

SWITCHING IT JOBS TOO OFTEN?



The lure of bigger and better job offers is something you may have to face, sometimes after being on the job only a few short months. Each new advance in technology means **new job opportunities**, especially for those in the IT workforce. As the demand for (and development of) better technology increases, companies must hire the most talented IT professionals. Industry demand for skilled specialists, in fact, has invested them with a "hire power." But such career clout has also helped to shape a dynamic new work ethic for the millennium, one centered on self-satisfaction.

A Revolving Door

Just as companies now forgo employee pension plans and gold watches to reward longevity within an organization, IT professionals are also changing the company work rules. They do not buy into the traditional notion of company loyalty. IT professionals come and go as quickly as you can click your mouse. Why? Competing high-tech firms offer better pay, flexible work environments, vacation bonuses, and IPO options. These promises are now commonplace in an industry that needs qualified technical specialists.

As an IT specialist, how do you know if and when you should make the move to a new company? We talked with IT professionals to learn which factors would actually them to move on to another firm. We also asked expert career analysts for their thoughts about changing companies.

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Three Case Studies

Eric Johnstone, John Harcourt, and Sandi Klein are all IT professionals that work in and around Washington, DC. Each of them has a special skill that is much in demand. And they all have at least one other thing in common: they'd leave their current positions in a heartbeat for the right reasons. But what are the "right reasons"?

"Show me the money!" says Eric Johnstone, who works as a computer specialist with a sub-contractor for UNISYS. He maintains their UNIX-based machines and teaches courses in system administration and PERL script writing. Johnstone, who has worked in his present position for a year and a half and in the IT field for over 13 years, says that he'd go to work for another company in a second--for the right price. Notes Johnstone, "I've got my daughter's college fund and a mortgage to think about." When it comes to hard work Johnstone is no slacker. He also finds time to act as a consultant for the cable and wireless division at AOL Time Warner.

John Harcourt, on the other hand, wants "bigger challenges." Harcourt is a senior network engineer for a local company that designs and builds networks. "I'd like to work on something I haven't done yet," he adds. He's been with his present company for two and a half years and says that, for the most part, he's satisfied with the job. But he "wouldn't turn down a **better job opportunity**, if it offered [him] a greater challenge in my work."

Sandi Klein, a user support manager, agrees with Harcourt. She's worked at a publication and communications firm in Alexandria, VA, for the last two and a half years. If another company were to offer her "challenge and training," she says that she would consider leaving her present job. "You don't gain very much if you only work for a pay check," Klein admits. "You don't stay fresh if you're not challenged, because the technology field changes so much."

All That Glitters...

Top career analysts and recruiters know that IT specialists are taking advantage of their positions in the industry. IT specialists are the new aristocrats of the workplace. People in the IT field are motivated by challenge," she says, and "will lead with their feet if their demands are not being met.

There's a greater demand for IT professionals than traditional professionals.

Yet many of these career analysts don't necessarily endorse switching jobs on a whim. They believe it may be better to take a more conservative approach, to reconsider your reasons for making a change. Consider these four tips before heading for greener pastures.

1. Money Is Cheap

Avoid the lure of easy money. A lot of people ... bemoan the fact that they took an assignment with the hope of making a lot of money. You may end up, in the long run, trading an immediate payoff for other potential gains in the future.

If you're happy, challenged, and being paid fairly, these are all reasons to stay. Don't just focus on a higher salary and don't trade dollars for your quality of life.

2. The Company You Keep

The day-to-day company atmosphere is as important as the work you perform. "Consider the company culture you'd like to work in," he advises. "Do you feel you'll fit in? Does the company management encourage you to advance? Are there opportunities to continue your education and training?" If the answer to any of these questions is no, then you may want to think twice about the offer.

3. The Benefits of Consulting

If you don't want the monotony of a job that offer little challenge, you don't necessarily have to change companies. With consulting you can **change jobs without changing your employer**. This gives you two things. It makes you well rounded and you learn about different businesses and exercise many different skills. Secondly, your employment status stays the same. Your insurance, 401k, and payday stay the same, you are just working at [different] sites. You don't get the feeling of starting all over again.

4. The Big Picture

In the final analysis, only you know what's right for you. Do you value a big paycheck, or is spending time with your family important to you right now? These are things you must decide for yourself. The main point is to set your own personal values and to know when those values are--or aren't--being met in your present job. Then it's up to you to take action.

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