

Tech and digital support



D 02

November 2023

Those working in tech and digital support roles make sure that customers - whether large businesses or individual users - get all the necessary advice and backup they need. It's possible to enter this area of work with GCSEs (or equivalent), although many jobs are aimed at those with higher-level qualifications.

Types of support roles

Most computer users (often known as end-users), at some time or other, need someone to turn to for help and advice when they run into problems. There may be people who need help setting up their computers, who require training in a new piece of software, whose equipment is faulty (such as a printer not operating), who have computing viruses or other serious problems, or who just need to get a piece of software to load properly.

User support may be provided by:

- a specially trained person operating a help desk or service desk within the user's organisation
- a third line support team, who provide advice and fixes to other service desk professionals (rather than directly to end-users)
- the supplier or manufacturer of the software/equipment, as part of their after-sales service
- a company that specialises in providing computer repair, maintenance, training and support to organisations and private customers
- internet service providers
- retail sales staff (who sell laptops, tablets, printers etc) - they need to be able to explain the hardware and software to customers who may know little about what they are buying, and answer any questions they have during or after the sale.

Some staff specialise in offering either software, hardware or network support; others provide more general help. Job titles vary from one employer to another, and roles and responsibilities often overlap. In large organisations, managers are employed to coordinate the work of support staff.

Software support staff

Software support staff may be known as, for example, **help desk/service desk operator**, **software/systems/digital support technician**, **help desk/service desk analyst** or **applications support specialist**. Support is provided to computer users when they have problems with the computer programs or apps they are using. Support staff are often based at a help desk, and may deal with telephone or online enquiries. Users may be experiencing problems opening a particular file or getting a program to work properly, for instance.

Software support staff need an in-depth knowledge of the software that their callers are using. Employers usually look for people who already have a good working knowledge of the programs, and of the particular business area.

Depending on their exact role and level of technical knowledge, help desk operators may need to pass on problems they can't resolve themselves to more specialist software staff (generally known as third line support). These specialist staff may have programming skills; find more information in the leaflet on [*Software design and development*](#).

Hardware support staff

Some people specialise in providing support in relation to the physical components of computer systems, i.e. the hardware.

Manufacturers and suppliers often install and test computer systems and provide after-sales support to users of their products. Organisations may also take out contracts with specialist computer support companies, to deal with any maintenance and repairs that cannot be handled by their own staff.

Some companies provide a 24-hour emergency service. Usually, where possible, **support/help desk staff** give advice over the telephone or online rather than in person. Work involving specialist technical know-how - such as a monitor needing repair - usually requires the skills of a **computer engineering/service and repair/maintenance technician** (once again, job titles vary).

Technicians usually have to visit their customers on site. It may be possible to fix the problem there and then, or the technician may need to take the equipment back to a workshop. Although computer equipment has become more reliable in recent years, there's a growing need for technical support staff to handle and fix a range of problems. This kind of work is also described in the leaflet on [Network and hardware engineering](#).

Network/infrastructure support staff

In most organisations computers are linked together to form a network that carries computer, telephone and video traffic. **Network/infrastructure engineers, unified communications technicians** etc keep the network infrastructure running. Network support staff (who may be called **network support engineers, technicians or troubleshooters**, for instance) are involved in ensuring that the networks operate smoothly; they sort out day-to-day problems, e.g. to do with information security. More information on the software side of digital networks can be found in the leaflet on [Careers in digital systems](#).

Training support staff

Training users to successfully operate specific software or hardware may take place informally (e.g. by retail staff in a phone shop) or more formally (e.g. delivering short courses to a team). Instructors may be employed in this role full-time or may have training duties as part of a wider role, such as in tech support or management. Job titles vary, but include **technical trainers, IT trainers, digital skills instructors and product demonstrators**. IT trainers may be employed directly by organisations (perhaps combined with other duties) or may work for specialist training providers to deliver training packages to individuals and organisations. Find out more about training careers in the leaflet on [Working in training](#).

What it takes

To work in tech and digital support roles you need to:

- enjoy solving problems
- have a logical mind
- be able to keep calm when dealing with worried, confused or frustrated computer users
- be able to communicate with a wide range of people, including those who may not have much tech expertise
- keep updating your knowledge as new products are brought out and technology develops
- be able to drive (for some jobs).

Entry, education and training

The entry qualifications required for tech and digital support work vary from employer to employer and on the particular requirements of the job.

Schools and colleges offer a range of **full-time courses** in computing at different levels. For example, at level 3 there are AS/A levels, BTEC Level 3 Nationals and, in England, the T level in digital support services, relevant to digital support and other roles. Refer to school and college prospectuses and websites for information on course content and entry requirements. After following a level 3 course it may be possible to enter higher education or train in employment.

Some employers ask for a relevant **foundation degree, HNC/D or degree**. Technicians and engineers working on complex systems and networks generally need a higher education qualification in computing, electronic engineering or a related subject.

Apprenticeships offer structured training in the workplace. They can provide training in tech and digital support roles, or provide a relevant background to move into this area of work. In England, relevant Apprenticeships include those at level 3 for information communication technicians, IT technical salespeople, IT solutions technicians or digital support technicians, at level 4 for network engineers and

applications support leads, and at level 5 for digital learning designers. In Wales, Apprenticeships are available at levels 2 and 3 in digital application support, and at levels 3 and 4 in IT solutions development and support. To find out more about Apprenticeships, see:

www.apprenticeships.gov.uk

www.careerswales.gov.wales

Certain qualifications can be taken part time while in employment. Some are available through professional bodies; the **SDI (Service Desk Institute)**, for instance, offers training courses for support staff at various levels.

For more information on education and training for tech and digital roles in general, refer to the leaflet *Digital careers - an introduction to the work and training*.

Pay and prospects

There are no set pay scales and salaries vary widely depending on the employer, location and exact job role. As a guide, help desk operators may be paid £17-35,000+ per year, according to their experience and responsibility. Managers can earn much more.

Tech and digital support staff can progress within an organisation to supervisory and management-level positions. This area of work can also be a step towards other digital careers or a training role.

Adults: If you are currently employed, and show the necessary interest and aptitude, it may be possible to move sideways into a tech and digital support role with your present employer.

Further Information

SDI (Service Desk Institute) - an organisation for those working in the IT service and support industry.

www.servicedeskintstitute.com

For other organisations and websites that may be useful, refer to the leaflet *Digital careers - an introduction to the work and training*.

Related Leaflets

D 01 Digital careers - an introduction to the work and training

D 05 Data analysis and management

D 06 Software design and development

D 08 Cyber and information security

D 09 Tech and digital management

D 11 Creative and user-focused digital careers

D 13 Careers in digital systems

F 12 Working in training

GE 03 Network and hardware engineering

GF 03 Domestic appliance and office equipment servicing and repair

GF 04 Engineering maintenance

O 08 Sales representative (includes technical sales)

© Copyright 2024. All rights reserved - Adviza Partnership