessarily reflecting their high-tech work. These “hybrids” have combined their technical skills with other talents and created an entirely new group of high-tech workers. Even more, these new hybrid jobs might become the future of all high-tech work.

### Moving Over

One of the most frequent questions I receive involves people who are seeking to make a move from their existing career into high-tech. In some cases, they have found that their current careers are not a good fit with their temperament or desires. Others are simply looking for the monetary benefits of working in high-tech, which traditionally pays better than most other fields.

Whatever the reason for their change, my usual response to them is to develop a hybrid job. It has been my experience that when you are transitioning into a high-tech career, experience is the most important factor of all. In order to get hired and make this career move, you need demonstrable technology skills that provide a solution to a company.

One way of developing this experience, and your resume, is to find a position that combines some traditional skills and knowledge with your technology skills. For example, paralegals might look for positions that could use their legal skills to help develop or sell software for law offices. If you have an engineering degree, perhaps you could become an important resource for engineering companies that are seeking to expand the use of technology in developing their projects. The goal is to develop a hybrid position that can develop your high-tech resume so that you can move into a more “pure” high-tech position in the future.

As I was developing this column, though, I began to realize that a hybrid job need not be just a steppingstone. As technology becomes more and more integrated into our lives, these hybrid careers may become the norm instead of the exception. I see now that hybrid careers could help com-

panies better utilize technology while also helping you achieve higher levels of job fulfillment.

Imagine being on a building project and talking to a tech support person who understood not only the CAD program they were supporting but also had a grounding in the basics of architecture and engineering. How about a programmer who was able to use his/her knowledge of accounting to design a better system for tracking budgets and expenditures? It would even work for the network manager who had a deep understanding of the needs of salespeople on the road, so that the corporate network was accessible no matter where staff members traveled. There are almost no areas in business where combining technical knowledge with another specialization would not lead to better technology design and use.

### Finding a Balance

Not only does the concept of high-tech hybrids work for those entering the high-tech world, it can also be a boon to those of you already deeply involved in a high-tech career. Pure high-tech jobs, such as programming, require a very specific temperament and personality. Too often I encounter people who have developed a high-tech career only to realize that, perhaps, it isn't the best fit for them.

Maybe they are spending all day developing programs to manage ATMs at your local bank when they have little to no interest in banking. Perhaps they are developing a network for retail stores, but have no desire to understand the workings of this environment. This type of situation can lead to worker dissatisfaction and quick burnout.

If you find yourself increasingly dissatisfied with your current job, perhaps you should be investigating some form of hybrid career. If you have a deep interest in photography, why not find a position at a company that produces digital cameras and the software that operates them? Not only would you be more interested in your job, the company would gain someone who could bridge the gap between the art, science, and technology that is digital photography. Everyone wins.

You owe it to yourself to make a change. There is no reason to continue slogging away in some generic corporate environment, working on projects that hold no interest for you. Find a position that not only engages your technology skills, but also your heart. This is a sure way to better your life and your high-tech career. □

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*Douglas E. Welch is a freelance writer from Van Nuys, California, and can be reached by e-mail at [douglas@welchwrite.com](mailto:douglas@welchwrite.com) or on the Web at [www.welchwrite.com](http://www.welchwrite.com).*