

Attracting and retaining software developers in a competitive job market

Issued by [Pnet](#)

29 Mar 2023

The Digital Age in which we now live has been characterised by a rapid transition from traditional industries to an economy centred on digital advancement. Whether companies realise it or not, most businesses are increasingly relying on tech in one way or another.

To maintain a competitive edge, organisations have to hire skilled IT talent such as software developers, data analysts, security specialists, cloud engineers, and so on. These tend to be individuals with specialised experience *and* strong competencies transferable to many industries. Given the rapidly evolving digital landscape and fast-moving trends, these professionals will be crucial in helping their employers stay ahead of the curve. The problem is, given the mobility of these skills to different industries, the competition to attract and retain the right talent is high.

There are always cost implications when a business loses staff members in any field – in terms of re-recruiting, retraining and investing time in onboarding. This cost is compounded when it comes to losing IT skills because they fall into the “scarce skills” category and it may be extremely difficult to replace them. This is specifically true for software developers.

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According to Pnet’s ‘Recruitment Difficulty Index’, hiring for software developers is currently “Very Difficult” indicated by recruiters receiving an average of 10 applications per job ad (compared to an average across all job types of 131 applications per job ad). In addition, of the 50,000 active IT jobseekers on the Pnet platform over the last six months, only about 9,000 are software developers (or related).

Despite the massive tech layoffs overseas, the demand for top software developers is fierce. With the right hiring strategies in place, however, South African employers can still attract and retain top tech professionals. In this article, Pnet unpacks some of the ways that recruiters can attract skilled software developers in a highly competitive job market.



The big question for employers looking to hire software developers is: What makes them tick?

Here are three tips for attracting and retaining software developers:

1. Make sure the package you offer is competitive

Software developers are in demand, and they know it. Although money isn't the only factor they consider when looking to make a career move, it is an important one — do your homework on market-related salaries for software developers before you make an offer. Remember, local recruiters are not only competing with other local recruiters for this talent; competition is coming from abroad too.

If your business is an SME, and you can't compete with big corporations in terms of monetary compensation, think of sweetening the deal by offering equity (a portion of the company's stock options or shares) or other forms of incentive bonuses instead. Alternatively, you could put a four-day working week on the table or perhaps offer high flexibility in terms of remote work opportunities. Research findings reveal that work-life balance is one of the top reasons that South African developers stay in a job. As a potential employer, you need to demonstrate that you offer a high degree of autonomy and will allow your employee the space to achieve deliverables in a way that works for them.

2. Review and enhance your current hiring process

If you are intent on hiring talented software developers, it's a good idea to plan carefully and make improvements to your current hiring process where necessary. For example, have you optimised your job listing with important keywords that will attract the attention of top developer talent? Have you provided enough information to pique the interest and attention of software developers? Have you put your best sales hat on to really sell the opportunity? Be specific about the vacant role, employee benefits, your company's values, and any potential for career growth or promotion down the line.

Once you've shortlisted the top candidates, try to get an understanding of their hard skills (technical) and soft skills during the interview process. In terms of the latter, pay attention to qualities like strong attention to detail, the ability to prioritise, strategic thinking and excellent communication skills among others. Although software developers may be comfortable getting technical stuff done on their own, they may still need to collaborate with colleagues and support different teams within the business. Soft skills will enable them to establish trust with others in the business and may also help them to find purpose in their new roles.

3. Resonate with your ideal candidate's core values

Being a sustainable business is important to attract the brightest talent in the market. In a 2021 [Deloitte survey](#), 49% of Gen-Zs and 44% of millennials said that they had made career choices based on their personal ethics. With an increasing need for talent, not focusing on sustainability can lead to a corporation losing out to competitors who are.

Software developers may be interested in finding out if they are building software that is going to do good for more than just the bottom line. Will the work they do serve a meaningful purpose? To understand prospective employees' personal values, be clear about your company's own vision and values. If they resonate with your company's 'big picture' goals and mission, you may have a better chance of securing the talent you need.

Parting thoughts

Software developers are a precious human resource in today's competitive job market. Any business wishing to remain sustainable in the future would be wise to consider the needs of this professional group and what factors may help to attract and retain their services – survival in the Digital Age depends on it.

2024

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