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The importance of an IT internship

By Natalie McGregory, staff writer

IT careers are "hands-on," and gaining real-world experience gives you an advantage over other entry-level IT professionals. One of the best ways to gain experience is through an internship. Randall Palm, Chief Technology and IS Director at CompTIA, agrees that an internship is an important aspect of starting a career in IT. "A new graduate may possess all the latest IT knowledge, but without real-world experience that knowledge can be useless."

In the past, finding an internship to apply your IT knowledge may have been difficult, but a recent CompTIA web poll found that 49 percent of organizations surveyed said they plan to hire summer interns for their IT departments, up 6 percent from last year.

What can you do to take advantage of these internship opportunities?

The first step to landing an internship is acing your interview. However, many internship applicants have little or no work experience, and are not sure of what they should talk about in the interview. Palm says that even without IT experience a successful candidate should be able to show the hiring manager proof of:

- Superior performance at a previous job
- Troubleshooting and deductive reasoning ability
- Excellent foundational IT knowledge
- Stability and reliability

Once you get the job, make sure you are on time and do your work in a timely fashion. At the beginning of an internship, most tasks consist of "IT busy-work," including printer maintenance, inventory auditing, PC repair and even cleaning up the IT area. Palm notes that as interns show they can do good work and can be trusted, their tasks will progress.

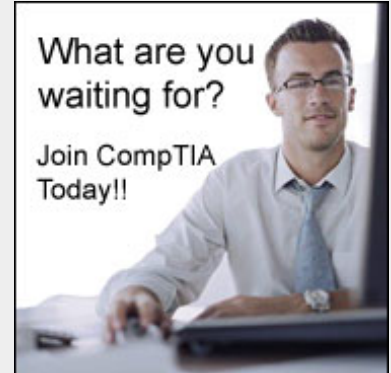
"Internships teach you things that cannot be taught at school," says

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Palm, "like dealing with irrational computer users, unrealistic deadlines, constant security policy intricacies and how to avoid rework."

But no matter what task you are undertaking, Palm says it is important that interns do not to hesitate to ask a question or get clarification. "Mistakes happen when interns try to do everything 'by the book.' Sometimes unconventional solutions are the right answer."

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