

T H E

J O B

C E N T E R

COMPUTER NETWORKING



Kyle Stoker is a 2009 graduate of Tri-Star Career Compact's Network Systems Tech Prep program. Being in that program has opened doors for Kyle. He is interning at Midmark Corporation in Versailles and hopes to work there full time when he graduates from college. Kyle also earned college credits and a \$2,000 scholarship to Rhodes State College where he is currently majoring in IT/Networking.

Used in homes, businesses, government offices, and schools, computers have become an integral part of everyday life. But whether it's a hard drive crash or an inexplicably missing file, computer users eventually run into problems requiring an advanced level of computer expertise to solve.

Society's overwhelming dependence on computers has led to the creation of increasingly complex computer networks, or legions of PCs (personal computers), servers, printers, and other hardware connected to operate within the same network of shared systems and software programs.

Computer support specialists and systems administrators are needed to create such networks and keep them running smoothly. These professionals solve problems for individual users as well as handle the daily administration, maintenance, and support of an organization's computer system and networks.

In general, computer support specialists give technical assistance, service, and advice to users and other technical specialists. These professionals troubleshoot problems and give technical support for hardware, software, and systems.

Technical support specialists communicate with employees to install, modify, clean, and repair com-

puter hardware, software, monitors, keyboards, and printers. They use technical diagnostic programs to detect and solve problems. They may also train computer users and author training manuals designed to instruct others in computer usage and troubleshooting. Overall evaluation of daily performance of computer systems is also part of the support specialists' responsibilities.

Network or computer systems administrators are the designers of networks or systems. They determine an organization's unique computer needs before designing, installing, and supporting its computer systems. They also provide administrative support for computer users in a wide variety of large and small businesses, schools, and government institutions. They maintain and evaluate a computer system's availability to users, effective integration of hardware and software, and security concerns.

Support specialists and computer systems administrators usually begin their careers as help-desk technicians. Help-desk technicians answer phone calls and e-mails from users having problems with their computer system. They often "walk" users through appropriate problem-solving steps, so they must be effective communicators.

Q&A

**Q:** I know a little about computers but have never held a computer related job. How can I get work experience before or during college?

**A:** There are several ways. Those with some computer knowledge but no formal job or educational experience may find entry-level positions in the computer support division of company. Since most organizations use computers, the types of businesses with support departments vary widely.

Also, many non-profit organizations such as schools and community centers seek volunteers to assist with their computer needs.

Such positions, whether low-paying or volunteer, can be priceless for gaining experience and honing one's skills on the job.

Those enlisted in the military may choose to pursue technical training which includes extensive education and work with computers. In some cases, this training may eliminate the need for additional college study.

**Q:** If I have a college degree, how important is prior work experience for gaining higher-level computer support and administration positions?

**A:** Very important. Employers want to feel confident the person they hire for a mid-level position with significant responsibilities is knowledgeable and capable, and can deal effectively with a variety of computer-related situations. Course study and professional computer certifications demonstrate expertise and may be required by some employers, but rarely substitute for actual experience.

JOB IN THIS FIELD

Job titles	Place of work	Kind of work	Average salary*
Computer support specialist	Businesses, schools, government offices, or computer services company	Provides technical assistance, service, advice, and training to computer users.	\$36,460
Network and computer systems administrator	Businesses, schools, government offices, or computer services company	Designs, implements, evaluates, and maintains computer network systems	\$51,280

\*Salaries vary depending on region and experience. Sources: Chronicle Guidance Publications and Occupational Outlook Handbook.

SKILLS REQUIRED

In addition to strong problem-solving, analytical, and communication skills, computer support specialists and network administrators must possess a wide range of computer skills.

WHERE/HOW TO GET TRAINING

Schooling

There are as many skills required to become a computer support specialist or systems administrator as there are ways to get them. That said, there is no universally accepted way to prepare for these professions. It is truly a career where practical skills and application go a long way to helping one qualify for a position.

In most cases, A+ certification will give you the foundation of knowledge you need for basic computer support positions. Certification in more advanced areas are recommended for systems administrators. They include security, networking, Linux, project management, and Intranet.

The IT/ Networking Major at Rhodes State College prepares a student to take the following certification exams: A+, Certified Novell Administrator, Microsoft Certified Professional, Microsoft Certified Systems Administrator, Cisco Certified Network Associate

and Cisco Certified Network Professional.

Many employers do prefer to hire those with some formal college education. Most companies will require a computer-related associate's degree from a community or technical college.

Rhodes State College is an official Microsoft IT Academy and an authorized Local Cisco Network Academy.

Financial Aid

Grants, scholarships, loans, and work/study programs are available for students. For most of this aid, high school seniors must submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid, available from high school guidance offices and post-secondary financial aid offices.

For more information on federal financial aid programs, visit the U.S. Department of Education's Web site at <http://www.ed.gov>.



For more information on federal financial aid programs, call (800) 4FE-DAID

FUTURE JOB OPPORTUNITIES

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, support specialists and systems administrators are predicted to be one of the fastest growing occupations over next few

years. Jobs are expected to grow much faster than average for all career fields, as organizations try to keep current with ever-changing technologies.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Work environments for those in this field typically involve business locales. Computer support specialists and systems administrators

tend to work in quiet office settings. If employed by a computer networking business, one may also travel to a client's business.

RESOURCES - HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

BOOK:

*Careers in Computers* by Lila B. Stair and Leslie Stair

ONLINE:

• [www.acss.org](http://www.acss.org) (Association of Computer Support Specialists)

GENERAL:

National Workforce Center for Emerging Technologies  
3000 Landerholm Circle SE.  
Bellevue, WA 98007  
[www.nwct.org](http://www.nwct.org)

• [www.sage.org](http://www.sage.org) (System Administrators Guild)

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