

Reflecting on the Profession: Who is the IT Professional?

Sure, they can fix a computer or write a software program, but today's IT pros must be well schooled in more than the technology basics.

By Su-Ting Yong

When we talk about an information technology (IT) professional, one might think of a lecturer teaching in the university, someone who might be expected to aware of everything in regard to IT. This kind of expectation may have been reasonable 10 years ago, but in today's society, finding an expert IT professional who is able to manipulate all the relevant IT knowledge is quite impossible. You may disagree with this statement.

Nowadays, IT and Information Systems (IS) are widely used in various industries, applications and even in our daily lives. IT may be used in manufacturing, production, communication, banking, and for personal use such as a mobile phone or a personal PDA. Companies and enterprises use different kinds of IS in order to remain competitive. Since IT exists everywhere, there is no clear-cut distinction between IT and other fields of studies. Accounting firms may use accounting IS, managers may use expert systems, and marketing departments may use geographical IS. In other words, an IT professional such as a lecturer not only needs to know about computers, hardware, software, networking and programming, but also must have knowledge of manufacturing, accounting, marketing, business and much more. IT lecturers are expected to know about everything in the world as long as IT is applicable!

But what does it really mean to be an expert IT professional? No doubt that there are various specific areas in IT such as AI, networking, database, programming etc., that should be understood, but in addition to those an IT professional is expected to master everything from fixing a computer to inventing a new software program. The IT professional is like a Superman and is multipurpose: he can fix every type of computer, fix all the printers, write any programs, and develop CAM, CAD, ERP, MIS, DSS etc. An IT professional can never stop learning because the advancement in IT never ends and IT is everywhere.

Knowledge is everywhere and there is no finish line in learning. In this knowledge society, the role of a professional such as a lecturer has changed. A lecturer should not be thought of as a knowledge transmitter who knows everything. As an educator, a lecturer should act as a facilitator, guiding the students to the answer and helping students in solving problems. Knowledge may get obsolete but the students' internal personalities and skills can help them in facing their future life. A lecturer is a human being and humans are not perfect. Therefore, who is really qualified to be called an IT professional? What are the full implications of these facts?

Su-Ting Yong is an Associate Lecturer for Information Systems in Curtin University Sarawak Campus, Malaysia, and holds a master's degree in IT management from of University of Technology Malaysia.

Source: Ubiquity, Volume 5, Issue 30, Sept. 29 - Oct. 5, 2004, <http://www.acm.org/ubiquity/>