

TALENT MARKET REPORT



# High-skilled Job Report for Q1 2026

APRIL 2026

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# Summary

Each quarter, Toptal analyzes trends in the broad global and US job markets, as well as trends that apply more specifically to experienced technology and professional services personnel like those in the Toptal Talent Network. To quantify demand, we developed the Toptal Market Strength Score, a metric based on the number of new job postings, offered compensation, and actual hiring activity.



## +8.9%

QoQ Toptal Market Strength Score for the remote and hybrid technology and professional services job market  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

**The headline finding for Q1 2026 is one of contrast:** Demand for experienced remote and hybrid technology and professional services personnel grew 8.9% quarter over quarter (QoQ) and 4.8% year over year (YoY), even as the broader job market struggled and layoffs at technology companies increased.

### Other significant findings include:

- + Job postings for all professions and levels of experience in the US and other large economies with comparable data fell by an average of 3% QoQ and 8% YoY.
- + All 10 specific areas of expertise that we track experienced QoQ increases in demand. YoY trends were more mixed; see [Toptal Market Strength Scores](#) for details.
- + Technology company layoffs increased 142% QoQ and 140% YoY. Oracle's dismissal of 30,000 workers on the last day of Q1 notably impacted these trends.
- + Toptal's US job market forecast projects an effectively flat trend for technology roles in Q2 2026, and moderate declines for professional services jobs and the broader market. For experienced remote and hybrid professional services and technology roles, our forecast projects moderate growth in Q2.

### Widespread adoption of AI is a major driver of the trends discussed in this report.

- + While AI is not necessarily "taking" jobs at scale, the expectation of what AI can do is slowing hiring as companies rethink workforce strategy and shift hiring budgets toward AI implementation and infrastructure.
- + Organizations are moving from volume hiring to leaner teams of versatile senior professionals who pair deep domain expertise with AI fluency and cross-functional agility.
- + These changes are creating higher demand for experienced talent in certain specializations, while more junior or generalist roles face declines.



## +4.8%

YoY Toptal Market Strength Score for the remote and hybrid technology and professional services job market  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

**Increasing macroeconomic volatility is a compounding factor.**

+ The US labor market is increasingly volatile, with job gains in January and March but losses in February. As the world’s largest economy, the US is a critical driver of global economic health, and uncertainty in the US market has broad global consequences.

**Toptal Market Strength Scores**

Click the links for more details about each market segment score.

REMOTE/HYBRID JOB MARKET SEGMENT	MARKET STRENGTH SCORE	
	Q o Q	Y o Y
<a href="#">All Technology &amp; Professional Services Roles</a>	+8.9%	+4.8%
<a href="#">Data Science Experts</a>	+12%	+14%
<a href="#">Designers</a>	+21%	+5%
<a href="#">Developers</a>	+7%	+1%
<a href="#">Finance Consultants</a>	+15%	+15%
<a href="#">Information Security Experts</a>	+20%	-15%
<a href="#">Management Consultants</a>	+7%	-6%
<a href="#">Marketing Experts</a>	+6%	+9%
<a href="#">Product Managers</a>	+15%	+46%
<a href="#">Project Managers</a>	+8%	-5%
<a href="#">Sales Experts</a>	+7%	+9%

The Toptal Market Strength Score includes job listings, compensation, and hiring for roles that require five or more years of experience. Note: Scores for product manager roles are more volatile due to differences in the available data.

Poor <15% Change    
 Moderate -15% to +15% Change    
 Strong >+15% Change

## Toptal Leadership Insights



**Erik Stettler**  
Chief Economist, Toptal

“

The first quarter of the year brought genuine growth for skilled technology and professional services talent as organizations moved from AI experimentation toward deployment. However, stated demand, as measured by new job postings and offered compensation, outpaced actual hiring. Companies are being extremely selective, expecting new hires to have AI fluency, business judgment, strong communication skills, and the ability to drive clear, rapid ROI. That selectivity is important to note because the broader economy is more fragile than some US labor market data suggests. Elevated technology company layoffs and contracting entry-level opportunities point to an underlying strain with potential implications for overall consumer demand, a key economic driver. At the same time, rising energy prices increase the cost of the AI implementations that are fueling the current high-skilled labor market.

This report contains encouraging signals for the high-skilled labor market, but the surface calm shouldn't be mistaken for underlying stability. The professionals and organizations best positioned for what comes next will be those that continue to learn, experiment, and stay attuned to their markets, regardless of the growth in demand for experienced talent.

“



**Jeff Benesch**  
Chief Operating Officer,  
Toptal

Demand for specialized skills in the labor market continues to grow, favoring adaptable professionals with both functional and technical depth. In Q1, we saw increased focus on more senior roles in product management and data science, along with domain experts in finance and management consulting. The impact of AI is now visible in hiring decisions, with employers increasingly requiring function-specific AI proficiency while pulling back on demand for more junior analysts, general project managers, and app developers. That trend is likely to continue in Q2, as organizations move forward with clearer priorities and greater budget discipline.

Despite broader job market volatility and economic uncertainty, our data shows that demand for experienced remote and hybrid technology and professional services personnel like those in the Toptal Talent Network grew 8.9% QoQ. As organizations scale AI capabilities, they are turning to fractional talent models and global sourcing to find the specialists who can actually deliver, opening up opportunities for the right professionals regardless of location.

# Introduction

This Q1 2026 report analyzes trends across the technology and professional services job market and broader global and US hiring trends. It covers:

- + QoQ and YoY market conditions as of the end of Q1 2026
- + A Q2 2026 forecast for the US job market
- + Q1 analysis and preliminary impressions of Q2 2026 from Toptal leadership

The first half of the report provides overall market context, beginning with the broadest trends; the second half describes more specific trends for each area of expertise, including data science, design, development, finance consulting, information security, management consulting, marketing, product management, project management, and sales.

The purpose of this report is to provide clear, direct, and actionable information to professionals in these fields on the nature of the demand for their services. It avoids speculation and jargon, and doesn't focus on broader macroeconomic matters outside of how they impact immediate trends in demand.

## How to Read This Report

Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent demand for the technology and professional services job market as well as each area of expertise in our network. These scores are based on the number of new job postings, median offered compensation, and actual hiring activity, as reported by Lightcast. The scores equally weight hiring against postings and compensation, to correct for “[ghost jobs](#)” that employers advertise without real intent to hire.

Because Toptal and its talent network are fully distributed, the primary Toptal Market Strength Scores in this report apply specifically to the remote and hybrid work market. Secondary scores that apply to all work models, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles are also shared. QoQ trends compare Q1 2026 to Q4 2025. YoY trends compare Q1 2026 to Q1 2025.

A few notes on the content and methodology:

- + Some of the source data changes in real time and may shift slightly between the time Toptal performed the calculations and the time of publication. This is common with indices of this kind and typically does not materially affect the trends and major findings.
- + Toptal generally services clients that need specialized professional talent with five or more years of experience; most of the data presented in this report applies to that professional profile, unless specifically stated otherwise.
- + While considering the QoQ metrics presented here, keep in mind that shorter-term metrics are more sensitive to smaller trends and seasonality.
- + Source hyperlinks generally lead to organizations' homepages or data landing pages; all calculations were performed by Toptal. (See the [Appendix](#) for more details on our methodology and analysis.)
- + Scores for product manager roles are more volatile due to differences in available data.

# Trends in the Global and US Job Market

The data we consider in this section presents a mixed picture: While the broad global job market continues to show weakness, demand for experienced technology and professional services personnel has increased moderately.

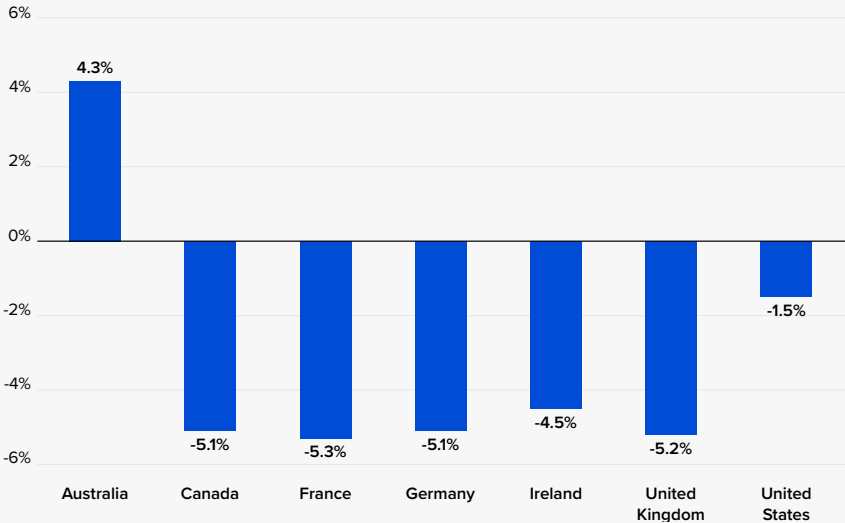
In this section, we discuss QoQ (Q1 2026 versus Q4 2025) and YoY (Q1 2026 versus Q1 2025) trends in the broad global and US job markets, as well as trends that apply more specifically to experienced technology and professional services personnel like those in the Toptal Talent Network. We will start with broad global trends, then move to the global technology market, then to select US demand trends, and finally to the data most specific to Toptal’s network and areas of expertise.

## Broad Global Demand Trends

### Global Job Posting Trends Are Mostly Down QoQ and YoY

Figure 1 shows the QoQ change in the number of job postings for all professions and all levels of experience in the US and other countries with comparable available data as of Q1 2026. Job listings in the eurozone, which includes [all countries that use the euro](#) currency, decreased 3.9% QoQ.

Figure 1  
Quarter-Over-Quarter Change in Job Postings in US and Other Large Economies

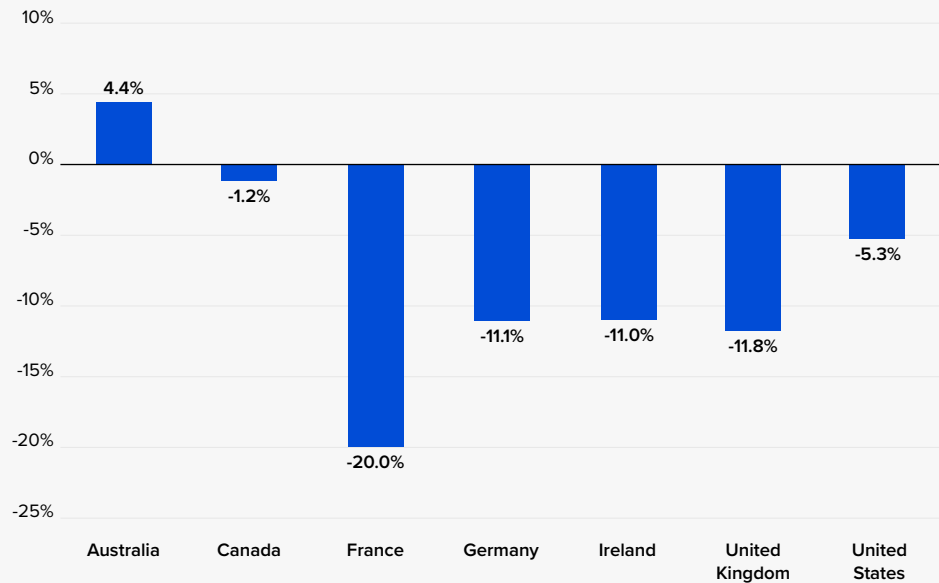


Source: Toptal, based on [Indeed Hiring Lab](#) data

QoQ trends in new job postings were broadly negative, with Australia the only country posting an increase (4.3%). Decreases ranged from 1.5% for the United States to 5.3% for France, with Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom all declining between 5.1% and 5.2%.

Figure 2 shows YoY trends.

Figure 2  
Year-Over-Year Change in Job Postings in US and Other Large Economies



Source: Toptal, based on [Indeed Hiring Lab](#) data

Job postings in most countries were down YoY with the exception of Australia, which showed a 4.4% increase.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 speak to the market for jobs at all levels of experience, all professional areas, and all work models (remote, hybrid, or in-office) and should therefore be taken as broad context for the more specific data we share from here on.

## Global Technology Demand Trends

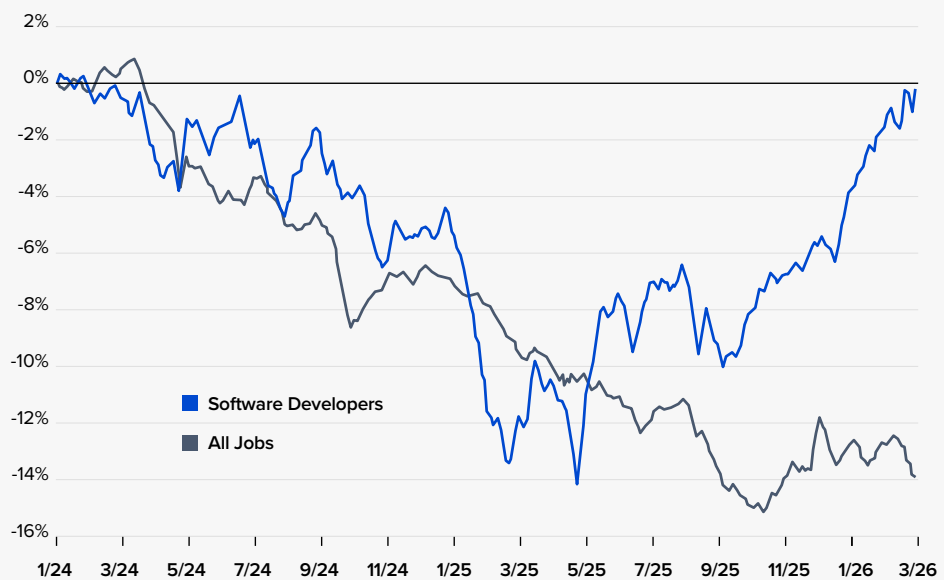
In this section, we discuss changes in the number of job listings for technology positions, the number of hires made, and layoffs at technology companies around the world.

### Technology Job Segment Rebounding Amid Continuing Declines in Broader Market

Global job postings across all professions and levels of experience remain lower than they were two years ago, according to Indeed data. However, as Figure 3 shows, postings for software engineers (a useful proxy for the broader technology sector) started to rebound as of the second quarter of 2025, even as the overall market continued its downward trajectory.

Figure 3

#### Cumulative Change in Global Job Postings: Software Engineers vs. All Roles January 2024 to March 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Indeed Hiring Lab](#) data

This pattern extends beyond software engineering to other key tech roles as well. The [State of the Product Job Market report](#), a biannual analysis of technology hiring trends, notes that there were 75% more open product manager roles at technology companies around the world in March 2026 than there had been three years before.

Several factors may contribute to this rebound. Many organizations continue to prioritize investments in software development, cloud infrastructure, and AI-related capabilities even while slowing hiring in other functions. What's more, the rapid adoption of AI is prompting companies to embark on initiatives and investments that they wouldn't otherwise, thereby increasing the need for technical talent. The data suggests that AI is functioning as a complement to software engineers, rather than a substitute.

While Indeed provides a useful view of broad job posting trends, note that large career platforms can be more susceptible to ghost job posts than more specialized job boards.

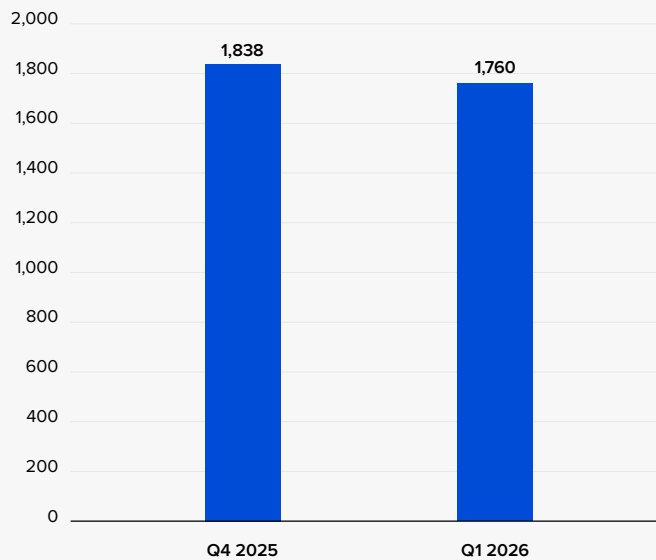
### Changes in Technology Job Listings

We now examine trends in job postings on Hacker News. As a leading platform for news and talent sourcing, Hacker News is a bellwether of job posting trends for technology professionals. Because of its relationship with the prestigious accelerator Y Combinator, Hacker News posts jobs primarily from employers that are either former or current startups, or otherwise have technology-driven business models. Hence, developer positions are most strongly represented on this job board. Figure 4 shows the 4.2% QoQ decrease in technology job postings on that site. These roles include all experience levels and work models (i.e., remote, hybrid, and in-office).

Figure 4

#### Quarter-Over-Quarter Change in Global Technology Job Postings on Hacker News

-4.2% | 



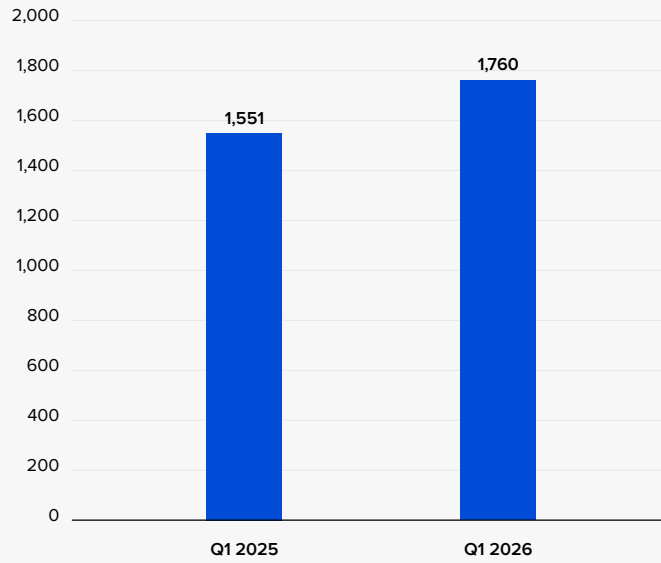
Source: Toptal, based on [Hacker News Hiring](#) data

Figure 5 demonstrates a positive YoY trend with a 13.5% increase in postings. The larger historical context here is that demand, as measured by job postings on Hacker News, is down substantially versus a few years ago. The number of job postings in Q1 2026 represents approximately a 43% decrease from the number of postings in Q4 2022.

Figure 5

### Year-Over-Year Change in Global Technology Job Postings on Hacker News

+13.5%



Source: Toptal, based on [Hacker News Hiring](#) data

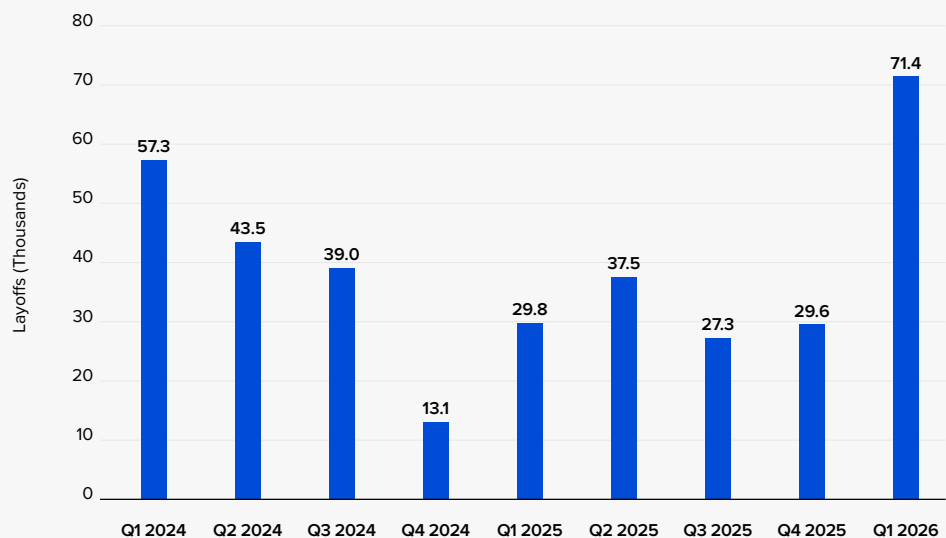
### Global Tech Layoffs

According to data from Layoffs.fyi, a real-time aggregator that is regularly cited by *The Wall Street Journal*, Bloomberg, and TechCrunch, layoffs at technology companies increased sharply QoQ, rising 142% from Q4 2025 to Q1 2026. Layoffs also increased 140% YoY (Q1 2026 versus Q1 2025).

Figure 6

### Global Tech Layoffs Increase Quarter Over Quarter and Year Over Year

Layoffs of Technology Company Employees, Q1 2024-Q1 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Layoffs.fyi](#) data

In Q1 2026, Oracle was the tech company most impacted by layoffs, accounting for approximately 42% of the quarter's total. Layoffs remained highly concentrated overall: The top five most affected companies, Oracle, Amazon, Block, Wisetech, and ASML, accounted for 75% of all layoffs in the quarter.

While this surge in layoffs may at first seem at odds with the data in Figure 3 showing rebounding demand for software engineers, it's important to keep in mind that tech company layoffs apply to all role types, seniority levels, and functions. Because layoff data captures workforce reductions broadly while demand data reflects targeted appetite for specific talent profiles, the two can move in opposite directions simultaneously.

Nevertheless, workforce reductions at large technology companies remain an important signal of broader market conditions, in this case likely pointing to budget consciousness, structural pivots, shifting investment priorities, and ongoing volatility driven in part by AI adoption. Other possible contributing factors to the surge in tech layoffs include US economic uncertainty, high interest rates, and the hopes of capitalizing on the stock market's statistical tendency [to respond positively to layoffs](#) under certain conditions.

It is worth noting that while other industries are hiring laid-off technology workers amid restructuring in the tech sector itself, many of the people affected in the past few quarters may be continuing their job searches, impacting the supply side of the talent market and compensation negotiations.

While all of these factors point to restructuring and volatility in both the technology and broader job market, they do not, as of Q1 2026, reflect weakening demand for experienced professional services and technology talent. See [Market Strength Scores for Technology and Professional Services](#) for details on the demand growth seen in this segment in Q1 and [Recommended Further Reading](#) for more information about recent technology company layoffs.

## Select US Demand and Hiring Trends

Updated Bureau of Labor Statistics data shows the US economy added [116,000 jobs](#) in all of 2025, compared to [1.4 million in 2024](#). So far, 2026 looks more positive, with estimated gains of approximately 205,000 jobs. Keep in mind, this data is preliminary and prone to revisions, and monthly trends have been volatile, with [gains in January](#), [losses in February](#), and a [rebound in March](#).

A closer look at the labor market reveals that specific segments like experienced technology professionals are showing relative resilience amid this volatility.

### US Technology, Information, Finance, and Media Hiring Trends

To consider US technology and professional services hiring trends, we turn to LinkedIn, and then to Staffing Industry Analysts (SIA).



## -0.2%

YoY change in hiring for the US technology, information, and media sector  
Source: [LinkedIn](#) data

LinkedIn's [March Workforce Report](#), which looks at US hiring data through February 2026, showed hiring in the US technology, information, and media sector was essentially flat YoY, at -0.2%. This follows a 6.2% YoY increase in Q4 2025.



## +1%

YoY change in US professional services staffing hours  
Source: [Staffing Industry Analysts](#) data

SIA's [Bullhorn Staffing Indicator index](#), which tracks hours for IT staffing and professional services including engineering, information technology, and finance, showed a 1% YoY increase in professional services hours as of the end of Q1 2026, following a 3% decline in Q4. IT staffing hours also increased, by 3.0% YoY.



## +3%

YoY change in US IT staffing hours  
Source: [Staffing Industry Analysts](#) data

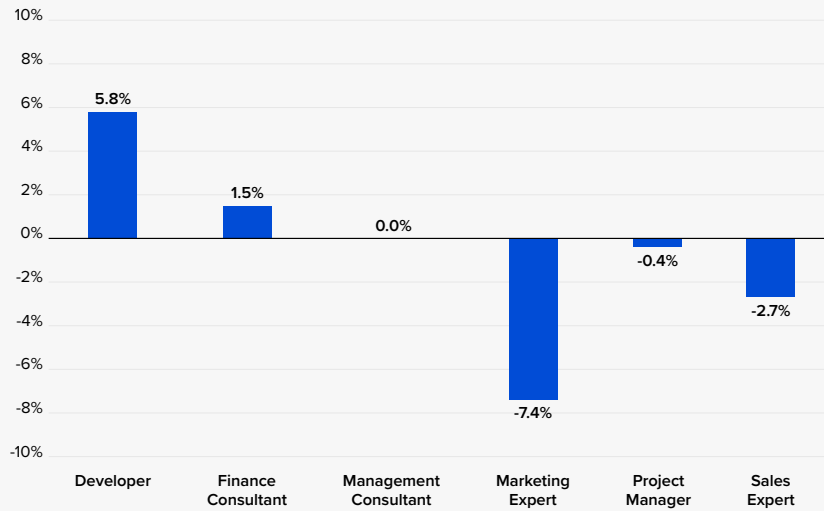
### US Job Postings for Select Technology and Professional Services Areas

We now turn to Indeed for trends in six key areas of technology and professional services, with an understanding that such a large platform may be more susceptible to ghost job posts than a niche job board like Hacker News. (This possibility is not a reflection of Indeed as a platform, but rather of the companies posting the jobs.)

The Indeed data differs from the data included in the Toptal Market Strength Scores in a few ways. It includes all experience levels (including entry-level roles) as well as all work models (including in-office work). Additionally, Indeed's job categories are more broadly defined than the way Toptal defines areas of expertise (i.e., "developers" may include data scientists, information security engineers, and so on).

Figure 7

### Changes in US Job Postings for 6 Key Areas of Expertise on Indeed Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q4 2025 vs. Q1 2026



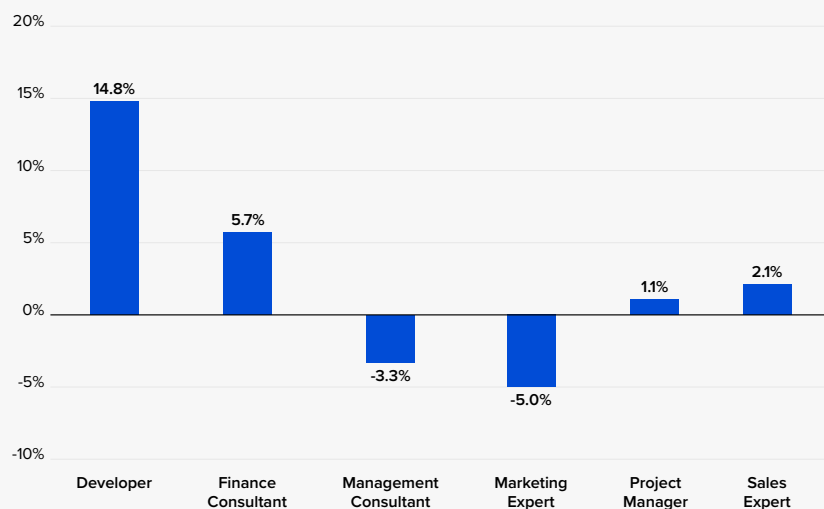
Source: Toptal, based on [Indeed Hiring Lab](#) data

The results show mixed QoQ trends. Developer roles led with a 5.8% increase, followed by finance consultants at 1.5%. Job postings for management consultants were flat. Marketing experts declined 7.4%, sales experts 2.7%, and project managers 0.4%. This is a departure from Q4 2025, when all six areas showed positive QoQ trends.

Figure 8 shows mostly positive YoY trends, with developer roles presenting the strongest gain at 14.8%, followed by finance consultants at 5.7%. Job postings for project managers and sales experts also rose slightly. Management consultants and marketing experts showed YoY declines.

Figure 8

### Changes in US Job Postings for 6 Key Areas of Expertise on Indeed Year-Over-Year Trends, Q1 2025 vs. Q1 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Indeed Hiring Lab](#) data

## Select Remote and Hybrid Demand and Hiring Trends

### Postings on We Work Remotely Are Down QoQ and YoY

For a look at remote jobs aligned with Toptal's areas of expertise, we turn to the world's largest remote job board, We Work Remotely (WWR). The WWR data, which Toptal has exclusive access to, differs from the Indeed data in that it is for remote and hybrid jobs only. WWR data also differs from Toptal Market Strength Scores. It includes entry-level roles instead of focusing on those that require five or more years of experience, combines some areas of expertise into single categories (e.g., sales and marketing experts), and doesn't include hiring activity.

Figure 9 shows a 12.4% QoQ decrease in postings on WWR for roles deemed most comparable to Toptal's areas of expertise. This follows a 10.9% QoQ decrease in Q4 2025.

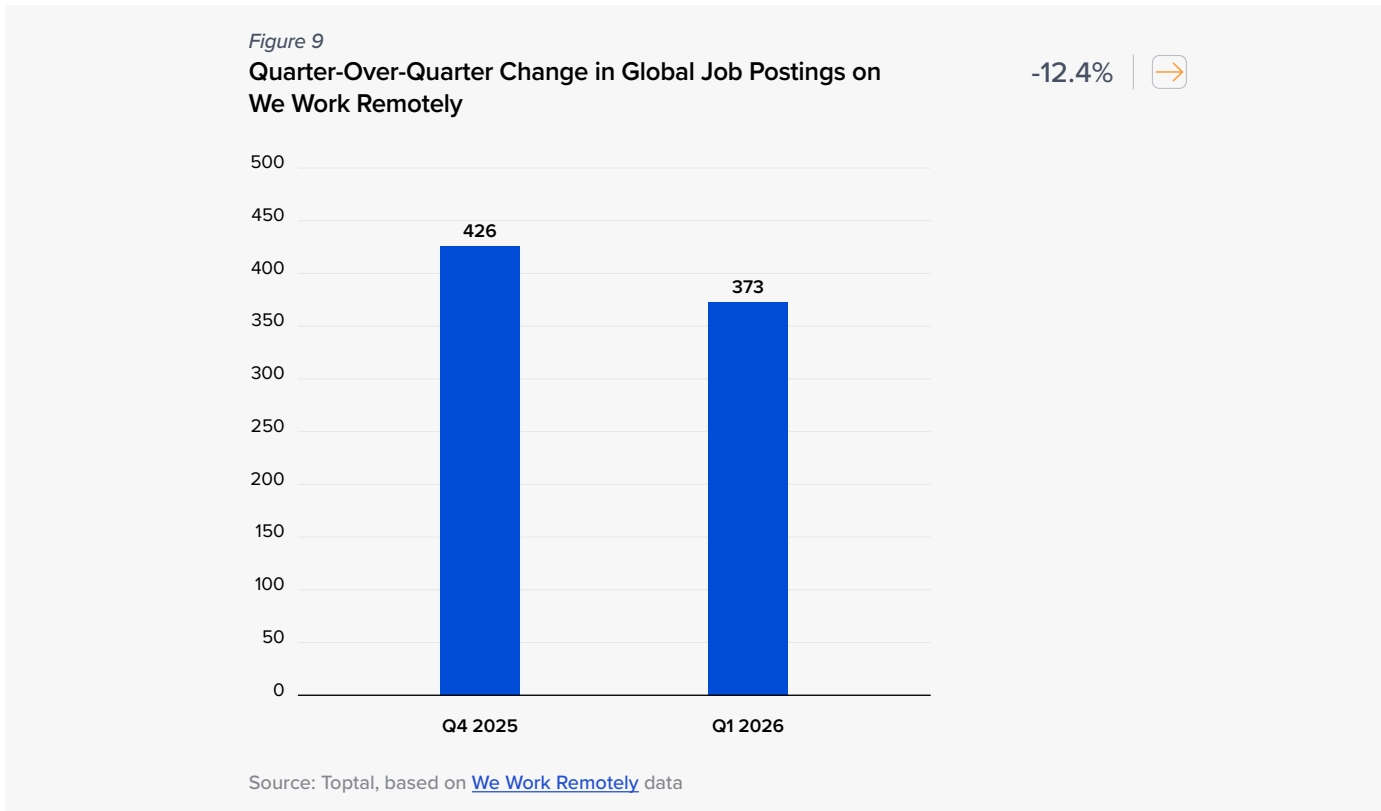
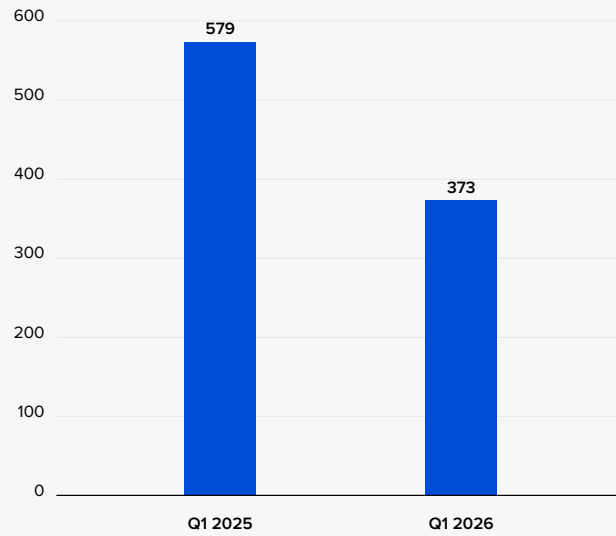


Figure 10 shows a 35.6% YoY decrease in postings. This follows a nearly flat Q4 2025 YoY trend with a 0.2% decrease.

Figure 10

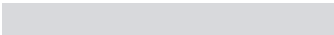
### Year-Over-Year Change in Global Job Postings on We Work Remotely

-35.6% 

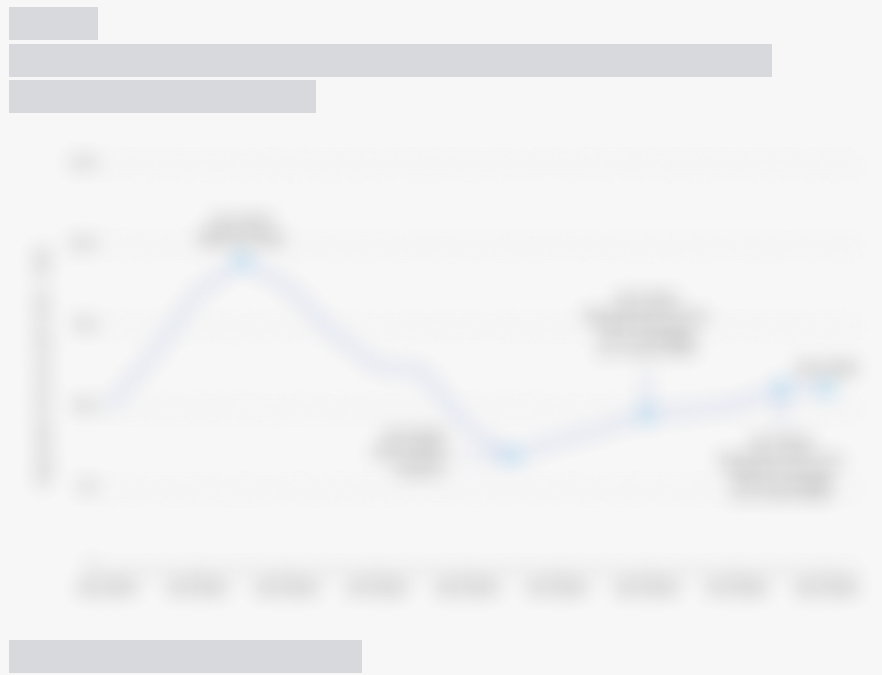


Source: Toptal, based on [We Work Remotely](#) data

### US Demand for Distributed Technology and Professional Services Experts

We now turn to Lightcast data for a look at remote and hybrid technology and professional services roles requiring at least five years of experience. Demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, 





It is worth noting the contrast between the declines in job postings on WWR seen in Figures 9 and 10, and the rebound we are discussing here. The difference likely reflects the composition of each dataset: WWR captures global postings for all experience levels, while Figure 11 illustrates US demand for high-skilled technology and professional services professionals with five or more years of experience. The divergence suggests that demand for this more specialized segment is recovering faster than the broader remote and hybrid job market.

This data also differs slightly from Toptal Market Strength Scores we will discuss in the next section, in that it is US-only and doesn't include hiring activity.

## Market Strength Scores for Technology and Professional Services

Toptal Market Strength Scores apply to technology and professional services personnel with five or more years of experience. The scores equally weight hiring activity and stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation. First, we will discuss trends for remote and hybrid technology and professional services roles, then for all work models, including remote, hybrid, and in-office. **Because Toptal Market Strength Scores are specific to global demand for roles that require five or more years of experience, they differ from other data presented in the report.**

### Remote and Hybrid Technology and Professional Services Market Strength

As of Q1 2026, market strength for the experienced remote and hybrid technology and professional services job market increased 8.9% QoQ for a Toptal Market Strength Score of Moderate. Market strength increased 4.8% YoY (Q1 2026 versus Q1 2025), also earning a score of Moderate.

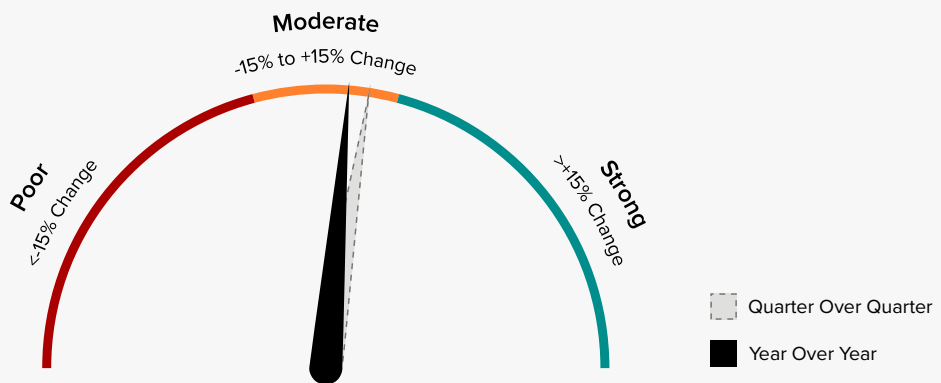
Figure 12

#### REMOTE AND HYBRID ROLES

#### Technology and Professional Services Market Strength

+8.9% QoQ 

+4.8% YoY 



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The Toptal Market Strength Score is a combined metric that includes the number of job listings, their compensation, and average monthly hires. It takes into account full-time, part-time, and hourly jobs.

The QoQ score reflects a 15.6% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, and a 2.2% increase in hiring. Job postings increased 15% for full-time roles and 17% for part-time roles, but decreased 4% for hourly roles. Compensation increased 1% for full-time roles, was flat for hourly roles, and decreased 2% for part-time roles.

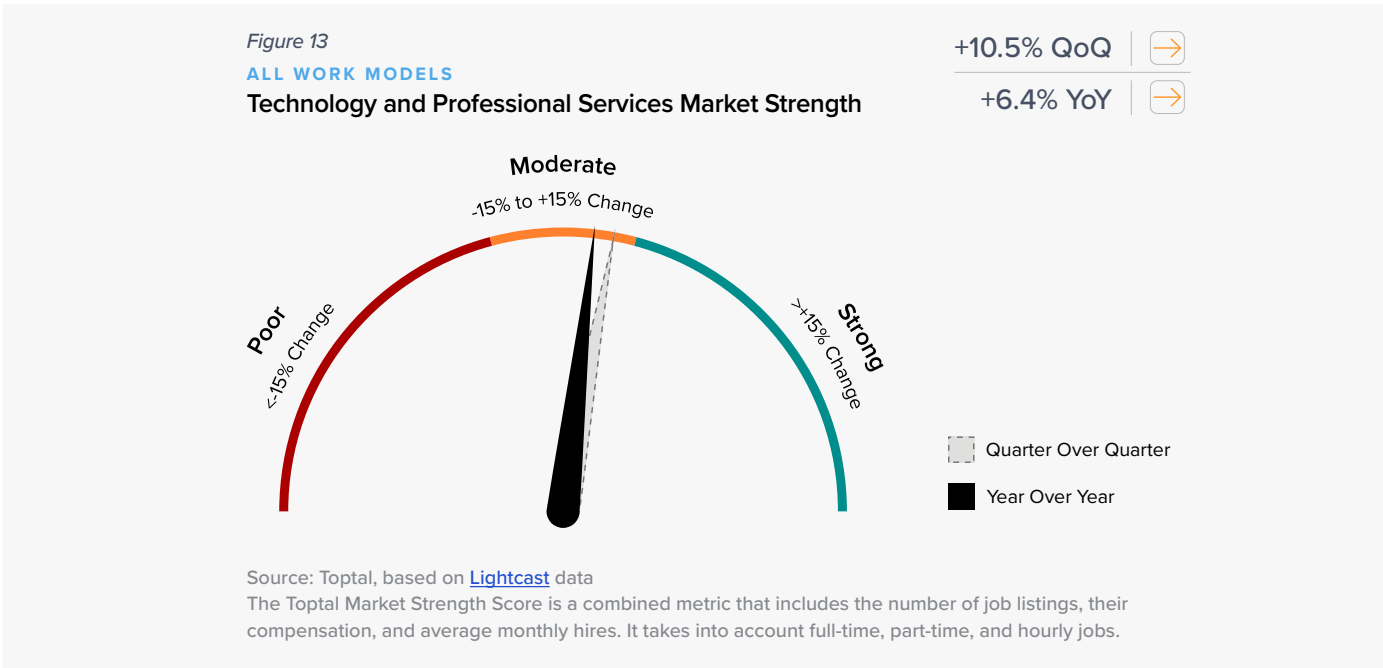
The YoY score reflects a 2.8% decrease in hiring and a 12.5% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation. Job postings increased 9% for full-time roles and 44% for part-time roles, but decreased by 56% for hourly roles. Compensation increased approximately 3% for full-time positions and 14% for hourly roles, but decreased by 11% for part-time roles.

These trends indicate that demand is stronger than it was a year ago, though the decline in hiring suggests employers remain cautious about adding headcount despite increased posting activity. It is also possible that some of this demand is too recent to have yet translated into actual hiring.

Note that while the market strength scores above reflect remote and hybrid demand, hiring data is only available for all work models (including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles) and that figure is used in the score calculations. Also keep in mind that in the general market, hourly and part-time roles represent a much smaller portion of new job postings relative to full-time roles, and hence tend to show more volatility.

### Overall Technology and Professional Services Market Strength

Our primary Toptal Market Strength Scores apply to remote and hybrid work. But we also track trends for the overall market, which includes in-office roles. As of Q1 2026, market strength for the overall experienced technology and professional services job market (including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles) increased 10.5% QoQ for a score of Moderate. Market strength increased 6.4% YoY (Q1 2026 versus Q1 2025) for a score of Moderate.



The overall technology and professional services market (which includes all work models) slightly outperformed the remote and hybrid market. Though the gap between the scores is small (10.5% versus 8.9% for QoQ, and 6.4% versus 4.8% for YoY), the fact that the combined work models performed better than remote and hybrid roles alone means in-office roles had to outperform to bring up the score.

The 10.5% QoQ increase in market strength reflects an 18.8% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, and a 2.2% increase in hiring activity. Job postings increased 17% for full-time roles, 21% for part-time roles, and 14% for hourly roles. Compensation increased 1% for both full-time and part-time roles, and 6% for hourly roles.

The 6.4% YoY rise in market strength reflects a 2.8% decrease in hiring and a 15.6% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation. Job postings increased 12% for full-time roles and 29% for part-time roles, but decreased by 23% for hourly roles. Compensation increased 3% for full-time roles and 9% for hourly roles, but fell by 1% for part-time positions.

# US Job Market Forecast for Q2 2026

Toptal has developed a statistical model that has predictive value for three key US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) employment indices:

- + All job openings
- + Professional services job openings
- + Information services job openings (the BLS's closest measure of technology jobs)

Our model also has predictive value for the market segment most relevant to Toptal:

- + Remote and hybrid professional services and technology job openings that require at least five years of experience; we use Lightcast data for this projection because it can be segmented more granularly than BLS information.

## US Job Market Forecast Signals

Toptal's predictive model suggests the following market signals for Q2 2026:

- + **Job growth for all US roles is projected to decline moderately.**  
BLS data shows that job growth fell at a rate of about 12% per year for the last several years. Our model suggests job growth will decline in Q2, but at a smaller magnitude than the BLS average.
- + **Job growth for all US professional services roles is projected to decline moderately.**  
BLS data shows that professional services job growth also fell at a rate of about 12% per year for the last several years. Our model suggests job growth in Q2 is likely to continue on this trajectory.
- + **Job growth for all US information services (technology) roles is projected to be effectively flat.**  
BLS data shows that information services job growth fell at a rate of about 22% per year for the last several years. In a departure from the BLS trends, the picture for technology-specific roles is more optimistic: According to our model, job growth for this segment in Q2 2026 will be effectively flat.

Potential drivers for all technology roles outperforming the BLS historical average include companies moving beyond AI experimentation to large-scale implementation, professionals reskilling to better meet demand for AI talent, and the market making up lost ground after a period of sharp declines and restructuring.

**+ Job growth for experienced remote and hybrid US professional services and technology roles is projected to increase moderately.**

Lightcast data shows that job growth in this segment rose at a rate of about 25% per year for the last several years. According to our model, job growth for this segment will continue to increase in Q2, but at a smaller magnitude than its historical average.

**Forecast Methodology**

The model is based on the past four years of remote and hybrid job postings on the world's largest remote work job board, We Work Remotely (WWR); proprietary data that Toptal has exclusive access to. The model also incorporates a set of macroeconomic variables, including the [U6 unemployment rate](#) (which captures both unemployment and [underemployment](#)), high-yield credit spreads, hiring rates, and inflation-adjusted GDP.

The model identifies historical relationships between these indicators and labor market growth to generate projections. The resulting signals are then compared to Toptal's own client demand for remote and hybrid professionals for the same time frame. For more information on methodology and data sources, see the [Appendix](#).

Remote and hybrid hiring patterns hold promise as predictive signals for broader job market trends for two reasons:

- + Companies may tap the larger global talent pool to fill urgent needs, foreshadowing longer-term hiring plans.
- + Organizations may pilot initiatives with distributed workers, then scale up successful experiments with broader hiring.

**Note that these signals do not constitute complete predictions for Q2 outcomes.**

The US job market is in a period of transition and volatility. While Toptal's forecast model takes this uncertainty into account, the final state of the US job market depends on numerous additional factors that aren't captured in this analysis, so these results should be understood as directional signals.

It is also important to note that correlation does not equal causation. While our data strongly suggests remote and hybrid hiring trends precede US market movements, more research is needed to confirm the mechanisms and understand the implications for growth and hiring in today's rapidly changing technology and talent landscape.

# Demand Trends by Toptal Talent Area of Expertise

We now turn to trends in demand for the areas of expertise most directly comparable with those in the Toptal Talent Network. Toptal’s Market Strength Scores take job postings, offered compensation, and hiring into account and apply to roles that require five or more years of experience. For these trends, we are looking at QoQ (Q1 2026 versus Q4 2025) and YoY (Q1 2026 versus Q1 2025).

Our primary market strength scores focus on remote and hybrid roles, given Toptal’s status as a fully distributed company and the world’s largest remote workforce. A clickable preview table of these scores is included below.

We also calculate secondary market strength scores that apply to all work models, including in-office roles, and discuss those in each area of expertise section.

REMOTE/HYBRID JOB MARKET SEGMENT	MARKET STRENGTH SCORE	
	Q o Q	Y o Y
<a href="#">Data Science Experts</a>	+12%	+14%
<a href="#">Designers</a>	+21%	+5%
<a href="#">Developers</a>	+7%	+1%
<a href="#">Finance Consultants</a>	+15%	+15%
<a href="#">Information Security Experts</a>	+20%	-15%
<a href="#">Management Consultants</a>	+7%	-6%
<a href="#">Marketing Experts</a>	+6%	+9%
<a href="#">Product Managers</a>	+15%	+46%
<a href="#">Project Managers</a>	+8%	-5%
<a href="#">Sales Experts</a>	+7%	+9%

The Toptal Market Strength Score includes job listings, compensation, and hiring for full-time, part-time, and hourly roles that require five or more years of experience. Note: Scores for product manager roles are more volatile due to differences in the available data.

Poor <-15% Change    
 Moderate -15% to +15% Change    
 Strong >+15% Change

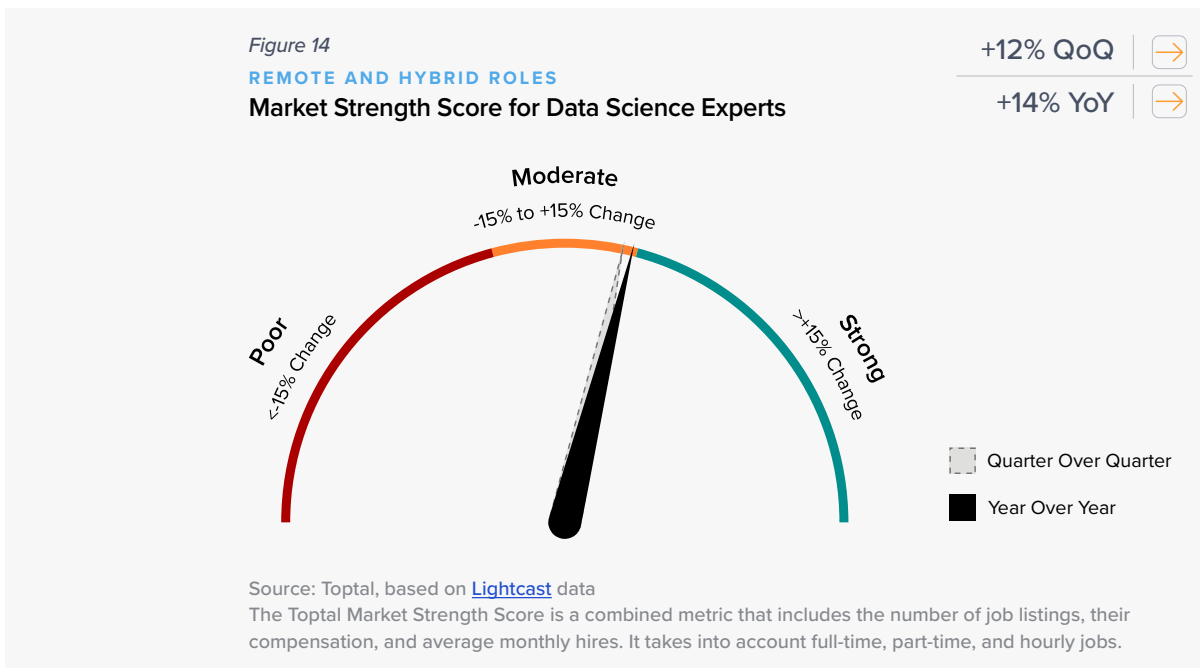
## Data Science Expert Trends

As discussed in the [Introduction](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent the demand for technology and professional services personnel with five or more years of experience. We calculate scores for the remote and hybrid job market and for the overall market, which includes remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The scores are based on QoQ (Q1 2026 versus Q4 2025) and YoY (Q1 2026 versus Q1 2025) changes in the number of new job postings, median offered compensation in those postings, and actual hiring activity.

First, we discuss market strength for remote and hybrid data science expert roles, then move on to all work models.

### Data Science Expert Market Strength: Remote and Hybrid Roles

Figure 14 shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in data science in the first quarter of 2026 versus the fourth quarter of 2025 and the first quarter of 2025. Note that while the market strength score reflects remote and hybrid demand, hiring data is only available for all work models, and that figure is used in this calculation.



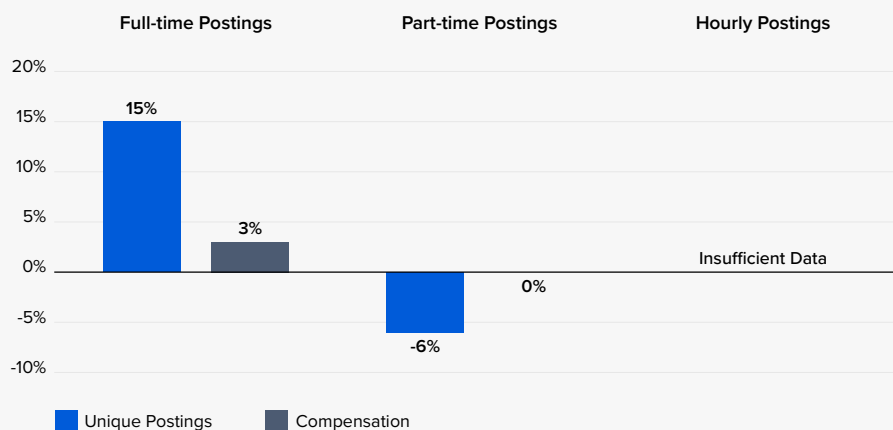
Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid data science roles increased 12% QoQ and 14% YoY, for scores of Moderate.

The QoQ increase was driven primarily by an 18% rise in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a 5% increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected less growth in stated demand but a strong increase in actual hiring.

We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Figure 15

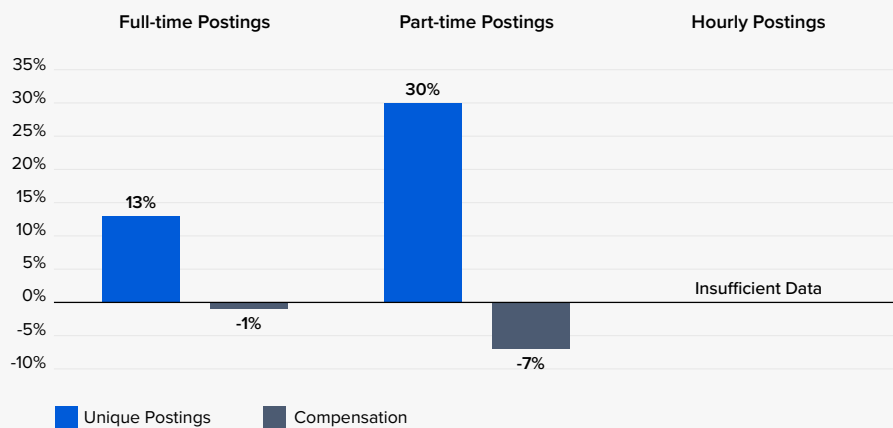
**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Data Science Experts**  
**Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q4 2025 vs. Q1 2026**



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data  
 Note: Part-time role results are based on limited data.

Figure 16

**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Data Science Experts**  
**Year-Over-Year Trends, Q1 2025 vs. Q1 2026**



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data  
 Note: Part-time role results are based on limited data.

Full-time job postings increased 15% QoQ and 13% YoY, while compensation rose 3% QoQ and fell 1% YoY. Part-time job postings decreased 6% QoQ and increased 30% YoY, and compensation was flat QoQ and decreased 7% YoY. These trends indicate a rebound in demand at the start of the year for full-time roles, alongside continued YoY strength in part-time demand. Softer compensation trends likely reflect competition among candidates and more constrained employer budgets.

The findings for part-time roles are based on limited data points and should be taken as general directional indicators of the market. There was insufficient data available for reliable trends in hourly positions.



**+5%**

QoQ change in data science expert hires  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

Hiring activity for data science experts increased 5% QoQ, reflecting expected seasonality, and 17% YoY. This Lightcast hiring data includes all time commitments and work models.



**+17%**

YoY change in data science expert hires  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The analysis above includes demand for positions with five or more years of experience. Demand for positions with 10 or more years of experience (a subset of the prior data) shows some differences. Full-time compensation saw



### Data Science Expert Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. Figure 17 shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in data science, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles.

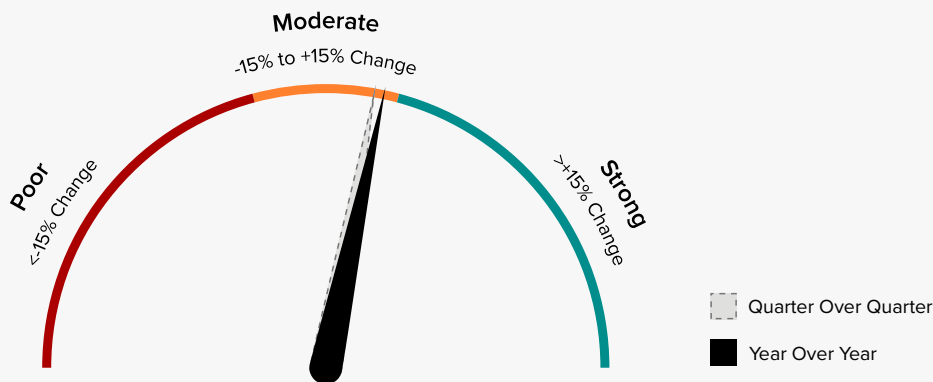
Figure 17

ALL WORK MODELS

### Market Strength Score for Data Science Experts

+10% QoQ

+12% YoY



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The Toptal Market Strength Score is a combined metric that includes the number of job listings, their compensation, and average monthly hires. It takes into account full-time, part-time, and hourly jobs.

Market strength for all experienced data science roles increased 10% QoQ and 12% YoY, for scores of Moderate. The QoQ increase was driven primarily by a 14% rise in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a 5% increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected continued growth in both stated demand and hiring.

The scores and dynamics for all work models and the remote and hybrid market were similar, although the overall market slightly underperformed compared to the remote and hybrid segment both QoQ and YoY.



**Vrinda Dabke**  
VP, Global  
Technology Services  
Delivery, Toptal

### Q1 Commentary

“

The data science job market in Q1 confirmed a structural bifurcation: Specialists with AI-native skills, production deployment experience, and domain depth saw demand outpace supply, while generalist data scientists with little or no deployment experience faced intense competition. Overall hiring was restrained, with employers concentrating their limited budgets on roles and skills tied to AI rather than expanding headcount broadly. Technical expectations continued to rise, with companies requiring data scientists to own data infrastructure, not merely consume clean tables. Proficiency with LLMs emerged as the most requested AI skill, followed by GenAI and NLP, while demand for applied capabilities like RAG, AI agents, and prompt engineering signal that AI fluency is now a baseline expectation rather than a differentiator.

### Q2 Preview

“

In Q2, employers are expected to sustain selective hiring with a sharper emphasis on domain specialization and AI governance. As organizations shift from AI experimentation to enterprise-wide deployment, success will require thoughtful workflow integration and realistic expectations about what the technology can and cannot do. Governance will emerge as a growing differentiator, as questions around bias, transparency, and accountability move from theoretical to urgent, rewarding candidates who can audit and validate AI outputs, in addition to generating them.

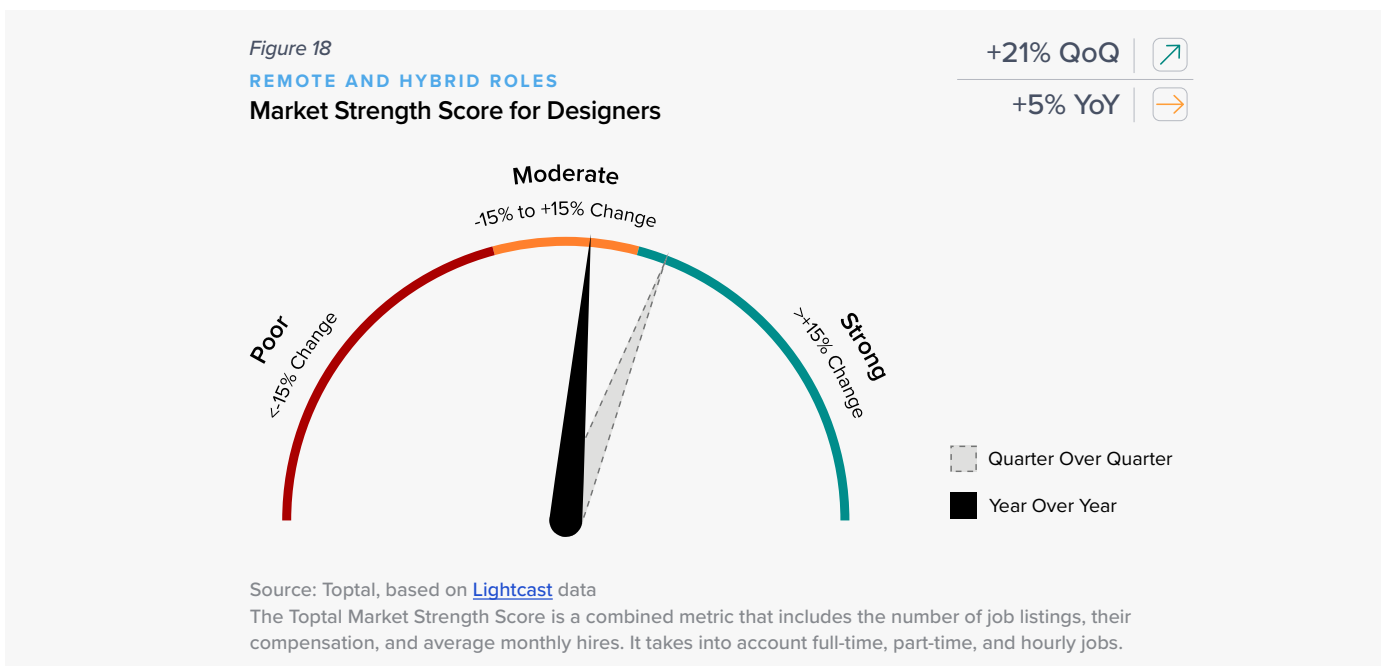
## Designer Trends

As discussed in the [Introduction](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent the demand for technology and professional services personnel with five or more years of experience. We calculate scores for the remote and hybrid job market and for the overall market, which includes remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The scores are based on QoQ (Q1 2026 versus Q4 2025) and YoY (Q1 2026 versus Q1 2025) changes in the number of new job postings, median offered compensation in those postings, and actual hiring activity.

First, we discuss market strength for remote and hybrid designer roles, then move on to all work models.

### Designer Market Strength: Remote and Hybrid Roles

Figure 18 shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in design in the first quarter of 2026 versus the fourth quarter of 2025 and the first quarter of 2025. Note that while the market strength score reflects remote and hybrid demand, hiring data is only available for all work models, and that figure is used in this calculation.



Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid design roles increased 21% QoQ and 5% YoY, for scores of Strong and Moderate.

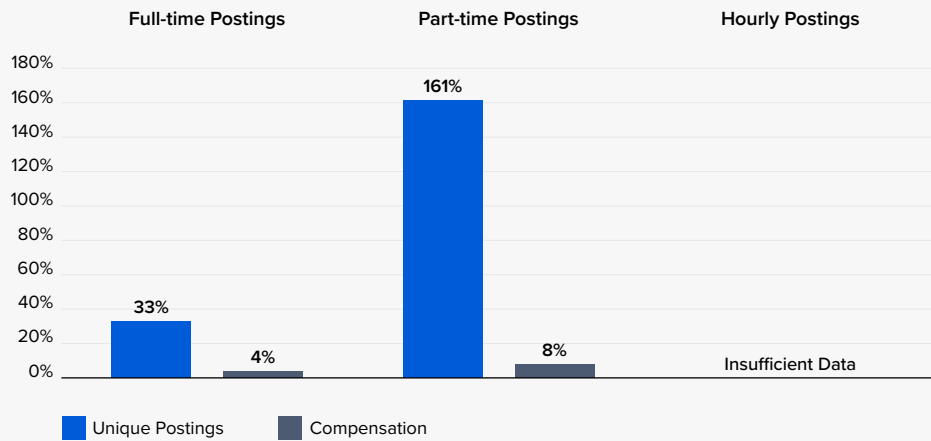
The QoQ score was driven primarily by a 44% rise in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, with hiring contributing more modestly.

The YoY score reflects a pronounced increase in stated demand, moderated by a single-digit decrease in actual hiring activity.

We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Figure 19

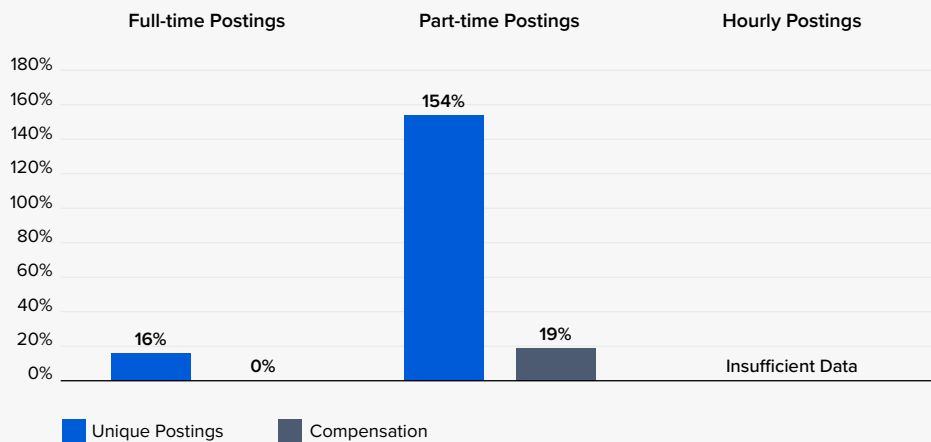
**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Designers**  
 Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q4 2025 vs. Q1 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data  
 Note: Part-time role results are based on limited data.

Figure 20

**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Designers**  
 Year-Over-Year Trends, Q1 2025 vs. Q1 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data  
 Note: Part-time role results are based on limited data.

Full-time job postings increased 33% QoQ and 16% YoY; compensation rose 4% QoQ and remained flat YoY. Part-time job postings increased 161% QoQ and 154% YoY, while compensation increased 8% QoQ and 19% YoY. These trends reflect stronger demand growth than seasonality alone would predict. Compensation has kept pace with demand, with both full-time and part-time positions showing upward trends.


The findings for part-time roles are based on limited data points and should be taken as general directional indicators of the market. There was insufficient data available for reliable trends in hourly positions.

→ **+1.4%**  
 QoQ change in designer hires  
 Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

Hiring activity for designers increased 1.4% QoQ, reflecting expected seasonality, and decreased 5.7% YoY. This Lightcast hiring data includes all time commitments and work models.

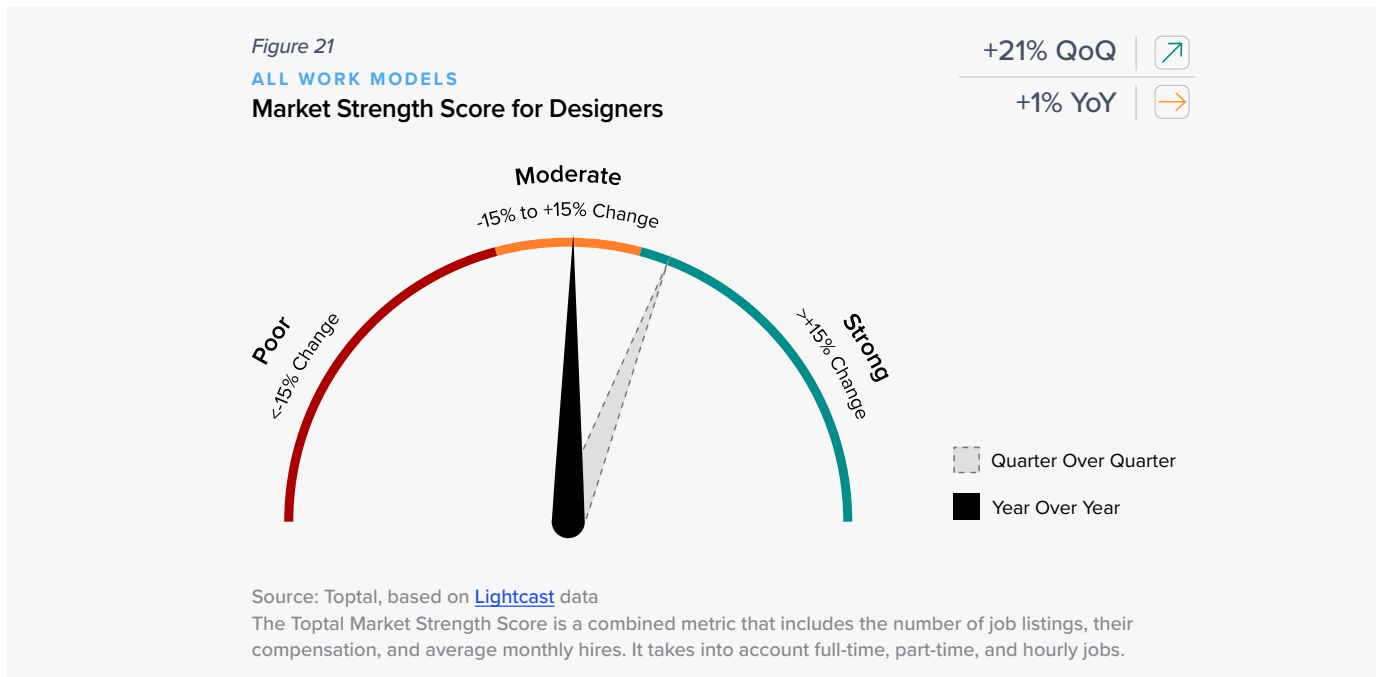
→ **-5.7%**  
 YoY change in designer hires  
 Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The analysis above includes demand for positions with five or more years of experience. Demand for positions with 10 or more years of experience (a subset of the prior data) shows some differences. Full-time compensation was



### Designer Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. Figure 21 shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in design, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles.



Market strength for all experienced design roles increased 21% QoQ and 1% YoY, for scores of Strong and Moderate. The QoQ increase was driven primarily by 41% growth in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation. The YoY score reflected growth in stated demand, moderated by a decline in hiring activity.

The scores and dynamics for all work models and the remote and hybrid market were similar, although demand for all work models slightly underperformed compared to the remote and hybrid segment YoY.



**David Vargas**  
Design Matching  
Team Lead, Toptal

#### Q1 Commentary

“

Last quarter, we saw important shifts related to AI. The practices that used to be exploratory have become part of the day to day. Clients expect designers to be comfortable applying AI tools in real workflows and throughout the digital product life cycle. As a result, demand has shifted toward more specific capabilities. There has been steady interest in product and visual designers who can support UX and move quickly through prototyping while working confidently with these new tools.

#### Q2 Preview

“

As we move into Q2, this shift is likely to become more defined. We expect demand to be more targeted, with an even stronger focus on designers who can apply AI in practical ways within product development and UX/UI, and contribute directly to how ideas are tested and implemented. Branding and motion design are also likely to remain important, as clients continue to look for ways to make their products feel more tangible, interactive, and appealing. Overall, we expect to see continued demand for designers who can connect design decisions with both AI technologies and company objectives, while keeping UX clear, intuitive, and grounded in real user needs.

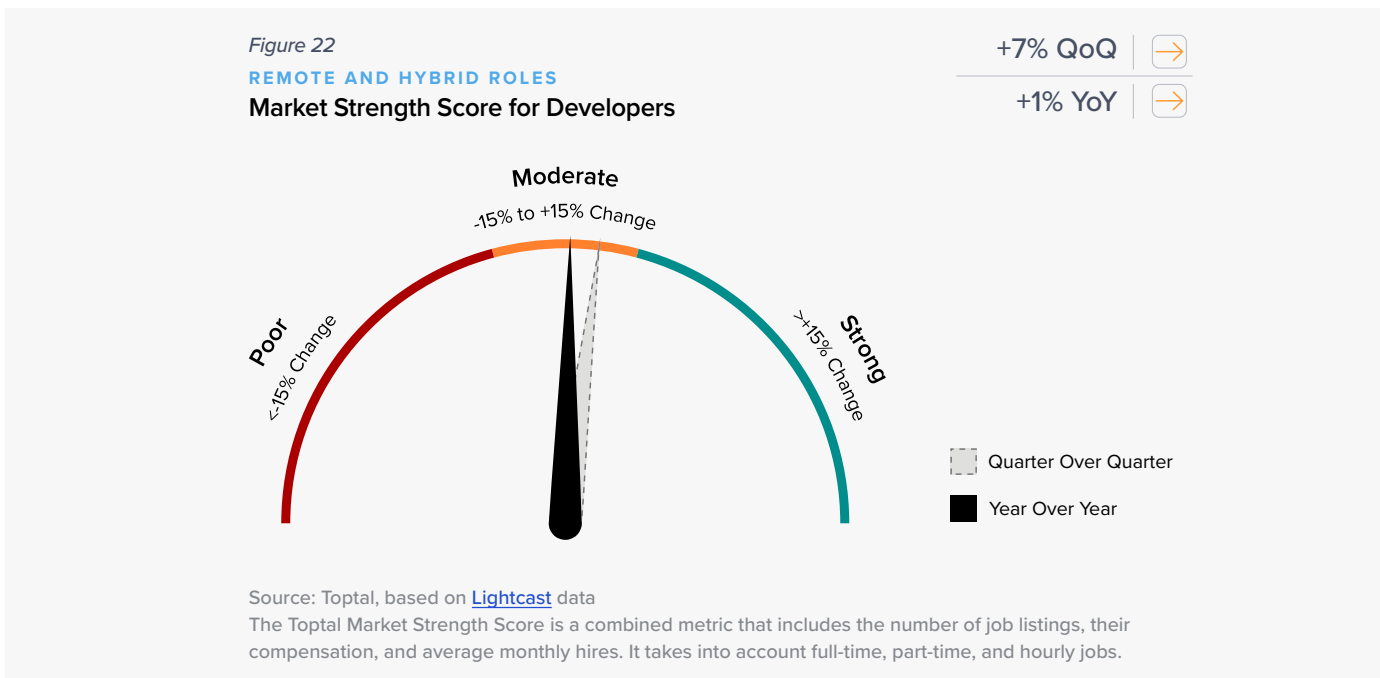
## Developer Trends

As discussed in the [Introduction](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent the demand for technology and professional services personnel with five or more years of experience. We calculate scores for the remote and hybrid job market and for the overall market, which includes remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The scores are based on QoQ (Q1 2026 versus Q4 2025) and YoY (Q1 2026 versus Q1 2025) changes in the number of new job postings, median offered compensation in those postings, and actual hiring activity.

First, we discuss market strength for remote and hybrid developer roles, then move on to all work models.

### Developer Market Strength: Remote and Hybrid Roles

Figure 22 shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in development in the first quarter of 2026 versus the fourth quarter of 2025 and the first quarter of 2025. Note that while the market strength score reflects remote and hybrid demand, hiring data is only available for all work models, and that figure is used in this calculation.



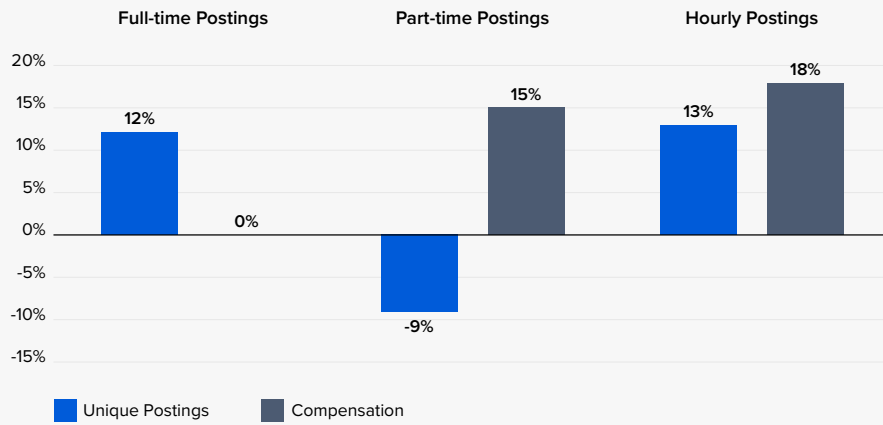
Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid developer roles increased 7% QoQ and 1% YoY, for scores of Moderate.

The QoQ score was driven primarily by a 13% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a smaller increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected more muted growth in stated demand, moderated by a slight decline in hiring activity.

We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Figure 23

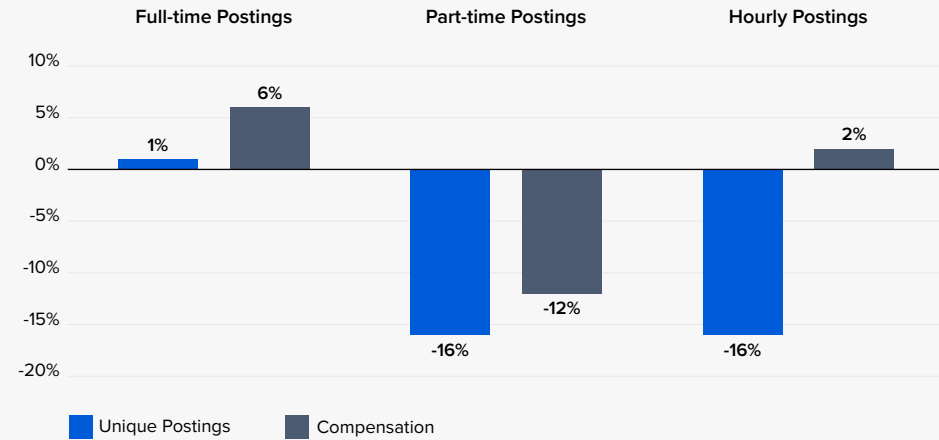
**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Developers**  
 Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q4 2025 vs. Q1 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

Figure 24

**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Developers**  
 Year-Over-Year Trends, Q1 2025 vs. Q1 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

Full-time job postings increased 12% QoQ and 1% YoY, and compensation remained flat QoQ and increased 6% YoY. Part-time job postings decreased 9% QoQ and 16% YoY; compensation increased 15% QoQ and decreased 12% YoY. These trends indicate uneven demand, with growth concentrated in full-time roles alongside weakness in part-time positions. Mixed compensation trends suggest wage growth is uneven, with more volatile patterns in part-time compensation, including short-term gains that have not been sustained on a YoY basis.

Hourly postings increased 13% QoQ and decreased 16% YoY, while compensation increased 18% QoQ and 2% YoY.



**+2%**

QoQ change in developer hires  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

Hiring activity for developers increased 2% QoQ, reflecting expected seasonality, and decreased 4% YoY. This Lightcast hiring data includes all time commitments and work models.



**-4%**

YoY change in developer hires  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The analysis above includes demand for positions with five or more years of experience. Demand for positions with 10 or more years of experience (a subset of the prior data) shows broadly similar patterns. There were, however, more



### Developer Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. Figure 25 shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in development, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles.

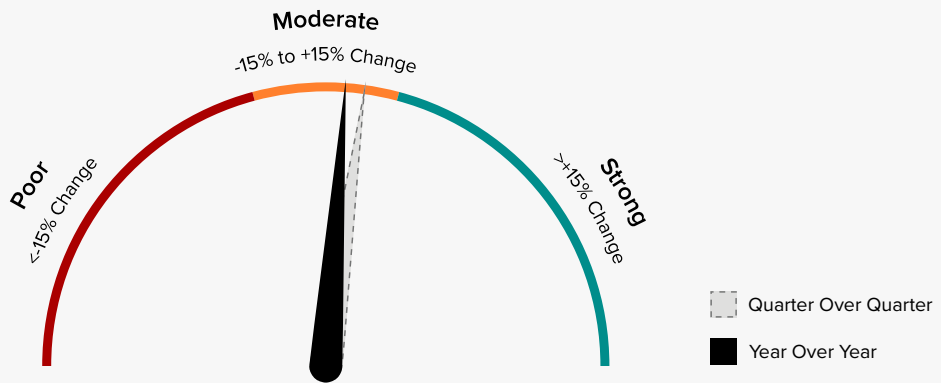
Figure 25

ALL WORK MODELS

### Market Strength Score for Developers

+8% QoQ

+4% YoY



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The Toptal Market Strength Score is a combined metric that includes the number of job listings, their compensation, and average monthly hires. It takes into account full-time, part-time, and hourly jobs.

Market strength for all experienced developer roles increased 8% QoQ and 4% YoY, for scores of Moderate. The QoQ increase was driven primarily by a rise in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a smaller increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected growth in stated demand, moderated by a decline in hiring activity.

The scores and dynamics for all work models and the remote and hybrid market were similar, although the overall market slightly outperformed the remote and hybrid segment YoY.



**Vrinda Dabke**  
VP, Global  
Technology Services  
Delivery, Toptal

#### Q1 Commentary

“

Q1 delivered a measurable but uneven recovery in developer hiring, continuing a cautious rebound that began in early 2024. The market remained split: Surplus applicants competed for generalist roles, while a persistent shortage held for deeply specialized AI talent. Employers hired with precision, prioritizing roles that directly drive revenue, reduce risk, or support AI adoption, opting for fewer but highly effective hires who could demonstrate immediate impact. Roles in highest demand included developers proficient in TypeScript, Python, Java, and Rust, languages closely tied to AI infrastructure and application development, alongside DevOps specialists and data engineers. The quarter confirmed a structural shift as AI fluency moved from a differentiator to a baseline expectation.

#### Q2 Preview

“

Q2 will mark a movement from reassessment to intentional action, with tech investment firmly anchored to operational efficiency, automation maturity, and provable ROI. Organizations aren't pulling back; they're becoming more selective about where and why they hire. Technology leaders face competing priorities, strengthening security while implementing AI and modernizing systems, often with limited capacity. These needs will keep demand high for cybersecurity, cloud infrastructure, and data engineering talent. Mid-to-senior developers with cloud-native, AI integration, and data engineering depth will have significant leverage, whereas generalists will face intensifying competition. The quarter is poised for disciplined growth, with selective and increasingly global sourcing as regional talent shortages persist.

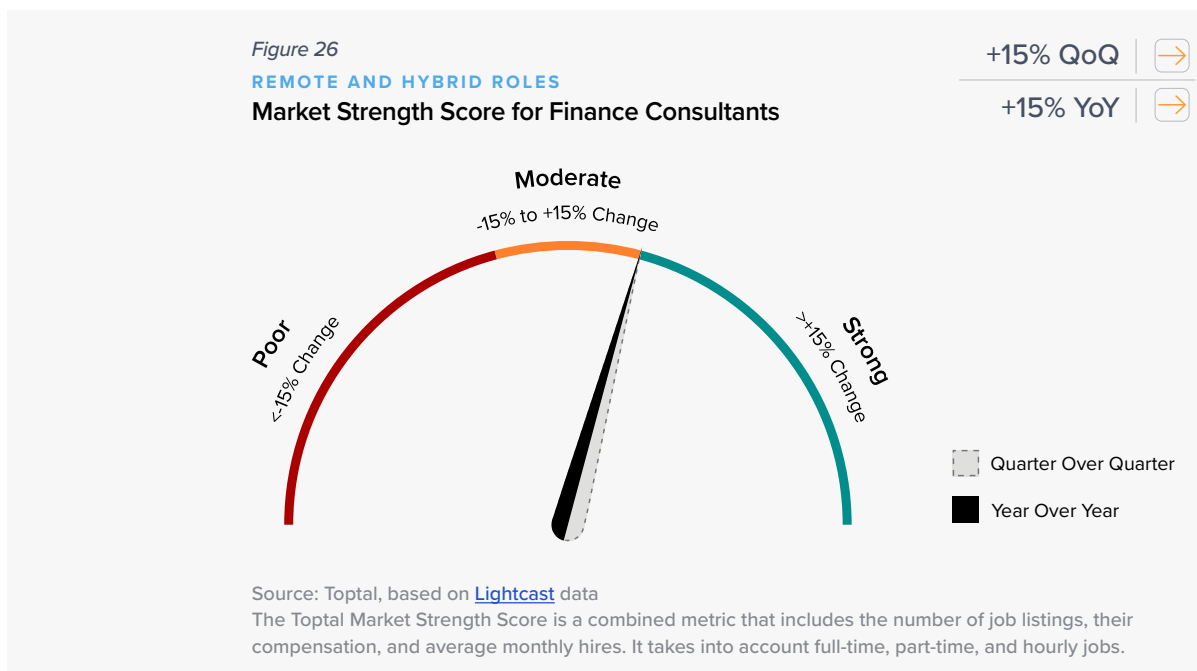
## Finance Consultant Trends

As discussed in the [Introduction](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent the demand for technology and professional services personnel with five or more years of experience. We calculate scores for the remote and hybrid job market and for the overall market, which includes remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The scores are based on QoQ (Q1 2026 versus Q4 2025) and YoY (Q1 2026 versus Q1 2025) changes in the number of new job postings, median offered compensation in those postings, and actual hiring activity.

First, we discuss market strength for remote and hybrid finance consultant roles, then move on to all work models.

### Finance Consultant Market Strength: Remote and Hybrid Roles

Figure 26 shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in finance consulting in the first quarter of 2026 versus the fourth quarter of 2025 and the first quarter of 2025. Note that while the market strength score reflects remote and hybrid demand, hiring data is only available for all work models, and that figure is used in this calculation.



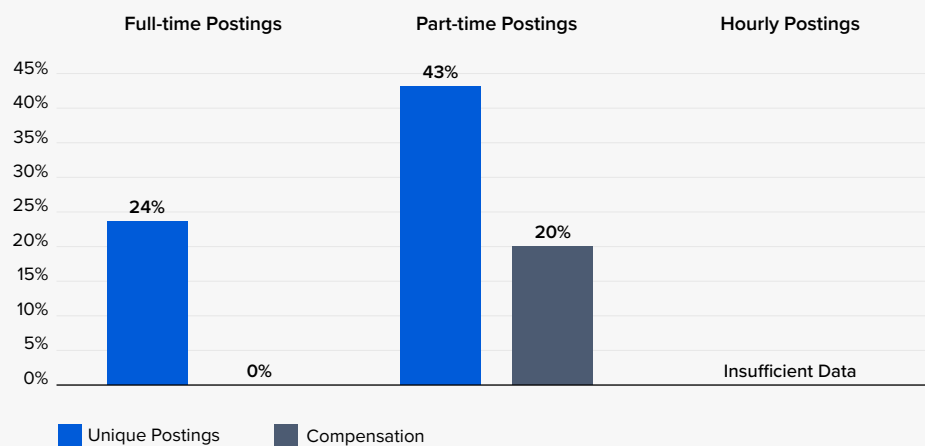
Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid finance consultant roles increased 15% QoQ and YoY, for scores of Moderate.

The QoQ score was driven primarily by a 25% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a more moderate increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected similarly strong growth in stated demand, with hiring also contributing positively to overall market strength.

We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Figure 27

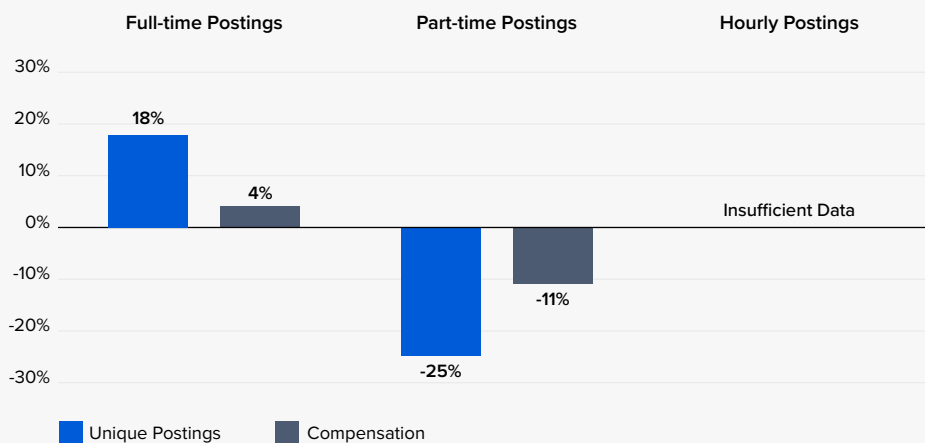
**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Finance Consultants**  
**Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q4 2025 vs. Q1 2026**



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data  
 Note: Part-time role results are based on limited data.

Figure 28

**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Finance Consultants**  
**Year-Over-Year Trends, Q1 2025 vs. Q1 2026**



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data  
 Note: Part-time role results are based on limited data.

Full-time job postings increased 24% QoQ and 18% YoY, while compensation remained flat QoQ and increased 4% YoY. Part-time job postings increased 43% QoQ and decreased 25% YoY; compensation increased 20% QoQ and decreased 11% YoY. These trends reflect stronger demand growth than seasonality alone would predict.

The findings for part-time roles are based on limited data points and should be taken as general directional indicators of the market. There was insufficient data available for reliable trends in hourly positions.



**+5%**

QoQ change in finance consultant hires  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

Hiring activity for finance consultants increased 5% QoQ, reflecting expected seasonality, and increased 7% YoY. This Lightcast hiring data includes all time commitments and work models.



**+7%**

YoY change in finance consultant hires  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The analysis above includes demand for positions with five or more years of experience. Demand for positions with 10 or more years of experience (a subset of the prior data) shows some slight differences. Full-time compensation



### Finance Consultant Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. Figure 29 shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in finance consulting, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles.

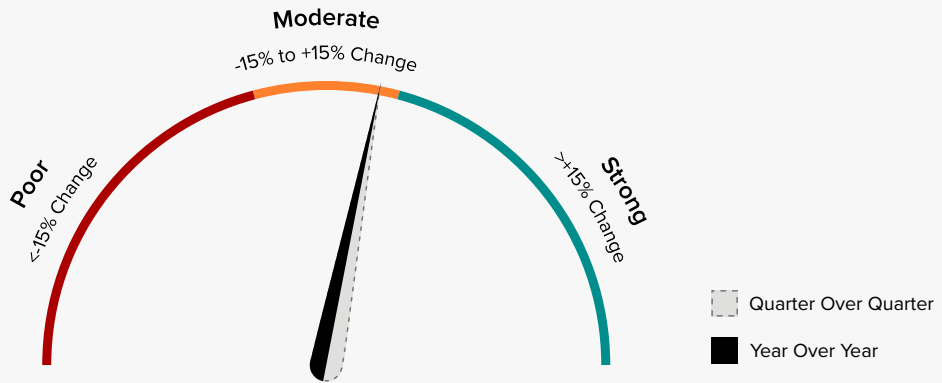
Figure 29

ALL WORK MODELS

### Market Strength Score for Finance Consultants

+11% QoQ

+11% YoY



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The Toptal Market Strength Score is a combined metric that includes the number of job listings, their compensation, and average monthly hires. It takes into account full-time, part-time, and hourly jobs.

Market strength for all experienced finance consultant roles increased 11% both QoQ and YoY, for scores of Moderate. The scores were driven primarily by a rise in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside smaller increases in hiring.

The scores and dynamics for all work models and the remote and hybrid market were broadly similar, although all work models underperformed compared to the remote and hybrid segment both QoQ and YoY.



**Michael Valocchi**  
Senior Client  
Solutions Advisor,  
Toptal

#### Q1 Commentary

“

The demand for core financial modeling skills and capabilities remained significant in Q1 as leaders sought quantitative justification for impending growth and investment decisions. This was particularly strong in the SMB space, where a rise in emerging businesses pursuing funding contributed to sustained demand. A steady M&A market also supported the need for financial expertise across multiple stages of the deal life cycle. In parallel, continued emphasis on diligence across all sectors reinforced the need for highly qualified financial talent.

#### Q2 Preview

“

Lingering macroeconomic uncertainty is expected to sustain a strong focus on data-driven decision-making, supporting continued demand for expertise in financial modeling, analytics, and accounting. Demand for fractional finance and accounting talent is likely to remain steady as emerging companies continue to scale. While the demand for M&A-related skills is expected to persist, it is unlikely to see significant growth in the near term as interest rates and broader market uncertainty are expected to constrain deal activity.

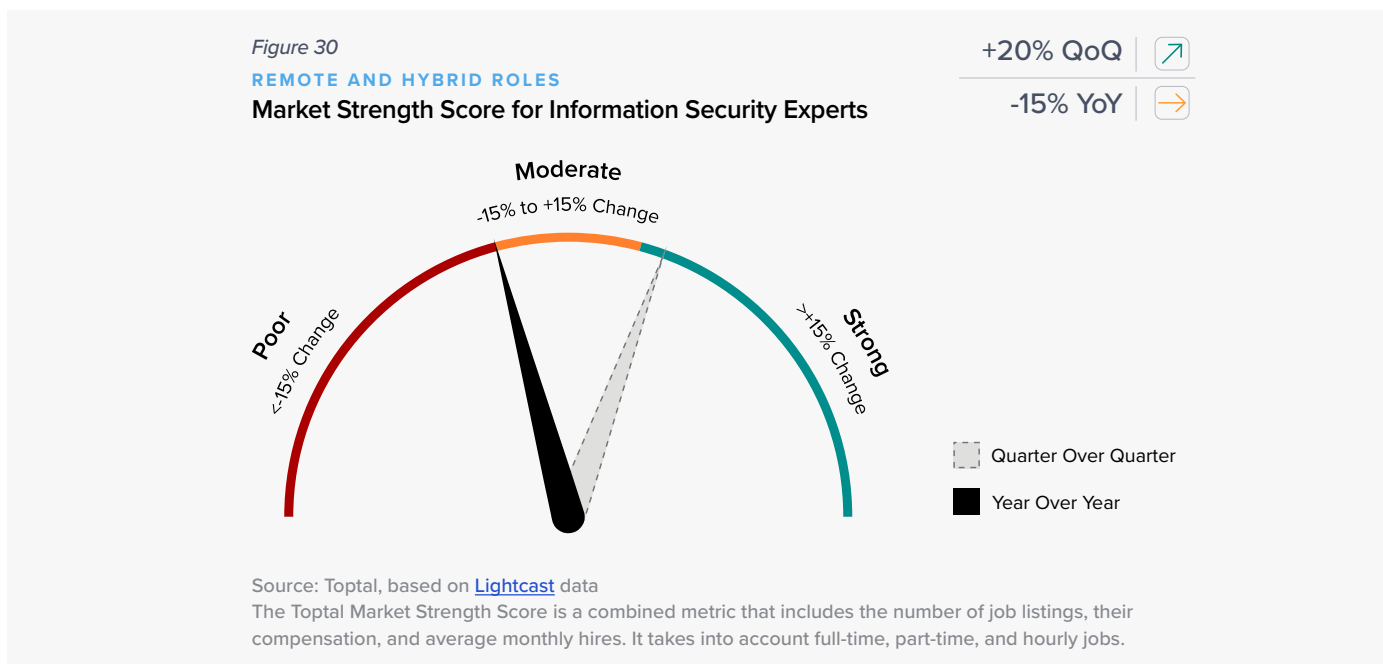
## Information Security Expert Trends

As discussed in the [Introduction](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent the demand for technology and professional services personnel with five or more years of experience. We calculate scores for the remote and hybrid job market and for the overall market, which includes remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The scores are based on QoQ (Q1 2026 versus Q4 2025) and YoY (Q1 2026 versus Q1 2025) changes in the number of new job postings, median offered compensation in those postings, and actual hiring activity.

First, we discuss market strength for remote and hybrid information security expert roles, then move on to all work models.

### Information Security Expert Market Strength: Remote and Hybrid Roles

Figure 30 shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in information security in the first quarter of 2026 versus the fourth quarter of 2025 and the first quarter of 2025. Note that while the market strength score reflects remote and hybrid demand, hiring data is only available for all work models, and that figure is used in this calculation.

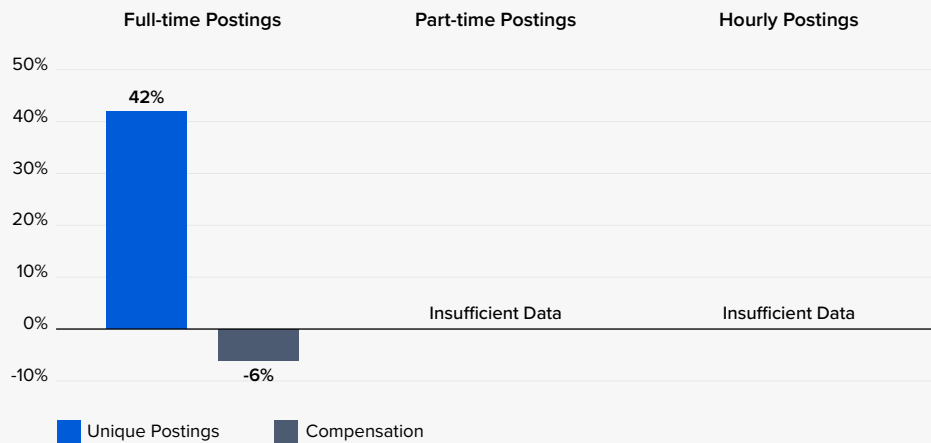


Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid information security roles increased 20% QoQ and decreased 15% YoY, for scores of Strong and Moderate.

The QoQ score was driven primarily by a 33% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a more moderate increase in hiring and represents a slight recovery after three consecutive quarters of double-digit QoQ declines in market strength. The YoY score reflected a decline in stated demand of 26% versus Q1 2025.

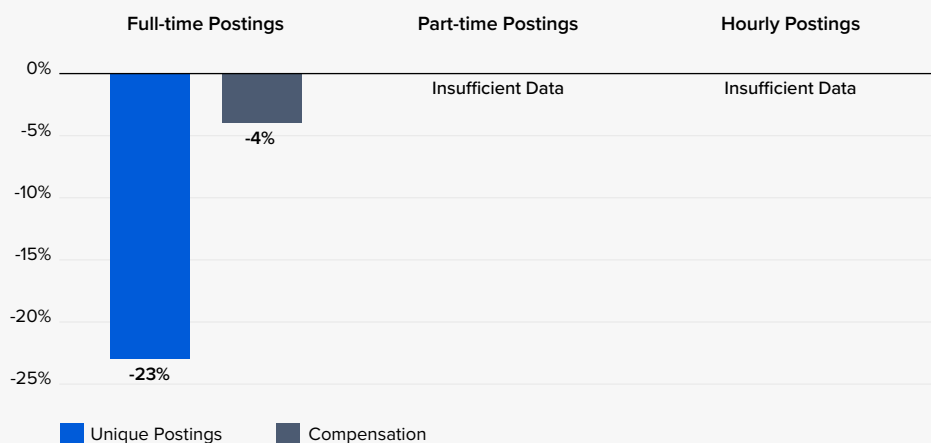
We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

*Figure 31*  
**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Information Security Experts**  
 Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q4 2025 vs. Q1 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

*Figure 32*  
**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Information Security Experts**  
 Year-Over-Year Trends, Q1 2025 vs. Q1 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

Full-time job postings increased 42% QoQ and decreased 23% YoY, and compensation fell 6% QoQ and 4% YoY. These trends indicate a short-term rebound in demand, following a weaker YoY baseline. Declines in compensation suggest that wage growth remains under pressure, likely reflecting competition among candidates and more constrained employer budgets. There was insufficient data available for reliable trends in part-time and hourly positions.



**+5%**

QoQ change in information security expert hires  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

Hiring activity for information security experts increased 5% QoQ, reflecting expected seasonality, and decreased 5% YoY. This Lightcast hiring data includes all time commitments and work models.

The analysis above includes demand for positions with five or more years of experience. Demand for positions with 10 or more years of experience



**-5%**

YoY change in information security expert hires  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

### Information Security Expert Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. Figure 33 shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in information security, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles.

Figure 33

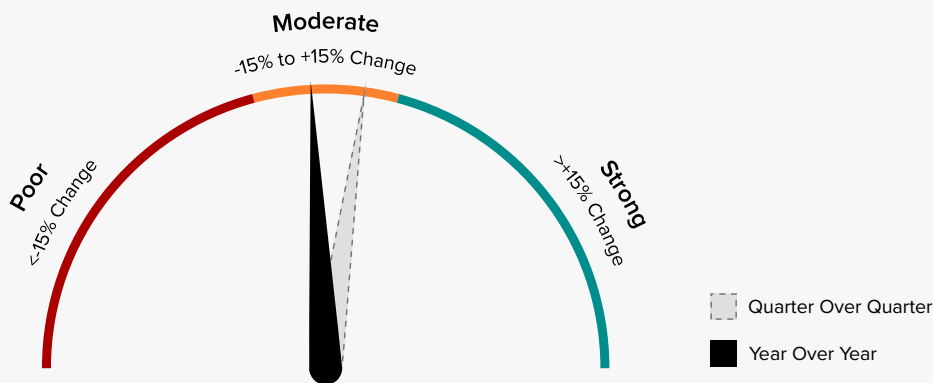
ALL WORK MODELS

### Market Strength Score for Information Security Experts

+8% QoQ



-3% YoY



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The Toptal Market Strength Score is a combined metric that includes the number of job listings, their compensation, and average monthly hires. It takes into account full-time, part-time, and hourly jobs.

Market strength for all experienced information security roles increased 8% QoQ and decreased 3% YoY, for scores of Moderate. The QoQ increase was driven primarily by a rise in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a smaller increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected a decline in both stated demand and hiring, contributing to weaker overall market conditions.

The scores and dynamics for all work models and the remote and hybrid market were directionally similar, although all work models showed weaker QoQ growth and a less pronounced YoY decline compared to the remote and hybrid segment.



**Zohra Ibrahim**  
Practice Director,  
Cyber and  
Information Security  
Services, Toptal

### Q1 Commentary

“

During Q1, the security market shifted from resilience planning to execution, with demand increasing for senior practitioners who could integrate resilience into live environments. AI-driven security operations became a defining theme, driving the need for expertise in model validation, governance, and risk alignment. Identity security evolved to address nonhuman identities as critical attack surfaces, driving more automated, continuously verified governance models. At the same time, regulatory pressure pushed organizations toward evidence-based validation, accelerating the need for talent who can operationalize governance and support audit readiness. Hiring remained selective, concentrated on senior, multidisciplinary talent and fractional leadership capable of delivering immediate, measurable outcomes.

### Q2 Preview

“

In Q2, the focus on managing risks from AI-driven systems and interconnected environments is expected to sharpen, with governance and oversight becoming key priorities. Cyber resilience will continue evolving into a measurable business capability, driving demand for expertise in testing, simulation, and risk quantification. Budget discipline is likely to persist, favoring targeted, outcome-driven engagements and flexible talent models, including fractional executives. Demand will center on senior professionals with cross-domain expertise in security, AI, and business risk, as the need for multidisciplinary leadership continues to outpace supply.

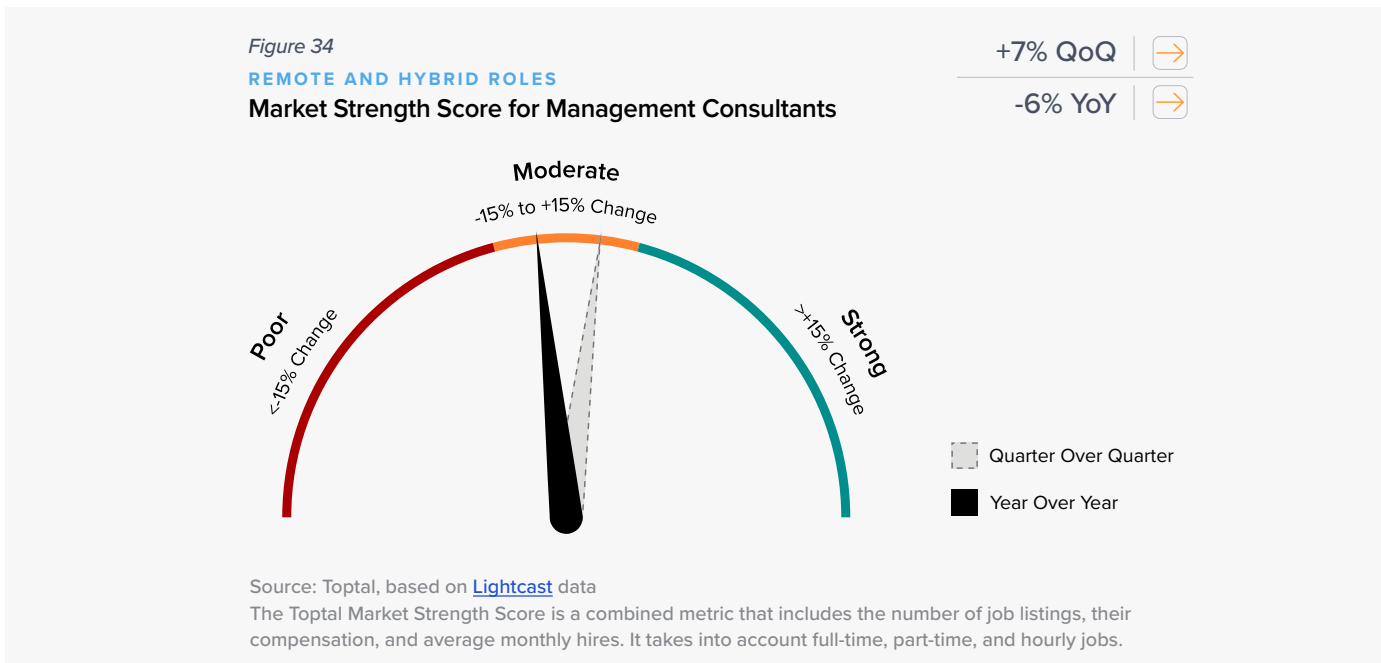
## Management Consultant Trends

As discussed in the [Introduction](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent the demand for technology and professional services personnel with five or more years of experience. We calculate scores for the remote and hybrid job market and for the overall market, which includes remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The scores are based on QoQ (Q1 2026 versus Q4 2025) and YoY (Q1 2026 versus Q1 2025) changes in the number of new job postings, median offered compensation in those postings, and actual hiring activity. (This section covers management consulting roles; see [Finance Consultant Trends](#) for information specific to finance experts.)

First, we discuss market strength for remote and hybrid management consultant roles, then move on to all work models.

### Management Consultant Market Strength: Remote and Hybrid Roles

Figure 34 shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in management consulting in the first quarter of 2026 versus the fourth quarter of 2025 and the first quarter of 2025. Note that while the market strength score reflects remote and hybrid demand, hiring data is only available for all work models, and that figure is used in this calculation.



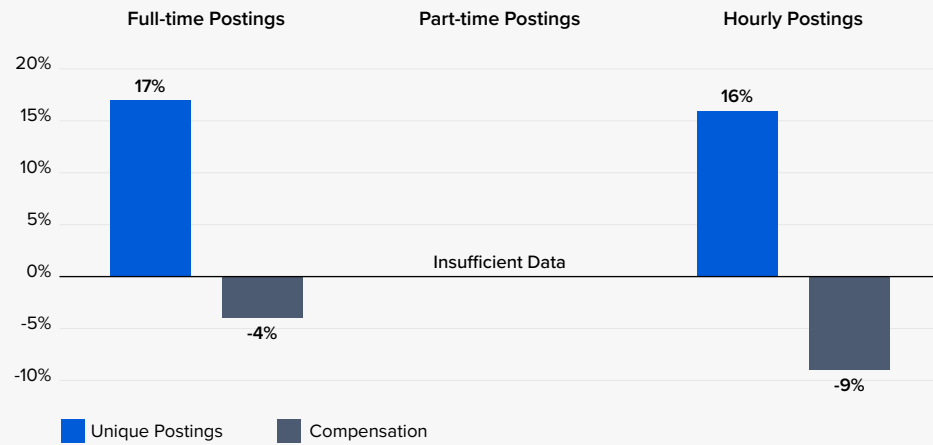
Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid management consulting roles increased 7% QoQ and decreased 6% YoY, for scores of Moderate.

The QoQ score was driven primarily by a 12% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a 3% increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected a decline in stated demand, compounded by a similar decrease in actual hiring activity.

We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Figure 35

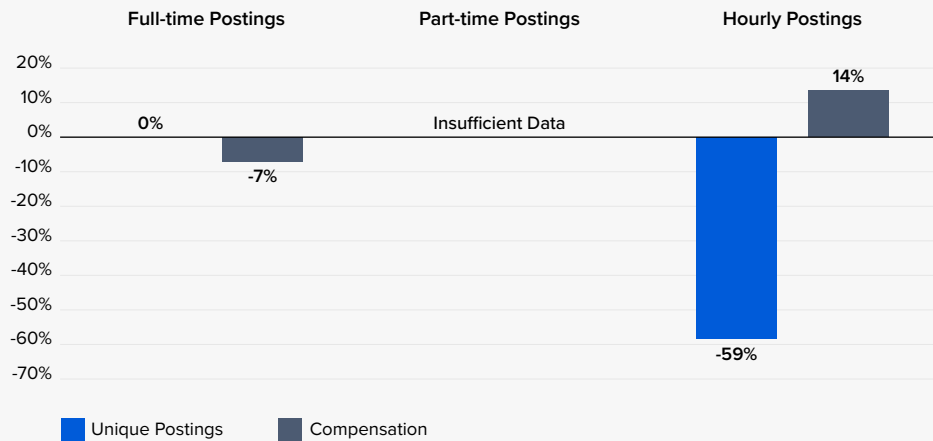
**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Management Consultants**  
**Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q4 2025 vs. Q1 2026**



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data  
 Note: Hourly role results are based on limited data.

Figure 36

**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Management Consultants**  
**Year-Over-Year Trends, Q1 2025 vs. Q1 2026**



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data  
 Note: Hourly role results are based on limited data.

Full-time job postings increased 17% QoQ and remained flat YoY, while compensation fell 4% QoQ and 7% YoY. These trends indicate a short-term rebound in demand, following a weaker YoY baseline. Declines in compensation suggest that wage growth remains under pressure, likely reflecting competition among candidates and more constrained employer budgets.

Hourly postings increased 16% QoQ, while compensation decreased 9%. Postings decreased 59% YoY and compensation increased 14%.

The findings for hourly roles are based on limited data points and should be taken as general directional indicators of the market. There was insufficient data available for reliable trends in part-time positions.

Hiring activity for management consultants increased 3% QoQ, reflecting expected seasonality, and decreased 4% YoY. This Lightcast hiring data includes all time commitments and work models.

The analysis above includes demand for positions with five or more years of experience. Demand for positions with 10 or more years of experience (a subset of the prior data) was broadly similar with a few notable differences. Full-time job postings decreased by



**+3%**

QoQ change in management consultant hires  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data



**-4%**

YoY change in management consultant hires  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

### Management Consultant Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. Figure 37 shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in management consulting, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles.

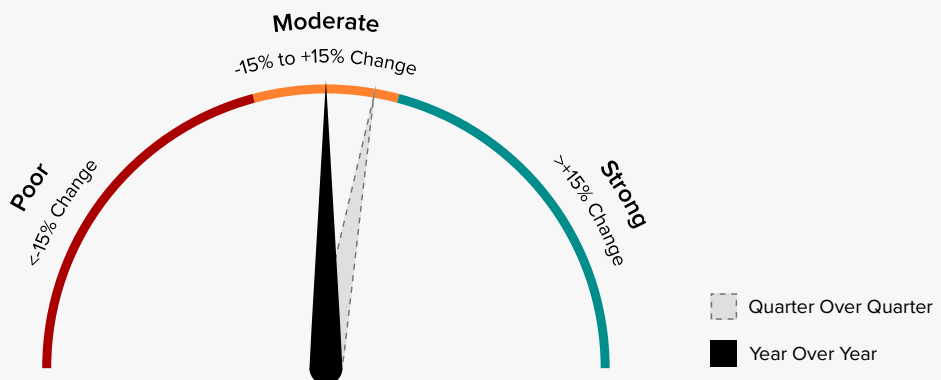
Figure 37

ALL WORK MODELS

### Market Strength Score for Management Consultants

+10% QoQ

0% YoY



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The Toptal Market Strength Score is a combined metric that includes the number of job listings, their compensation, and average monthly hires. It takes into account full-time, part-time, and hourly jobs.

Market strength for all experienced management consultant roles increased 10% QoQ and remained flat YoY, for scores of Moderate. The QoQ increase was driven primarily by an 18% rise in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a smaller increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected modest growth in stated demand and a decline in hiring activity.

The scores and dynamics for all work models and the remote and hybrid market were directionally similar, although the overall market outperformed QoQ and showed a more stable YoY performance than the remote and hybrid segment.



**Michael Valocchi**  
Senior Client  
Solutions Advisor,  
Toptal

#### Q1 Commentary



This quarter, the management consulting market continued moving toward a new equilibrium, as clients shifted from experimentation to reinvention. Engagements increasingly emphasized implementation-focused strategy, with organizations prioritizing execution over ideation. AI-related expertise remained a key priority as companies worked to realize returns on prior investments. At the same time, change management, growth strategy, and transformation skills remained essential. There was an increase in the demand for specialized skills, such as manufacturing automation, consumer retail personalization, and fintech strategy, with clients seeking targeted support for specific, high-impact challenges.

#### Q2 Preview



In Q2, businesses are expected to continue prioritizing execution, driving demand for consultants who can translate strategy into measurable outcomes. As companies balance growth ambitions with cost discipline, there will be increased need for practical expertise across transformation, AI, operational excellence, and customer strategy. Change management skills will likely remain critical as companies implement large-scale initiatives, while demand for leadership and coaching capabilities is likely to grow. Business-focused AI expertise is expected to remain a consistent priority.

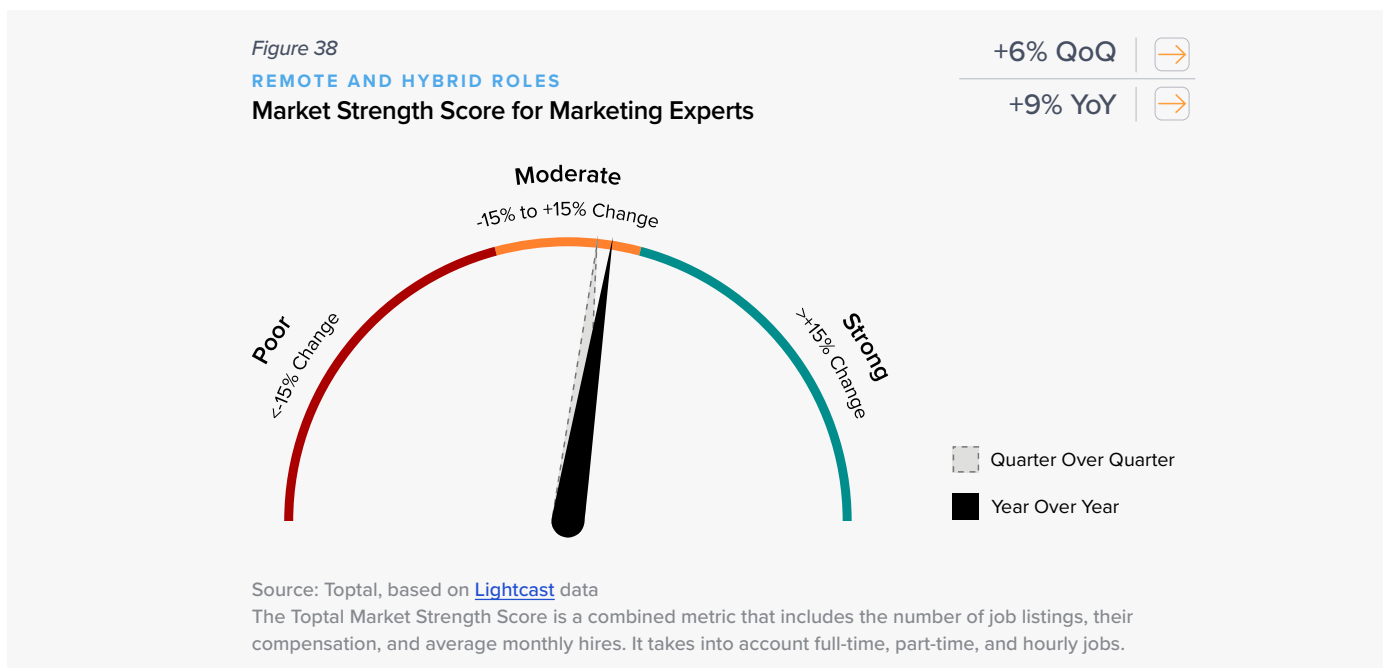
## Marketing Expert Trends

As discussed in the [Introduction](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent the demand for technology and professional services personnel with five or more years of experience. We calculate scores for the remote and hybrid job market and for the overall market, which includes remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The scores are based on QoQ (Q1 2026 versus Q4 2025) and YoY (Q1 2026 versus Q1 2025) changes in the number of new job postings, median offered compensation in those postings, and actual hiring activity.

First, we discuss market strength for remote and hybrid marketing expert roles, then move on to all work models.

### Marketing Expert Market Strength: Remote and Hybrid Roles

Figure 38 shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in marketing in the first quarter of 2026 versus the fourth quarter of 2025 and the first quarter of 2025. Note that while the market strength score reflects remote and hybrid demand, hiring data is only available for all work models, and that figure is used in this calculation.



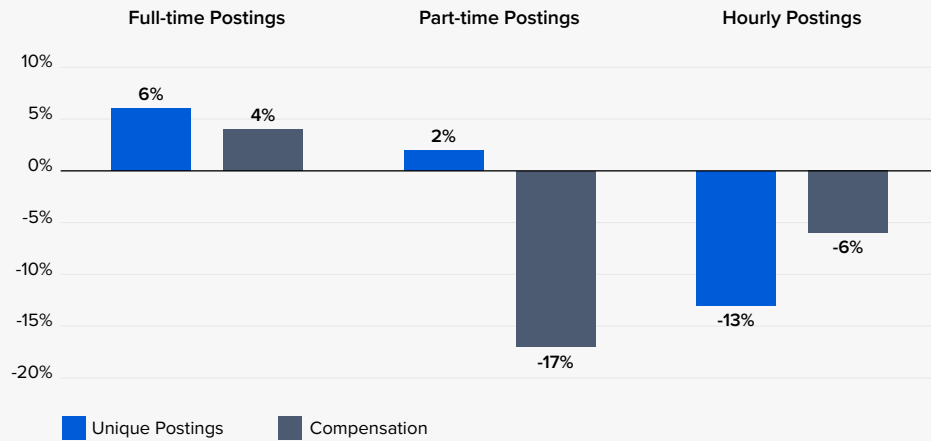
Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid marketing expert roles increased 6% QoQ and 9% YoY, for scores of Moderate.

The QoQ score was driven primarily by a 10% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a smaller increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected strong growth in stated demand, moderated by a slight decline in hiring activity.

We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Figure 39

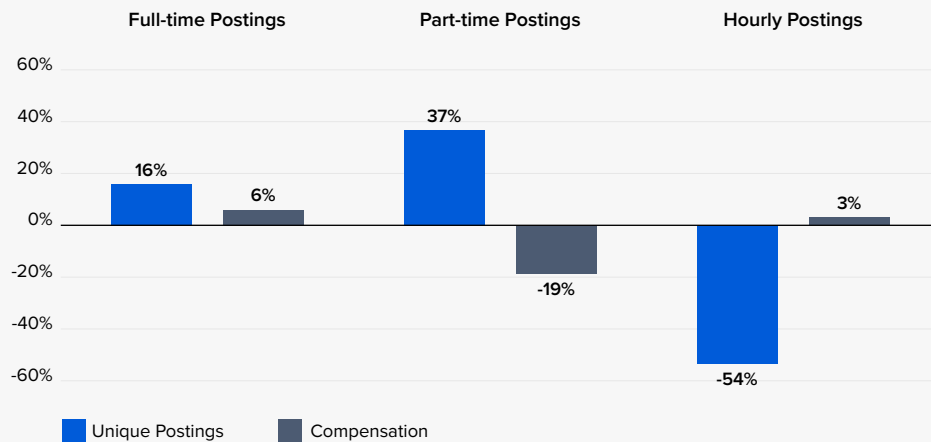
**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Marketing Experts**  
 Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q4 2025 vs. Q1 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data  
 Note: Hourly role results are based on limited data.

Figure 40

**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Marketing Experts**  
 Year-Over-Year Trends, Q1 2025 vs. Q1 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data  
 Note: Hourly role results are based on limited data.

Full-time job postings increased 6% QoQ and 16% YoY, and compensation rose 4% QoQ and 6% YoY. Part-time job postings increased 2% QoQ and 37% YoY, and compensation decreased 17% QoQ and 19% YoY. These trends suggest a steady increase in demand, concentrated primarily in full-time roles. Although compensation grew moderately for full-time positions, part-time compensation was under pressure despite increased job openings.

Hourly postings decreased 13% QoQ and 54% YoY, while compensation decreased 6% QoQ but increased 3% YoY. The findings for hourly roles are based on limited data points and should be taken as general directional indicators of the market.



**+2%**

QoQ change in marketing expert hires  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

Hiring activity for marketing experts increased 2% QoQ, reflecting expected seasonality, and decreased 5% YoY. This Lightcast hiring data includes all time commitments and work models.



**-5%**

YoY change in marketing expert hires  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The analysis above includes demand for positions with five or more years of experience. Demand for positions with 10 or more years of experience (a subset of the prior data) shows some differences. Senior part-time postings decreased



### Marketing Expert Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. Figure 41 shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in marketing, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles.

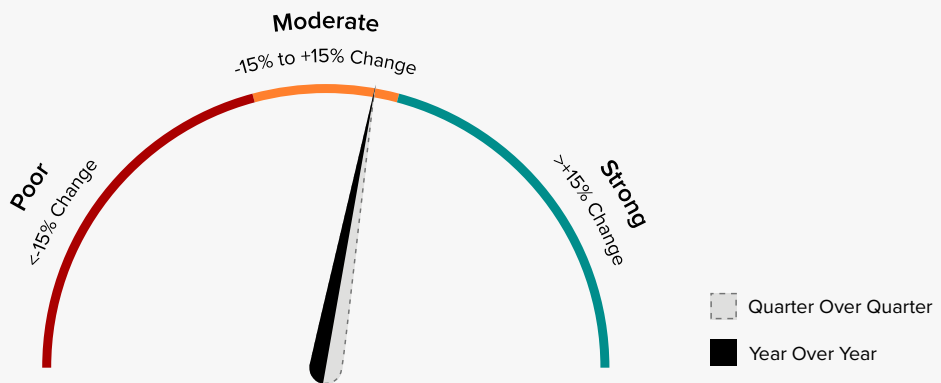
Figure 41

ALL WORK MODELS

### Market Strength Score for Marketing Experts

+10% QoQ |

+10% YoY |



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The Toptal Market Strength Score is a combined metric that includes the number of job listings, their compensation, and average monthly hires. It takes into account full-time, part-time, and hourly jobs.

Market strength for all experienced marketing expert roles increased 10% both QoQ and YoY, for scores of Moderate. The QoQ increase was driven primarily by an 18% rise in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a more modest increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected strong growth in stated demand, moderated by a decline in hiring activity.

The scores and dynamics for all work models and the remote and hybrid market were directionally similar, although the overall market showed stronger growth both QoQ and YoY than the remote and hybrid segment.



**Chris Krohn**  
GM, Topical's  
Marketing Agency

#### Q1 Commentary



Q1 growth for marketing experts was driven by higher demand from small and medium-sized businesses, particularly in media, technology, and financial services. Growth marketing remained a significant area of demand, as companies sought to drive efficient customer acquisition and measurable revenue impact. Hiring also accelerated in marketing strategy and operations, reflecting a focus on the importance of aligning execution with business performance.

#### Q2 Preview



The Q2 outlook points to continued growth in demand for marketing talent. Demand for AI-related capabilities is expected to remain strong, with clients looking to improve targeting, personalization, and campaign efficiency. Ongoing macroeconomic uncertainty may introduce volatility, particularly if organizations reassess or constrain marketing budgets.

## Product Manager Trends

As discussed in the [Introduction](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent the demand for technology and professional services personnel with five or more years of experience. We calculate scores for the remote and hybrid job market and for the overall market, which includes remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The scores are based on QoQ (Q1 2026 versus Q4 2025) and YoY (Q1 2026 versus Q1 2025) changes in the number of new job postings, median offered compensation in those postings, and actual hiring activity. Lightcast does not report hiring activity for product manager positions.

First, we discuss market strength for remote and hybrid product manager roles, then move on to all work models.

### Product Manager Market Strength: Remote and Hybrid Roles

Figure 42 shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in product management in the first quarter of 2026 versus the fourth quarter of 2025 and the first quarter of 2025.



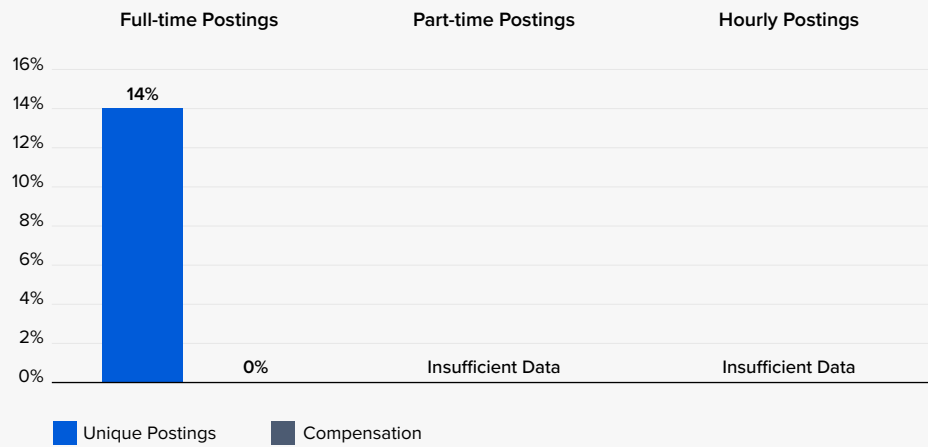
Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid product manager roles increased 15% QoQ and 46% YoY, for scores of Moderate and Strong.

Both QoQ and YoY scores were driven wholly by stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, since Lightcast does not report on hiring activity for product managers. It's important to note that while stated demand provides an important market signal, it can also overstate the true demand due to ghost job postings, as discussed in the [Introduction](#) section.

We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Figure 43

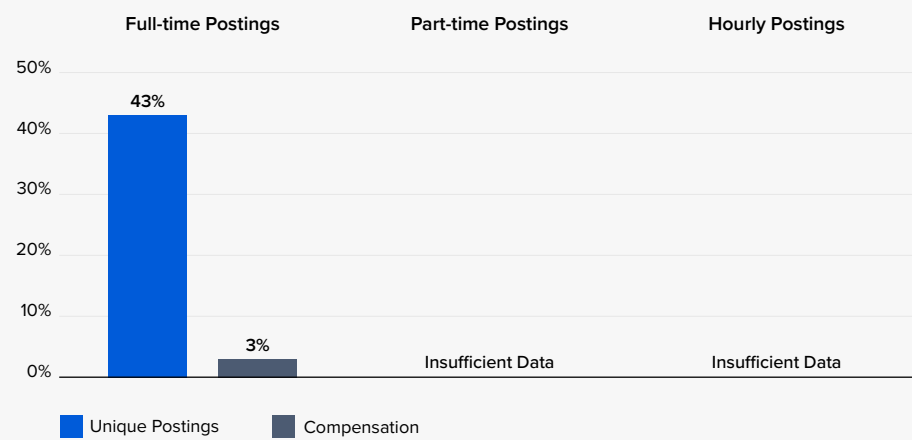
**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Product Managers**  
 Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q4 2025 vs. Q1 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

Figure 44

**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Product Managers**  
 Year-Over-Year Trends, Q1 2025 vs. Q1 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

Full-time job postings increased 14% QoQ and 43% YoY; compensation remained flat QoQ and rose 3% YoY. Modest compensation growth suggests that wage increases have been more measured relative to the rise in job postings, likely reflecting competition among candidates and more constrained employer budgets. There was insufficient data available for reliable trends in part-time and hourly positions.



**+2.2%**

Average QoQ change in hiring for all Toptal areas of expertise  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

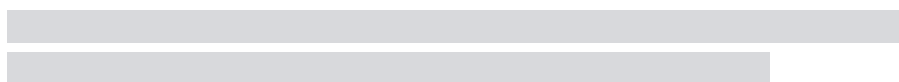
While Lightcast does not gather hiring data for product managers, the data from all other talent areas of expertise included in this report shows hiring activity increasing by an average of 2.2% QoQ and decreasing by an average of 2.8% YoY.



**-2.8%**

Average YoY change in hiring for all Toptal areas of expertise  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The analysis above includes demand for positions with five or more years of experience. Demand for positions with 10 or more years of experience (a subset of the prior data) shows stronger growth in some areas. Full-time job postings for senior-level roles rose



Note: Lightcast does not report hiring data for product manager roles. These averages provide context on the general hiring trend.

### Product Manager Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. Figure 45 shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in product management, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles.

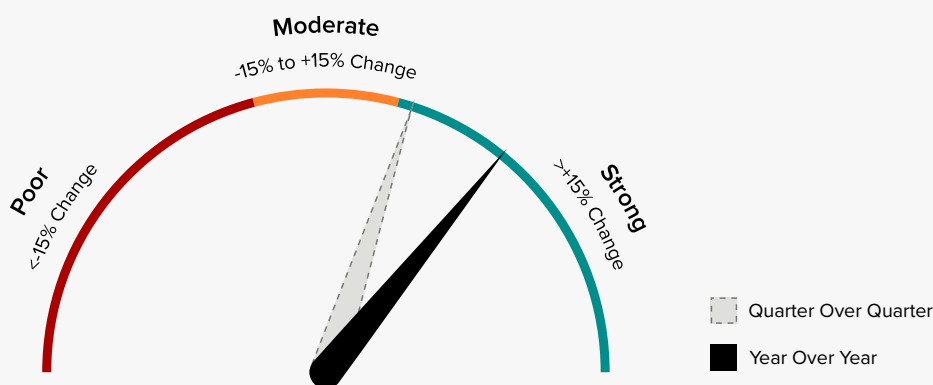
Figure 45

ALL WORK MODELS

### Market Strength Score for Product Managers

+18% QoQ

+39% YoY



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The Toptal Market Strength Score is a combined metric that includes the number of job listings and their compensation. It takes into account full-time, part-time, and hourly jobs. Lightcast does not report hiring data for product manager positions, so it is not included in this score.

Market strength for all experienced product manager roles increased 18% QoQ and 39% YoY, for scores of Strong. The demand trends were wholly driven by job postings and compensation, since Lightcast does not report on hiring activity for product managers.

The scores and dynamics for all work models and the remote and hybrid market were extremely similar, although all work models slightly outperformed the remote and hybrid segment QoQ, and underperformed in comparison YoY.



**Érico Sabino**  
Enterprise  
Matching Team  
Lead, Toptal

### Q1 Commentary

“

Q1 marked a decisive shift from AI exploration to commercial execution. Activity was strongest around technical product management, particularly in areas such as RAG, LLMs, and agentic AI, alongside increased need for early-stage leaders driving MVP development. There was also a growth in demand for data product managers capable of building the foundational enterprise infrastructure required for scaling. As priorities shifted toward delivery, there was an emphasis on specialized expertise in applied AI, data architecture, and end-to-end product development.

### Q2 Preview

“

In Q2, demand for product managers is expected to remain concentrated on specialized technical execution. Enterprises will continue prioritizing roles in business analysis, data product management, and LLM-related capabilities to support complex AI and data integrations. At the same time, SMBs will continue to require technical product leaders who can drive MVP development and define scalable product roadmaps. Increasingly, success in the market is likely to depend on deeper specialization in data systems and technical delivery, rather than generalist product management approaches.

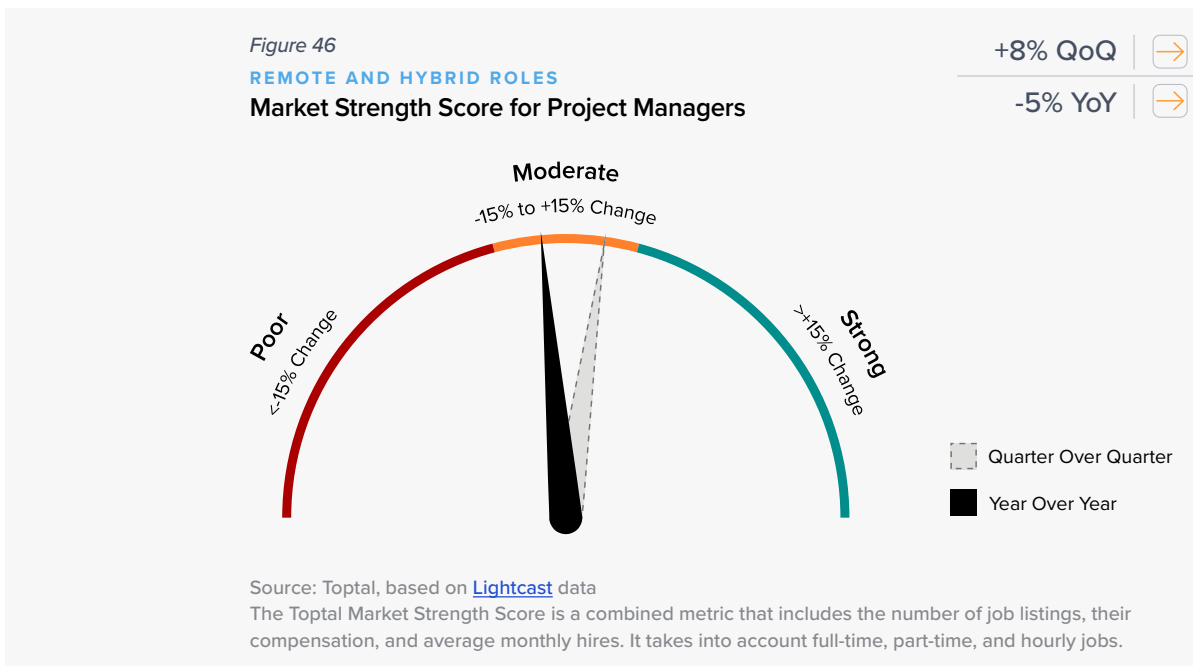
## Project Manager Trends

As discussed in the [Introduction](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent the demand for technology and professional services personnel with five or more years of experience. We calculate scores for the remote and hybrid job market and for the overall market, which includes remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The scores are based on QoQ (Q1 2026 versus Q4 2025) and YoY (Q1 2026 versus Q1 2025) changes in the number of new job postings, median offered compensation in those postings, and actual hiring activity.

First, we discuss market strength for remote and hybrid project manager roles, then move on to all work models.

### Project Manager Market Strength: Remote and Hybrid Roles

Figure 46 shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in project management in the first quarter of 2026 versus the fourth quarter of 2025 and the first quarter of 2025. Note that while the market strength score reflects remote and hybrid demand, hiring data is only available for all work models, and that figure is used in this calculation.



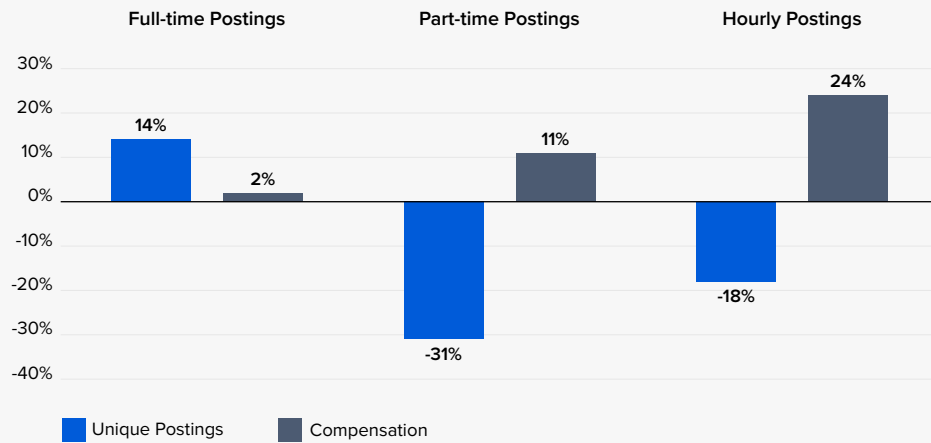
Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid project manager roles increased 8% QoQ and decreased 5% YoY, for scores of Moderate.

The QoQ score was driven primarily by a 16% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a slight increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected a decline in stated demand, compounded by a slight decrease in actual hiring activity.

We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Figure 47

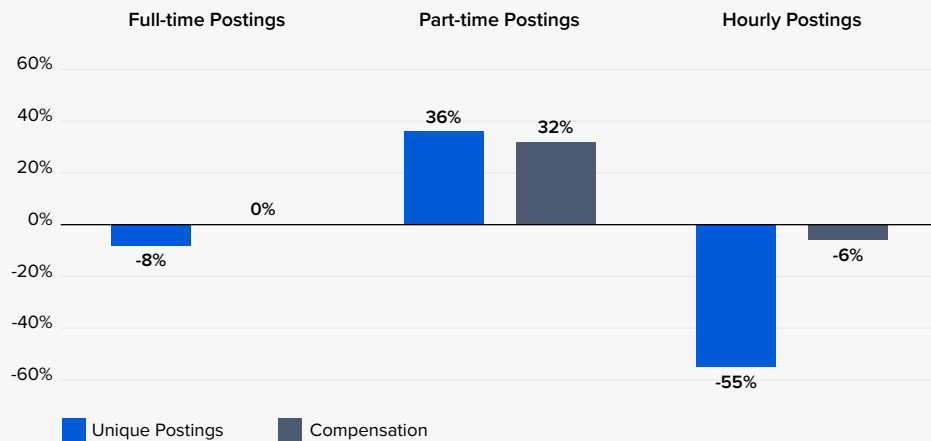
**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Project Managers**  
 Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q4 2025 vs. Q1 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data  
 Note: Part-time and hourly role results are based on limited data.

Figure 48

**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Project Managers**  
 Year-Over-Year Trends, Q1 2025 vs. Q1 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data  
 Note: Part-time and hourly role results are based on limited data.

Full-time job postings increased 14% QoQ and decreased 8% YoY, while compensation rose 2% QoQ and remained flat YoY. Part-time job postings decreased 31% QoQ and increased 32% YoY, while compensation increased 11% QoQ and 32% YoY.

Hourly postings decreased 18% QoQ and 55% YoY. Hourly compensation increased 24% QoQ and decreased 6% YoY. The findings for part-time and hourly roles are based on limited data points and should be taken as general directional indicators of the market.



**+1%**

QoQ change in project manager hires  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

Hiring activity for project managers increased 1% QoQ, reflecting expected seasonality, and decreased 1% YoY. This Lightcast hiring data includes all time commitments and work models.



**-1%**

YoY change in project manager hires  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The analysis above includes demand for positions with five or more years of experience. Demand for positions with 10 or more years of experience (a subset of the prior data) shows some differences. Based on limited data, senior-level part-time postings were



### Project Manager Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. Figure 49 shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in project management, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles.

Figure 49

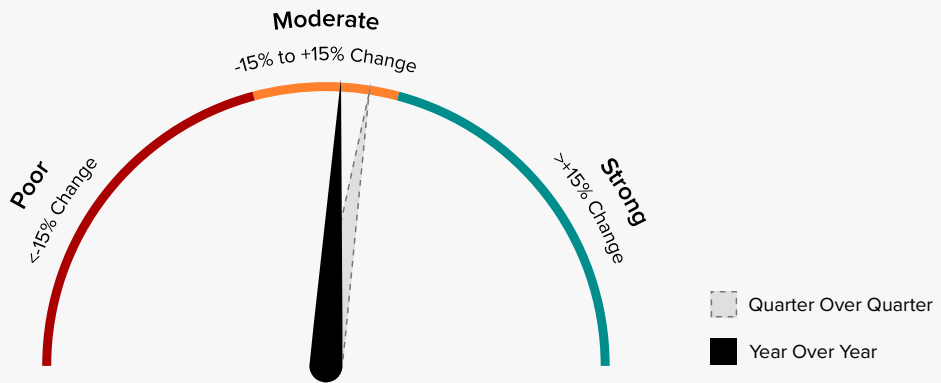
ALL WORK MODELS

### Market Strength Score for Project Managers

+9% QoQ



+3% YoY



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The Toptal Market Strength Score is a combined metric that includes the number of job listings, their compensation, and average monthly hires. It takes into account full-time, part-time, and hourly jobs.

Market strength for all experienced project manager roles increased 9% QoQ and 3% YoY, for scores of Moderate. The QoQ increase was driven primarily by a rise in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a slight increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected modest growth in stated demand and a slight decline in hiring activity.

The scores and dynamics for all work models and the remote and hybrid market were similar in magnitude, although the overall market showed slight growth YoY while the remote and hybrid segment marginally weakened.



**Sergio Castro**  
Product and Project  
Management  
Matching Team  
Lead, Toptal

#### Q1 Commentary



Q1 marked a definitive shift from general coordination to high-stakes technical orchestration. Enterprises prioritized technical project managers for AI, cloud, and ERP transformations, notably in the consumer-packaged goods and healthcare industries, while SMBs had an increased need for “lean-to-lead” specialists focused on rapid MVP delivery and technical agility. Across sectors, proficiency in tools like Jira and Asana became a baseline requirement. To maintain a competitive edge and ensure market alignment, project managers needed to bridge the gap between strategic planning and the granular technical execution required for complex, modern delivery.

#### Q2 Preview



Q2 is expected to mark a shift from experimental builds to operational deployment. Enterprises will likely prioritize specialists who can lead large-scale migrations and provide oversight of increasingly complex AI and cloud portfolios, particularly in sectors such as manufacturing and supply chain. Demand will likely increase for fractional transformation leaders, and we’ll see continued focus on M&A, ERP, and compliance as organizations pursue greater operational maturity. Success in this environment will require balancing rapid innovation with the demands of large-scale, systemwide transformation.

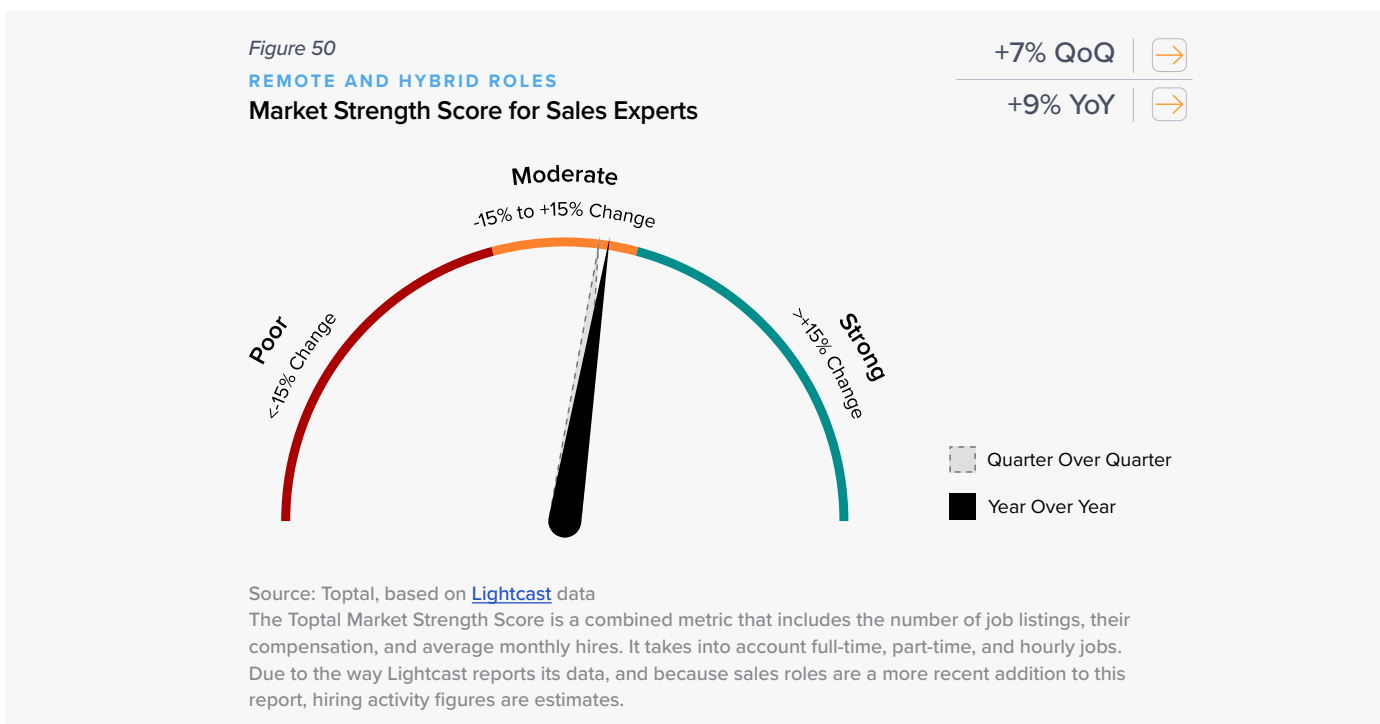
## Sales Expert Trends

As discussed in the [Introduction](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent the demand for technology and professional services personnel with five or more years of experience. We calculate scores for the remote and hybrid job market and for the overall market, which includes remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The scores are based on QoQ (Q1 2026 versus Q4 2025) and YoY (Q1 2026 versus Q1 2025) changes in the number of new job postings, median offered compensation in those postings, and actual hiring activity. Due to the way Lightcast reports its data, and because sales roles are a more recent addition to the scope of this report, the hiring figures shared in this section are estimates.

First, we discuss market strength for remote and hybrid sales expert roles, then move on to all work models.

### Sales Expert Market Strength: Remote and Hybrid Roles

Figure 50 shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in sales in the first quarter of 2026 versus the fourth quarter of 2025 and the first quarter of 2025.



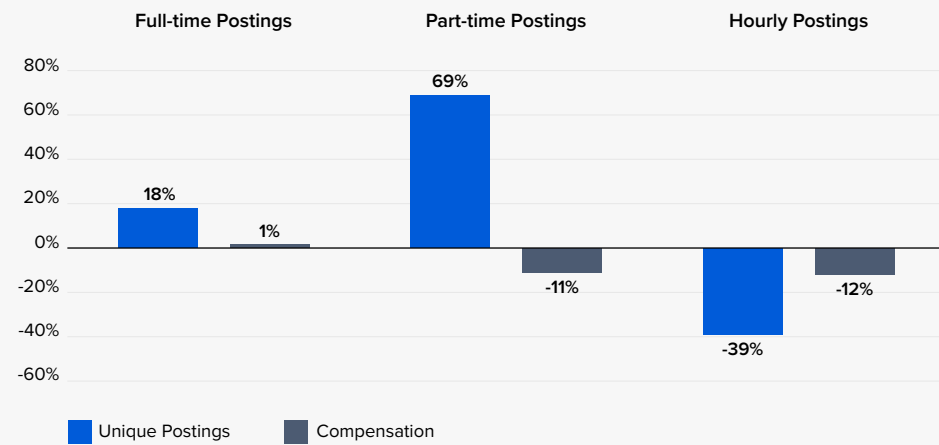
Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid sales expert roles increased 7% QoQ and 9% YoY, for scores of Moderate.

The QoQ score was driven primarily by a 19% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, moderated by a slight decline in hiring activity. The YoY score reflected strong growth in stated demand, with hiring contributing only marginally to overall market strength.

We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Figure 51

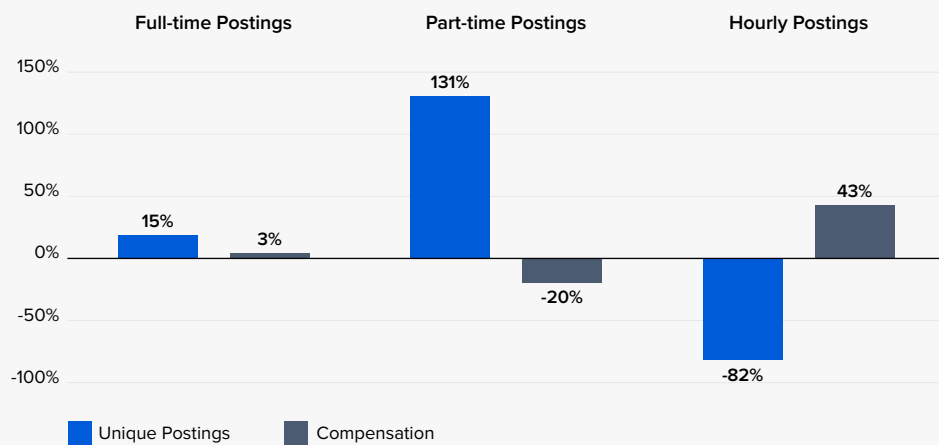
**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Sales Experts**  
 Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q4 2025 vs. Q1 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data  
 Note: Hourly role results are based on limited data.

Figure 52

**Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Sales Experts**  
 Year-Over-Year Trends, Q1 2025 vs. Q1 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data  
 Note: Hourly role results are based on limited data.

Full-time job postings increased 18% QoQ and 15% YoY, and compensation rose 1% QoQ and 3% YoY. Part-time job postings increased 69% QoQ and 131% YoY, while compensation decreased 11% QoQ and 20% YoY.

Hourly postings decreased 39% QoQ and 82% YoY. Compensation decreased 12% QoQ but increased 43% YoY. The findings for hourly roles are based on limited data points and should be taken as general directional indicators of the market.

Hiring activity for sales experts decreased 5% QoQ and increased 1% YoY. This Lightcast hiring data includes all time commitments and work models.

The analysis above includes demand for positions with five or more years of experience. Demand for positions with 10 or more years of experience (a subset of the prior data) shows directionally similar patterns, but with slight differences.



**-5%**

QoQ change in sales expert hires  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data



**+1%**

YoY change in sales expert hires  
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

Note: Due to the way Lightcast reports its data, and because sales roles are a more recent addition to this report, these figures are estimates.

### Sales Expert Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. Figure 53 shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in sales, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles.

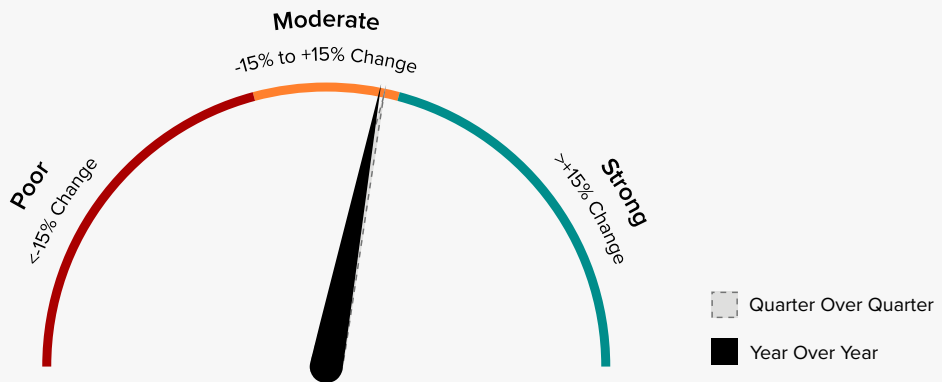
Figure 53

ALL WORK MODELS

### Market Strength Score for Sales Experts

+12% QoQ

+11% YoY



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The Toptal Market Strength Score is a combined metric that includes the number of job listings, their compensation, and average monthly hires. It takes into account full-time, part-time, and hourly jobs. Due to the way Lightcast reports its data, and because sales roles are a more recent addition to this report, hiring activity figures are estimates.

Market strength for all experienced sales expert roles increased 12% QoQ and increased 11% YoY, for scores of Moderate. The QoQ score was driven primarily by a strong rise in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, moderated by a decline in hiring activity. The YoY score reflected growth in stated demand, with hiring activity contributing only marginally to overall market strength.

The scores and dynamics for all work models and the remote and hybrid market were directionally similar, although the overall market outperformed the remote and hybrid segment both QoQ and YoY.



**Toby Dusina**  
Director, Sales  
Development,  
Toptal

#### Q1 Commentary



Q1 continued the shift toward disciplined execution that began in late 2025. Organizations entered the year with clearer priorities and less tolerance for inefficiency, which influenced both hiring decisions and go-to-market strategy. Companies focused on hiring professionals who could directly impact revenue, improve operating leverage, or support strategic initiatives. This increased the demand for sales talent with commercial skills and technical and business fluency. The most marketable professionals were those comfortable working across AI-enabled workflows, data analytics, and modern cloud-based environments, while still maintaining strong discovery, executive communication, and ROI-driven selling skills. We also saw continued movement away from purely activity-driven outbound models toward more targeted, account-level strategies. Organizations are prioritizing sellers who can operate as advisors, navigate complex buying groups, and connect solutions to measurable business outcomes. In this environment, adaptability and cross-functional experience have become key differentiators in both performance and hiring.

#### Q2 Preview



Q2 is expected to bring increased pressure on productivity, predictability, and hiring discipline, as organizations focus on execution quality and measurable impact rather than rapid team expansion. Hiring will continue, but companies will prioritize professionals who can contribute immediately in complex, high-value sales environments. We expect demand to remain strongest for sales professionals who can operate credibly with executive buyers, particularly in conversations centered on cost efficiency, risk management, and quantifiable ROI. Experience with AI-enabled tools, data-driven decision-making, and enterprise-level deal cycles is becoming a consistent requirement. Overall, the second quarter is likely to reward sales experts who use both technology and human insight to build trust and drive decisions in a more selective market.

# Key Takeaways

Significant insights from this report are summarized below.

- + **Demand for experienced remote and hybrid technology and professional services personnel rose 8.9% QoQ and 4.8% YoY.**
- + **Demand for all experienced technology and professional services roles, including in-office jobs, increased by 10.5% QoQ and 6.4% YoY, slightly outperforming remote and hybrid roles alone.**
- + **Broader job market data points to weaker demand for generalists and entry-level workers.** Postings for all professions and all levels of experience in the US and most other large economies fell by an average of about 3% QoQ and 8% YoY, with the exception of Australia, which saw an increase of about 4% both QoQ and YoY.
- + **Volatility in the technology sector continues, with technology company layoffs increasing by about 140% both QoQ and YoY.** This illustrates the divergent trends defining the current market: Even as some companies are reducing headcount broadly, employers are simultaneously competing for a narrower set of experienced, specialized professionals.
- + **The widespread adoption of AI is a major driver of the trends seen in this report.**
  - The Toptal leaders interviewed for this report are seeing the influence of accelerating AI adoption across every domain and industry, with clients increasingly seeking top-tier talent who are experienced in their fields, understand business strategy, are fluent with AI, and can deliver measurable ROI.
  - AI has accelerated a fundamental reshuffling across nearly every sector, prompting companies to reevaluate business models, product strategies, and the types of expertise they need.
  - Demand has slowed for some skill sets and grown for others, as organizations shift from volume hiring to leaner teams of versatile senior professionals who pair deep domain expertise with AI fluency, business acumen, and cross-functional agility.

**+ Increasing macroeconomic volatility is another contributor to the trends described in this report.**

- The US labor market, a bellwether for global financial and economic health, is increasingly volatile, with job gains in January and March, but losses in February.

Beginning in Q4 2025, Toptal has offered a US job market forecast, built on a statistical model with predictive value for several key job segments. In this report, we share the following directional signals for Q2 2026:

**+ Job growth for all US roles is projected to decline moderately.**

Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data shows that job growth fell at a rate of about 12% per year for the last several years. Our model suggests job growth in Q2 is likely to continue to decline, though to a lesser degree than the historical trend.

**+ Job growth for US professional services roles is projected to decline moderately.**

BLS data shows that professional services job growth also fell at a rate of about 12% per year for the last several years. Our model suggests job growth in Q2 is likely to continue on this trajectory.

**+ Job growth for US information services (technology) roles is projected to be effectively flat.**

BLS data shows that information services job growth fell at a rate of about 22% per year for the last several years. In a departure from the BLS trends, the picture for technology-specific roles is more optimistic: According to our model, job growth for this segment in Q2 2026 will be effectively flat.

**+ Job growth for experienced remote and hybrid US professional services and technology roles is projected to increase moderately.**

Lightcast data shows that job growth in this segment rose at a rate of about 25% per year for the last several years. According to our model, job growth for this segment will continue to increase in Q2, but at a smaller magnitude than its historical average.

# Appendix

## Data Sources

This report uses data from the following sources:

Source	Data Type
<a href="#">Hacker News Hiring</a>	Job postings for technology professionals
<a href="#">Indeed Hiring Lab</a>	Data drawn from the popular site for job postings for the US and other major economies
<a href="#">Layoffs.fyi</a>	Layoff data for technology professionals
<a href="#">Lightcast</a>	Unique job postings and offered compensation by talent profile, aggregated from approximately 220,000 job boards, company career sites, and job posting aggregators
<a href="#">LinkedIn Economic Graph</a>	Hiring trends in the technology, information technology, and media sectors at the national level for the US and other major economies
<a href="#">Staffing Industry Analysts (SIA)</a>	Trends in demand for engineering and information technology professionals via the staffing industry
<a href="#">We Work Remotely</a>	The world's largest job board for remote positions

## Recommended Further Reading

The trends and potential drivers discussed in this report have received attention and analysis from myriad points of view. The articles and reports presented here were chosen not necessarily because we agree with every point they make, but rather for the overall quality of their research and representation of the issues.





## US Job Market Forecast Methodology

Toptal's US job market forecast relies on a proprietary statistical model developed by Toptal that is designed to predict directional trends in several key job segments. Toptal regularly refines the model. The methodology as of Q1 2026 is described below.

### Data Inputs

The model draws on the following data sources:

- + Four years of job postings on the world's largest remote work job board, We Work Remotely; data that Toptal has exclusive access to. (Remote and hybrid hiring patterns serve as leading indicators for broader market trends, in part because companies often tap the global distributed talent pool to address urgent needs before expanding hiring more broadly.)
- + Bureau of Labor Statistics job posting data
- + Lightcast job posting data
- + Key macroeconomic indicators, including:
  - [U6 unemployment rate](#): Unlike the headline U3 unemployment rate, which only counts people who are unemployed and actively seeking work, the U6 rate captures underemployed workers and those who have stopped searching but still want a job, providing a better picture of true labor market slack.
  - [High-yield credit spreads](#): This is a measure of the additional yield investors require to hold below-investment-grade corporate debt; it is often used as an indicator of broader economic risk appetite.
  - [Hiring rates](#): This metric tracks the rate of change in total nonfarm hires in the US. Toptal's model considers more than 20 years of hiring rates.
  - [Inflation-adjusted GDP](#) (also called real GDP): This metric corrects gross domestic product (GDP) numbers for the effects of inflation, giving a clearer picture of economic growth. When GDP grows, businesses often face stronger demand and are more likely to hire, while weak or slowing real GDP growth is a sign of job market weakness.

### Model Construction, Output, and Interpretation

Toptal's US jobs forecast is an ordered logistic regression model, which takes a set of input variables and uses historical data to estimate the relationship between those inputs and a particular outcome. The model's directional projections are then compared against Toptal's own client demand data for remote and hybrid professionals, providing a cross-check between modeled signals and observed market activity.

## Talent Market and Vertical Demand Data Analysis

This analysis uses data from Lightcast, which aggregates job postings from approximately 220,000 sources, including job boards, company career sites, and job posting aggregators, scraping 6 to 8 million unique postings from more than 90,000 employers per month.

Lightcast then follows defined processes to fit the data into a common taxonomy and to remove duplicate and expired postings. More information on Lightcast's data sources and methodology can be found on the Lightcast website.

We conducted the analysis for full-time, part-time, and hourly positions. To align the data sample with the Toptal Talent Network, the following parameters were applied to the queries for each talent profile:

- Postings by US companies with no restrictions on talent location
- Postings by staffing companies and employers or clients
- Postings for remote and/or hybrid positions
- Postings requiring at least five years of experience
- Internships excluded

When job postings offered a compensation range, we used the midpoint.

### Lightcast's Language on Taxonomy and Identifying Duplicates

Lightcast uses a 60-day rule to identify duplicates. "For example, if there is a job for a Marketing Specialist at Google posted for the first time on March 1st, Lightcast considers this as the 'original posting' then for the next 60 days Lightcast considers any advertisements found as duplicates. In theory, if Google posts the same ad every day for the entire year on different sources Lightcast will count it 6 times."

"Each job posting is further enriched with value-add processes including:

- Job title and company standardization.
- Skill extraction and tagging.
- SOC and NAICS code determination and assignment.
- Education and experience determination."

## Taxonomy for Talent Areas of Expertise

Toptal Report Terminology	Lightcast Terminology
<b>Data Science Experts</b>	Data Scientists
<b>Designers</b>	Graphic Designers Web and Digital Interface Designers
<b>Developers</b>	Software Developers
<b>Finance Consultants</b>	Financial and Investment Analysts
<b>Information Security Experts</b>	Information Security Analysts
<b>Management Consultants</b>	Management Analysts Business Operations Specialists
<b>Marketing Experts</b>	Marketing Managers Market Research Analysts Marketing Specialists
<b>Product Managers</b>	Positions with “Product Manager” included in job title
<b>Project Managers</b>	Project Management Specialists
<b>Sales Experts</b>	Sales Managers Sales Representatives of Services, Except Advertising, Insurance, Financial Services, and Travel Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing Sales Engineers Sales and Related Workers, All Other



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