TALENT MARKET REPORT

Toptal

High-skilled Job Report for Q2 2026

JULY 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.

+5.4%

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

+8.9%

YoY 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 Q2 2026 is one of contrast: Demand for experienced remote and hybrid technology and professional services personnel grew 5.4% quarter over quarter (QoQ) and 8.9% year over year (YoY), even as the broader job market continued to fluctuate and layoffs at technology companies remained elevated YoY.

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 3.6% QoQ and 9% YoY.
+ Most of the 10 specific areas of expertise that we track experienced QoQ and YoY increases in demand. See Toptal Market Strength Scores for details.
+ Technology company layoffs decreased 47% QoQ and increased 5% YoY. The QoQ drop is largely due to an unusually high number of layoffs in Q1, when Oracle dismissed approximately 20,000 workers at the very end of the quarter.
+ Toptal's US job market forecast projects an effectively flat trend for all professional services roles in Q3 2026, and slight to moderate increases in growth for all technology roles and the broader market. For experienced remote and hybrid professional services and technology jobs, our forecast also predicts moderate growth in Q3.

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

+ While AI is not "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 professionals with deep expertise, either within a certain specialization or in big-picture thinking that can be applied across business functions. At the same time, demand is softening for more junior roles and those based primarily on routine tasks.

Broader economic conditions are a compounding factor.

+ US job growth was more positive in Q2 than in Q1 but remains unpredictable. While April and May saw modest job gains, growth slowed in June. 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	
	QOQ	YOY
All Technology & Professional Services Roles	+5.4% →	+8.9% →
Data Science Experts	+12% →	+14% →
Designers	-10% →	+1% →
Developers	+2% →	+3% →
Finance Consultants	+27% ↗	+42% ↗
Information Security Experts	+10% →	+3% →
Management Consultants	+11% →	+3% →
Marketing Experts	+7% →	+11% →
Product Managers	+13% →	+27% ↗
Project Managers	+19% ↗	+14% →
Sales Experts	-5% →	+1% →

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

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Hiring strengthened across the broader US economy during the second quarter of 2026 and improved even more significantly within the high-skilled professional market. It was a meaningful reprieve from the weakness during the second half of 2025, but not a return to the market that preceded this period of technological transformation.

While this stabilization is welcome, it’s important to note that transitions rarely move in straight lines. June represented the weakest month of the quarter for US job growth, indicating that near-term uncertainty remains. Similarly, while layoffs at technology companies declined significantly from the dramatic peak in Q1, they remained elevated relative to 2025 levels.

AI has been one major driver, among many, of volatility in the labor market for the last several quarters. But organizations’ understanding of the technology is starting to mature, and it is clear that while AI is an extraordinary multiplier of expertise, creativity, judgment, and the other distinctly human elements that create value, it brings great risk when approached as a replacement for those qualities. This evolving understanding of the technology has strengthened the demand for professionals who can use AI to extend the impact of their own expertise and bring strong judgment, domain knowledge, and human creativity to the workplace.

Jeff Benesch
Chief Operating Officer,
Toptal

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Despite ongoing restructuring in the job market and continuing economic uncertainty, demand for experienced remote and hybrid technology and professional services personnel like those in the Toptal Talent Network grew 5.4% QoQ and 8.9% YoY. Finance consultants were especially sought-after, with demand surging 27% in Q2 versus Q1 2026, and 42% versus Q2 2025. The maturation of AI agents for finance is driving some of this demand, as companies need experienced professionals who can implement and evaluate these tools across corporate and banking functions.

We also saw sustained strong growth for AI-fluent senior experts in data science and product management, with a notable increase in employers seeking talent with experience in specific AI platforms, rather than AI skills in general. It is worth noting, however, that downward pressure on compensation in AI-related roles is continuing as the number of new graduates entering the labor market in these fields has outpaced job growth.

As the broader job market recalibrates and organizations scale AI capabilities, companies remain deliberate about who they bring in and why. We expect that they will continue to turn to fractional and project-based talent models for the agility they need to target rapidly emerging areas and drive measurable impact.

Introduction

This Q2 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 Q2 2026
+ A Q3 2026 forecast for the US job market
+ Q2 analysis and preliminary impressions of Q3 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 Q2 2026 to Q1 2026. YoY trends compare Q2 2026 to Q2 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 (Q2 2026 versus Q1 2026) and YoY (Q2 2026 versus Q2 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.

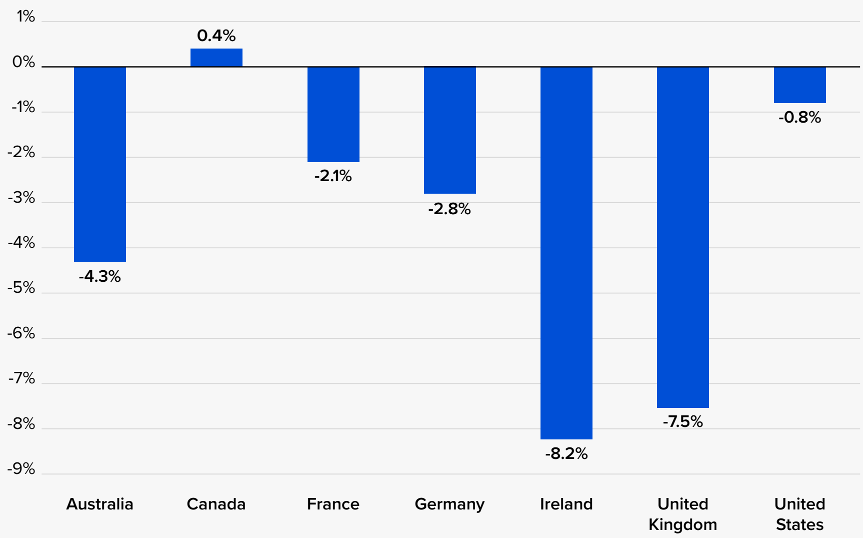
Broad Global Demand Trends

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 Q2 2026. Job listings in the entire eurozone, which includes [all countries that use the euro currency](), decreased by an average of 4.5% QoQ.

Figure 1

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



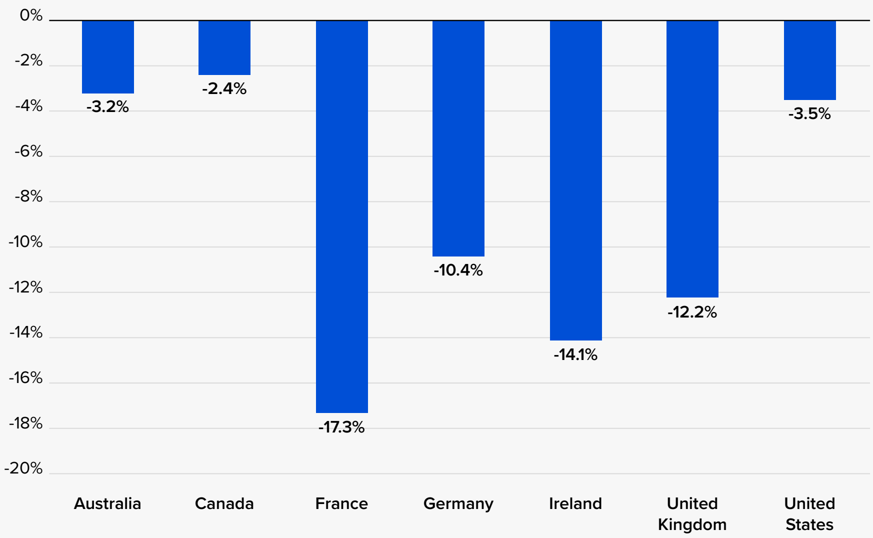
Source: Toptal, based on [Indeed Hiring Lab]() data

QoQ trends in new job postings were broadly negative, with Canada the only country posting an increase (0.4%). Decreases ranged from 0.8% for the United States to 8.2% for Ireland.

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 were down YoY across all of these countries, with Canada showing the smallest decline (2.4%) and France the largest (17.3%). Eurozone job postings decreased by an average of 12.5% YoY.

Figures 1 and 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.

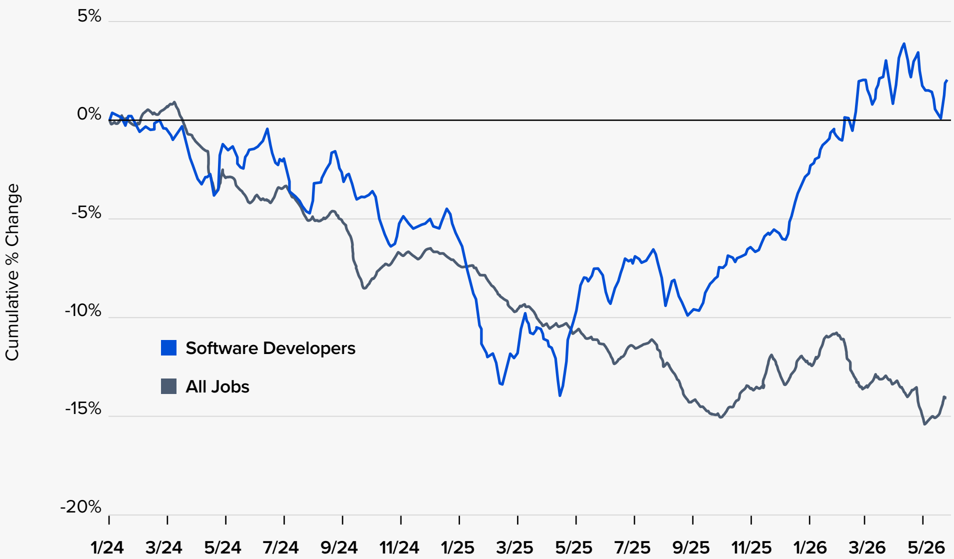
Despite Recent Volatility, Technology Job Segment Rebounding as Broader Market Declines

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 June 2026



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

Software developer postings have shown volatility in recent months, but the cumulative trend continues to point toward recovery, a sharp contrast to the more subdued, ongoing decline in postings across all roles.

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

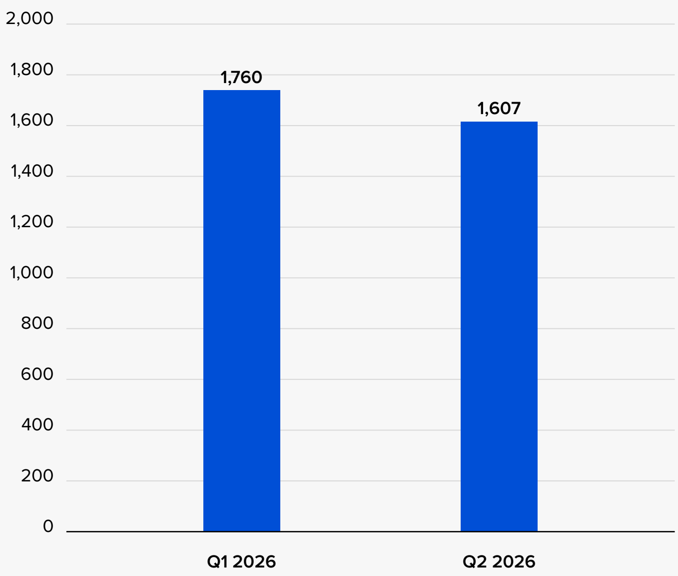
We now examine trends in job postings on Hacker News. As a leading platform for news and talent sourcing, Hacker News is a bellwether of job posting trends for technology professionals. Because of its relationship with the prestigious accelerator Y Combinator, Hacker News posts jobs primarily from employers 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 8.7% 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

-8.7%



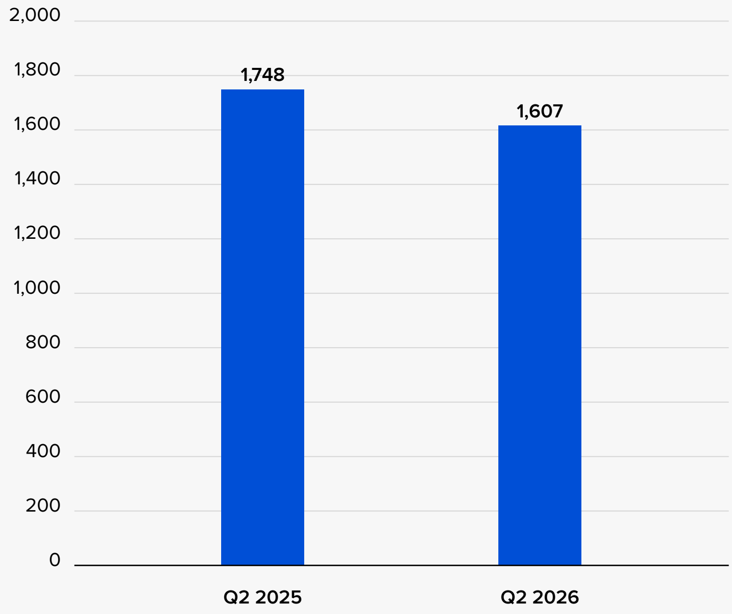
Source: Toptal, based on Hacker News Hiring data

Figure 5 shows a negative YoY trend with an 8.1% decrease in postings. Overall, job postings on Hacker News are down substantially versus a few years ago. The number of job postings in Q2 2026 represents an approximate 69% decrease from the number of postings in Q2 2022.

Figure 5

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

-8.1%



Source: Toptal, based on Hacker News Hiring data

The Hacker News trends stand in contrast to the rebound in Indeed's software engineer data (Figure 3) and the largely flat and positive trends in Indeed's own six-area breakdown later in the report (Figures 7 and 8). This divergence may partly reflect Hacker News's startup-heavy employer base, which tends to be more exposed to funding and budget pressures than the broader, more established organizations that make up more of Indeed's postings.

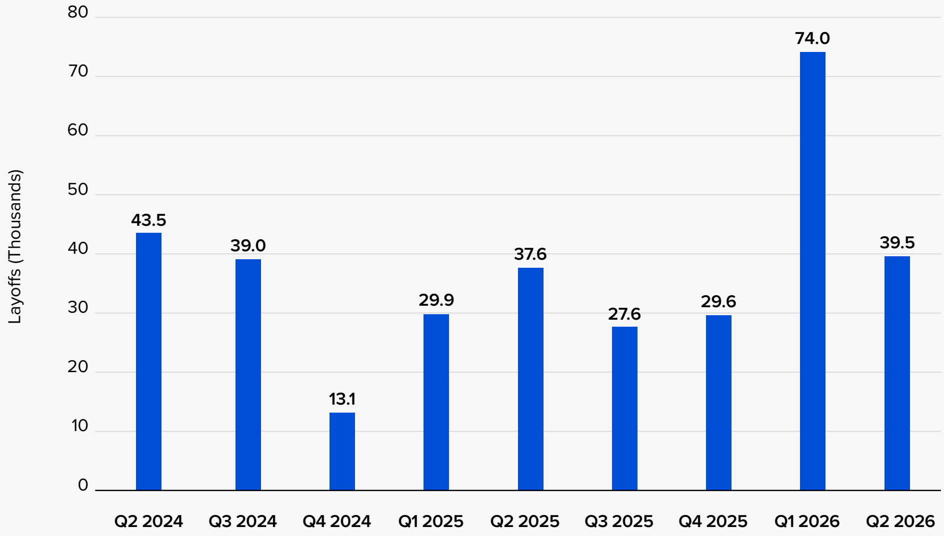
Global Tech Layoffs

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 decreased substantially QoQ, falling 47% from Q1 2026 to Q2 2026. Layoffs also increased 5% YoY (Q2 2026 versus Q2 2025). This sharp QoQ decline largely reflects an outsized spike in Q1 layoffs, driven by Oracle's dismissal of roughly 20,000 workers in the final weeks of that quarter.

Figure 6

Global Tech Layoffs Decrease Quarter Over Quarter but Increase Year Over Year

Layoffs of Technology Company Employees, Q2 2024-Q2 2026



Source: Toptal, based on Layoffs.fyi data

In Q2 2026, Meta was the tech company most impacted by layoffs, accounting for approximately 20% of the quarter's total. Layoffs remained highly concentrated overall: The top five most affected companies, Meta, PayPal, Cisco, Intuit, and Lucid Motors, accounted for 54% of all technology company layoffs in the quarter.

While the YoY elevation in layoffs (see Q2 2026 versus Q2 2025 in Figure 6) 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 elevated 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 these factors point to restructuring and volatility in both the technology and broader job market, they do not, as of Q2 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 Q2 and Recommended Further Reading for more information about recent technology company layoffs.

Select US Demand and Hiring Trends

Job growth in the US was volatile in Q1 2026, with gains in January and March, but losses in February. So far, Q2 looks more positive, with moderate growth in April and May, and smaller gains in June. Keep in mind, this data is preliminary and prone to revisions.

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

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).

LinkedIn's June Workforce Report, which looks at US hiring data through May 2026, showed hiring in the US technology, information, and media sector declined 2.1% YoY. This follows a 0.2% YoY decrease in Q1 2026.

-2.1%
YoY change in hiring for the US technology, information, and media sector
Source: LinkedIn data

SIA's Bullhorn Staffing Indicator index, which tracks hours for IT staffing and professional services, including engineering, information technology, and finance, showed a flat 0% YoY change in professional services hours as of the end of Q2 2026, following a 1% increase in Q1. IT staffing hours declined 1% YoY.

0%
YoY change in US professional services staffing hours
Source: Staffing Industry Analysts data

-1%
YoY change in US IT staffing hours
Source: Staffing Industry Analysts data

US Job Postings for Select Technology and Professional Services Areas

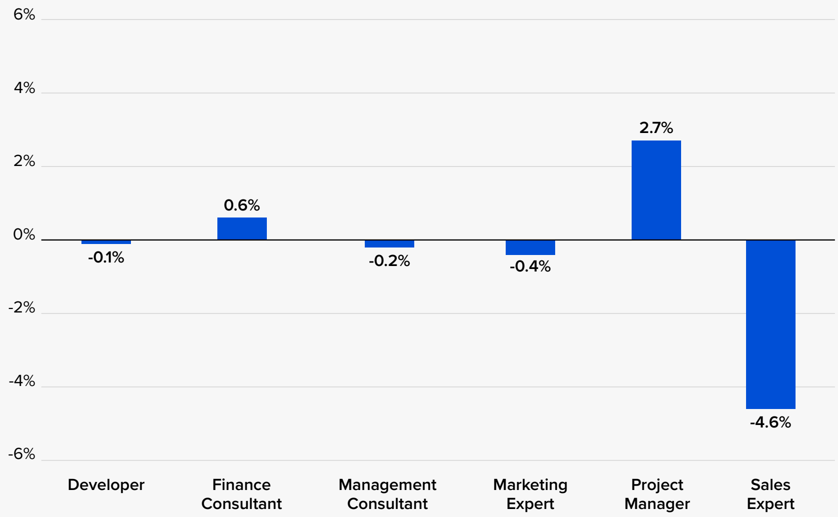
We now turn to Indeed for trends in six key areas of technology and professional services, with an understanding that such a large platform may be more susceptible to ghost job posts than a niche job board like Hacker News. (This possibility is not a reflection of Indeed as a platform, but rather of 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, Q1 2026 vs. Q2 2026



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

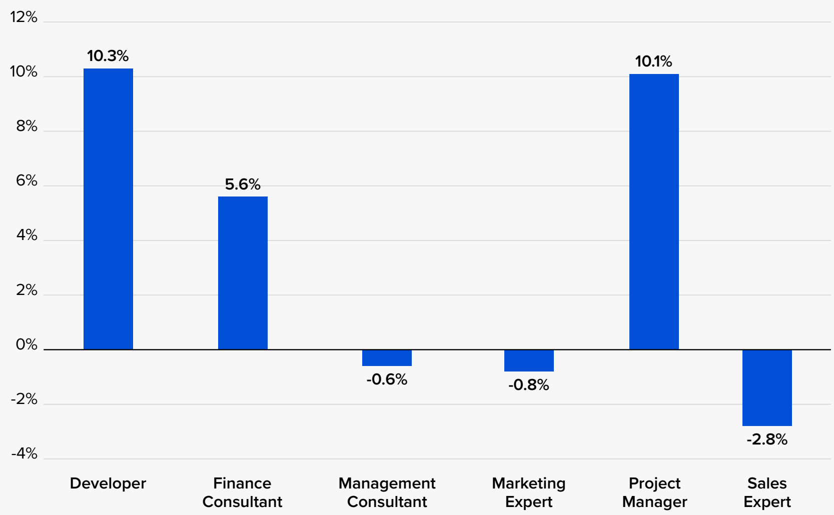
Figure 7 shows muted QoQ trends. Project managers led with a 2.7% gain, while sales experts saw the sharpest decline, at 4.6%. The remaining four areas, developers, finance consultants, management consultants, and marketing experts, were all roughly flat.

Figure 8 shows mostly positive YoY trends, with developer and project manager roles presenting the strongest gains at around 10%, followed by finance consultants at 5.6%. Management consultants and marketing expert trends were roughly flat YoY, while sales experts decreased 2.8%.

Figure 8

Changes in US Job Postings for 6 Key Areas of Expertise on Indeed

Year-Over-Year Trends, Q2 2025 vs. Q2 2026



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

Select Remote and Hybrid Demand and Hiring Trends

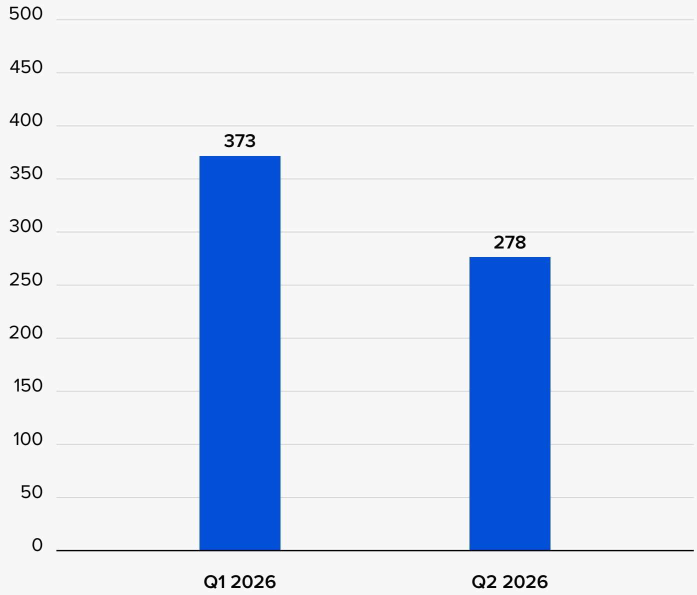
Postings on We Work Remotely Are Down QoQ and YoY

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). Figure 9 shows a 25.5% QoQ decrease in postings on WWR.

Figure 9

Quarter-Over-Quarter Change in Global Job Postings on We Work Remotely

-25.5%

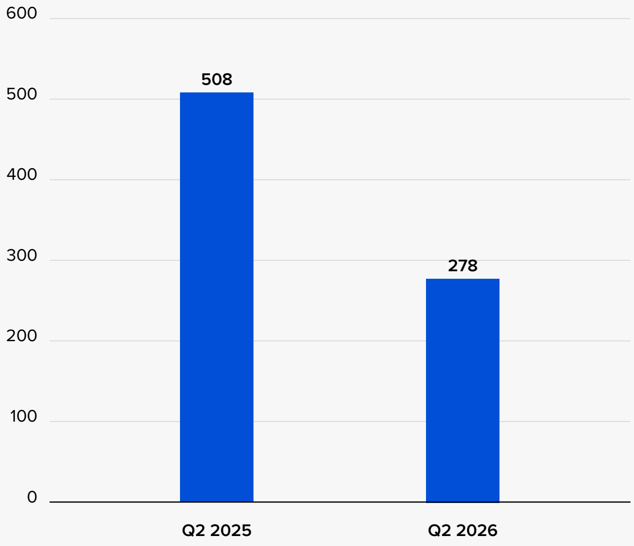


Source: Toptal, based on We Work Remotely data

Figure 10 shows a 45.3% YoY decrease in postings. The declining trends on WWR this quarter stand in contrast to the Aggregate Demand for Toptal-relevant Positions data and Toptal Market Strength Scores below, which both point to growth for experienced remote and hybrid professional services and technology roles. Some divergence is expected, since jobs on WWR include entry-level and junior roles. This quarter's stark gap, however, appears tied to strategic decisions WWR has made about its own platform rather than a broader shift in market conditions. WWR remains a valuable signal as the world's largest platform for remote job opportunities and a proprietary data source unique to this report. Its dynamics offer visibility into the changing nature of remote work that other sources don't capture, and we will continue monitoring the platform's evolution in future editions.

Figure 10
Year-Over-Year Change in Global Job Postings on We Work Remotely

-45.3%



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,

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 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 Q2 2026, market strength for the experienced remote and hybrid technology and professional services job market increased 5.4% QoQ for a Toptal Market Strength Score of Moderate. Market strength increased 8.9% YoY (Q2 2026 versus Q2 2025), also earning a score of Moderate.

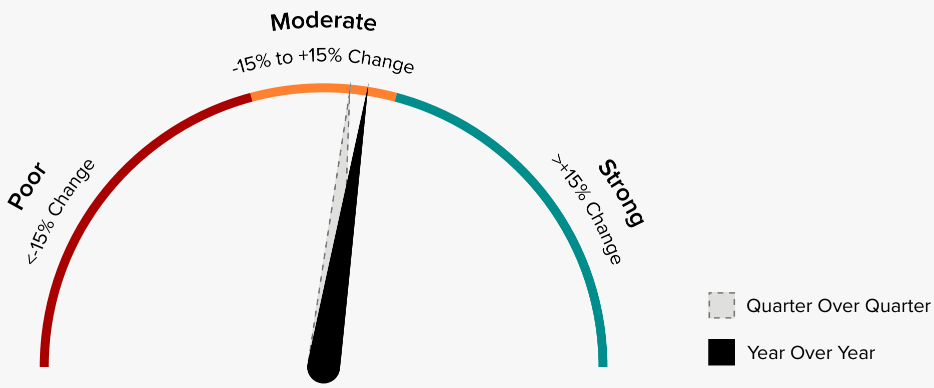
Figure 12

REMOTE AND HYBRID ROLES

Technology and Professional Services Market Strength

+5.4% QoQ

+8.9% 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 4.8% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, and a 6% increase in hiring. Job postings increased 6% for full-time roles, 9% for part-time roles, and 12% for hourly roles. Compensation decreased 1% for full-time roles, fell 8% for part-time roles, and increased 4% for hourly roles.

The YoY score reflects a 2.1% increase in hiring and a 15.8% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation. Job postings increased 16% for full-time roles and 28% for part-time roles, but decreased 23% for hourly roles. Compensation was flat for full-time roles, decreased 20% for part-time roles, and increased 18% for hourly roles.

These trends indicate that demand and hiring are both growing compared to a year ago, with employers not just posting more roles but following through with actual headcount additions.

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 Q2 2026, market strength for the overall experienced technology and professional services job market (Figure 13) increased 7.1% QoQ for a score of Moderate. Market strength increased 12.6% YoY (Q2 2026 versus Q2 2025) for a score of Moderate.

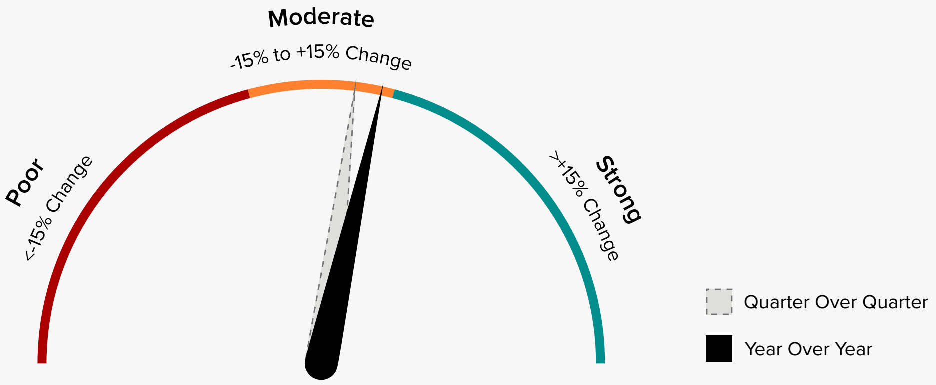
Figure 13

ALL WORK MODELS

Technology and Professional Services Market Strength

+7.1% QoQ

+12.6% 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 overall technology and professional services market (which includes all work models) outperformed the remote and hybrid market. Though the gap between the scores is small (7.1% versus 5.4% for QoQ, and 12.6% versus 8.9% 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 7.1% QoQ increase in market strength reflects an 8.3% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, and a 6% increase in hiring activity. Job postings increased 8% for full-time roles, but decreased 5% for part-time roles and 2% for hourly roles. Compensation was flat for full-time roles, decreased 2% for part-time roles, and increased 1% for hourly roles.

The 12.6% YoY rise in market strength reflects a 23.2% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, and a 2.1% increase in hiring activity. Job postings increased 21% for full-time roles, but decreased 2% for part-time roles and 17% for hourly roles. Compensation increased 2% for full-time roles, decreased 5% for part-time roles, and increased 4% for hourly roles.

US Job Market Forecast for Q3 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 Q3 2026:

+ **Job growth for all US roles is projected to increase slightly.**
  BLS data shows that job growth has been declining at an average rate of 3.5% per quarter for the last several years. Our model suggests a departure from the BLS trends for Q3, with slightly positive growth.

+ **Job growth for all US professional services roles is projected to be effectively flat.**
  BLS data shows that professional services job growth fell at a rate of about 4% per quarter for the last several years. Our model suggests a departure from the BLS trends for Q3 and that the decline will level off.

+ **Job growth for all US information services (technology) roles is projected to increase moderately.**
  BLS data shows that information services job growth fell at a rate of about 5.5% per quarter for the last several years. Our model suggests a departure from the BLS trends for Q3, with a moderate increase in growth.

+ **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 3.2% per quarter for the last several years. According to our model, job growth for this segment will continue to increase in Q3, but at a larger magnitude than its historical average.

Potential drivers for these segments of the US market outperforming their historical averages include easing energy prices, broader resilience in the US economy, and a release of pent-up hiring demand as heightened volatility calms. For technology roles specifically, this effect is compounded by companies developing a clearer sense of what AI can and cannot do, prompting an increase in hiring as they better understand their talent needs.

Forecast Methodology

The model is based on the past 16 years of remote and hybrid job postings on Lightcast, and incorporates a set of macroeconomic variables, including the U-6 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 several years of Toptal's own client demand for remote and hybrid professionals. 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 distributed 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 Q3 outcomes. The US job market has shown surprising resilience during the first half of 2026 but overall remains 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 (Q2 2026 versus Q1 2026) and YoY (Q2 2026 versus Q2 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	
	QOQ	YOY
Data Science Experts	+12% →	+14% →
Designers	-10% →	+1% →
Developers	+2% →	+3% →
Finance Consultants	+27% ↗	+42% ↗
Information Security Experts	+10% →	+3% →
Management Consultants	+11% →	+3% →
Marketing Experts	+7% →	+11% →
Product Managers	+13% →	+27% ↗
Project Managers	+19% ↗	+14% →
Sales Experts	-5% →	+1% →

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 (Q2 2026 versus Q1 2026) and YoY (Q2 2026 versus Q2 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 second quarter of 2026 versus the first quarter of 2026 and the second 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.

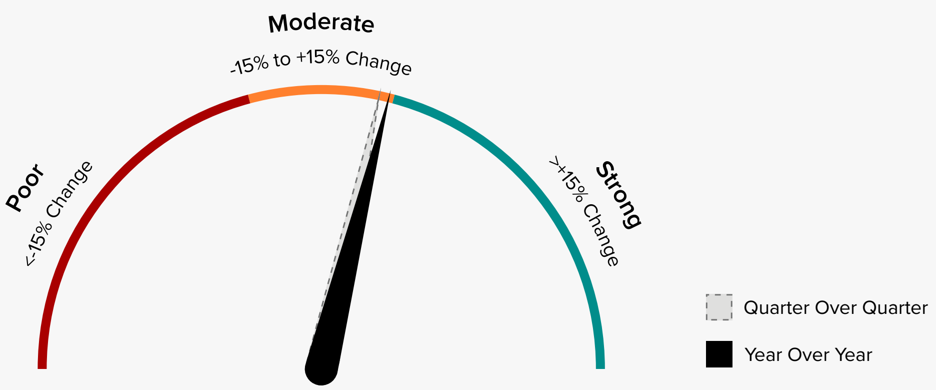
Figure 14

REMOTE AND HYBRID ROLES

Market Strength Score for Data Science Experts

+12% QoQ

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

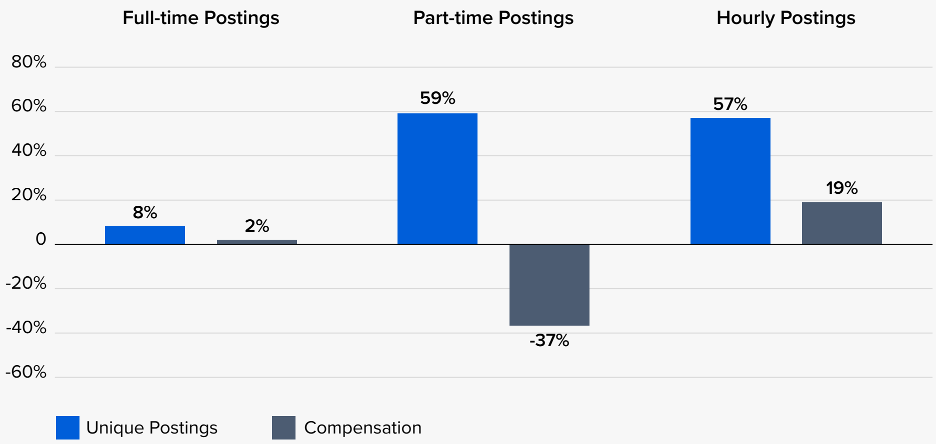
The QoQ increase was driven by an 11% rise in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a similar increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected strong growth in stated demand moderated by a slight increase in actual hiring.

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, Q1 2026 vs. Q2 2026

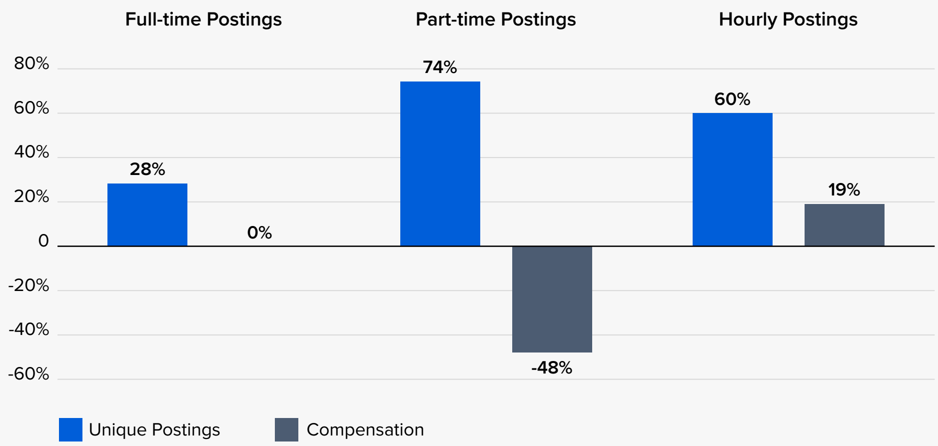


Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data
Note: Hourly role results are based on limited data.

Figure 16

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Data Science Experts

Year-Over-Year Trends, Q2 2025 vs. Q2 2026



Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data
Note: Hourly role results are based on limited data.

As shown in Figures 15 and 16, full-time job postings increased 8% QoQ and 28% YoY, while compensation rose 2% QoQ and remained flat YoY. Part-time job postings rose 59% QoQ and 74% YoY, but compensation fell by 37% QoQ and 48% YoY. The quarterly posting trends for both time commitments reflect stronger growth than seasonality alone would predict. Compensation trends failed to keep pace with demand, indicating that employers are retaining bargaining power and may be allocating budgets elsewhere.

Hourly postings increased 57% QoQ and 60% YoY, alongside compensation growth of 19% both QoQ and YoY. The findings for hourly roles are based on limited data points and should be taken as general directional indicators of the market.

+13%
QoQ change in data science expert hires
Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

Hiring activity for data science experts increased 13% QoQ and 1% YoY. This Lightcast hiring data includes all time commitments and work models.

+1%
YoY change in data science expert hires
Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

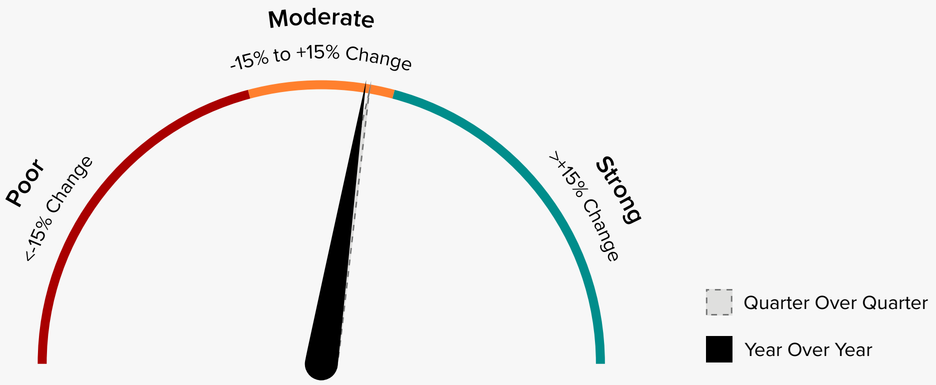
The analysis above includes demand for positions with five or more years of experience. Demand for positions with 10 or more years of experience (a subset of the prior data) was directionally similar. Based on limited data, part-time postings showed

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
+9% 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 9% YoY, for scores of Moderate. The QoQ increase was driven by an 8% rise in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, compounded by a slightly larger increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected 19% growth in stated demand moderated by a marginal increase in 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.

Paul Cioni
CTO, Technology Services,
Toptal

Q2 Commentary

"Q2 marked a shift in how organizations evaluated data science expertise. As AI took on more of the routine analytical work, employers placed greater value on professionals who could critically interrogate AI outputs and translate those findings into recommendations that withstand executive and regulatory scrutiny. Organizations recognized that reliable decisions depend on interpretation as much as model quality, driving demand for experienced practitioners who combine statistical expertise with strategic decision-making skills.

Q3 Preview

"As AI continues to absorb analytical work and organizations formalize AI validation as part of their workflows, senior data scientists with proven critical thinking and process design skills will have an advantage. With focus on ROI increasing, employers are likely to prefer practitioners who can work directly with business leaders and extract greater value from AI analysis.

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 (Q2 2026 versus Q1 2026) and YoY (Q2 2026 versus Q2 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 second quarter of 2026 versus the first quarter of 2026 and the second 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.

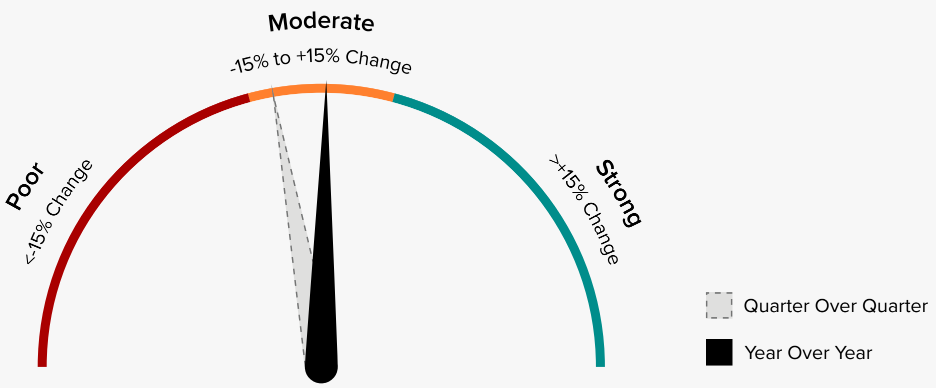
Figure 18

REMOTE AND HYBRID ROLES

Market Strength Score for Designers

-10% QoQ

+1% 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 experienced remote and hybrid design roles decreased 10% QoQ and increased 1% YoY, for scores of Moderate.

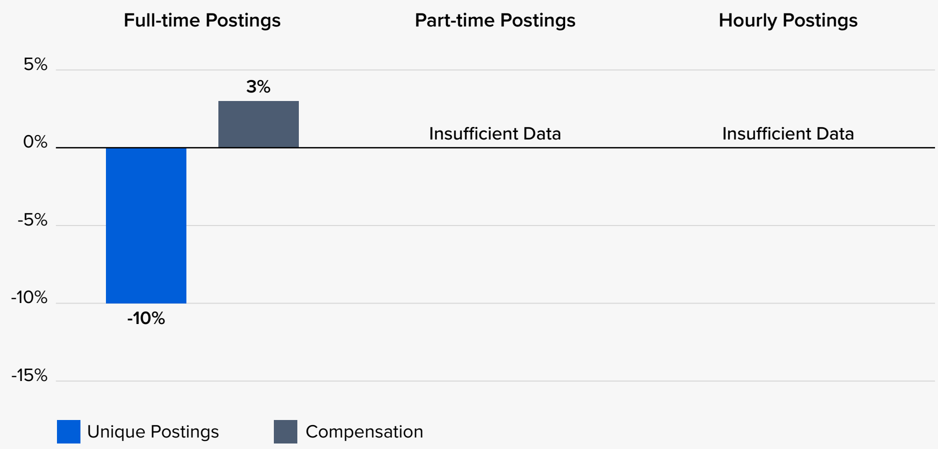
The QoQ score was driven by a 7% decline in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, compounded by a slightly larger decline in hiring. The YoY score reflected 18% growth in stated demand moderated by a 16% decline in hiring.

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 19

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Designers

Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q1 2026 vs. Q2 2026

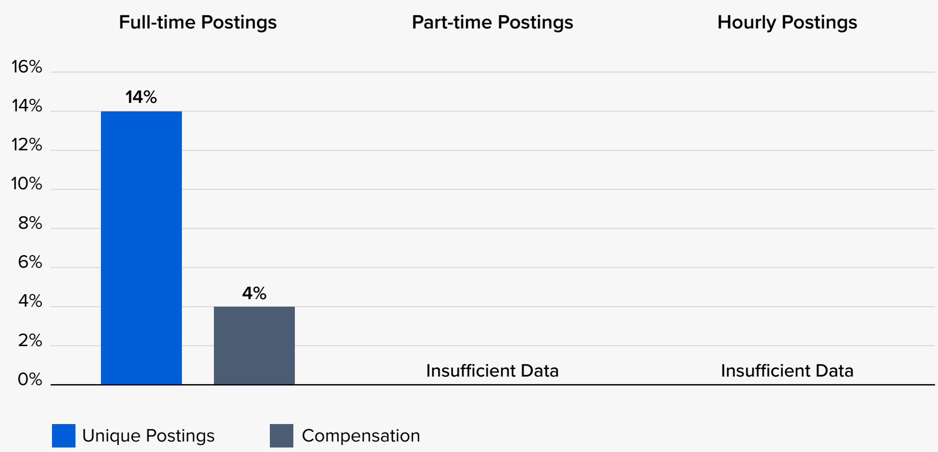


Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast] data

Figure 20

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Designers

Year-Over-Year Trends, Q2 2025 vs. Q2 2026



Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast] data

As shown in Figures 19 and 20, full-time job postings decreased 10% QoQ but increased 14% YoY; compensation rose 3% QoQ and 4% YoY. There was insufficient data available for reliable trends in part-time and hourly positions.

-11%

QoQ change in designer hires
Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

-16%

YoY change in designer hires
Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

Hiring activity for designers declined 11% QoQ and 16% 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 directionally similar. Full-time postings showed

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.

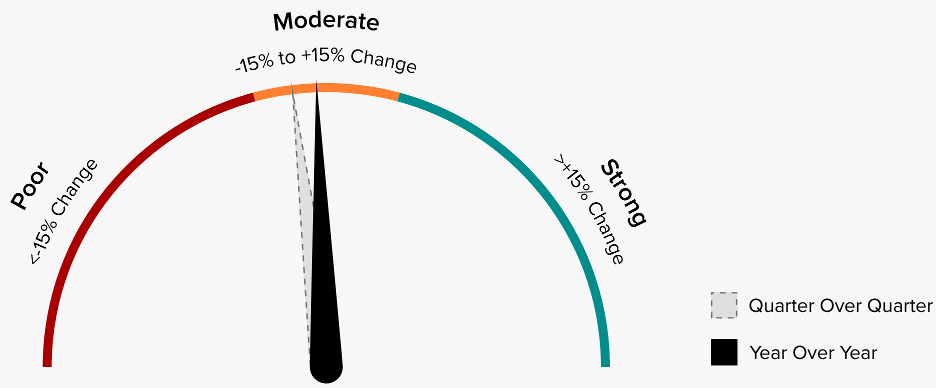
Figure 21

ALL WORK MODELS

Market Strength Score for Designers

-7% QoQ

-2% 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 design roles decreased 7% QoQ and 2% YoY, for scores of Moderate. The QoQ score was driven by a slight decline in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, compounded by an 11% decline in hiring activity. The YoY score reflected slight growth in stated demand moderated by a 16% 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 underperformed compared to the remote and hybrid segment YoY.

David Vargas
Design Matching
Team Lead,
Toptal

Q2 Commentary

"

Demand for designers continued to build, but in a much more selective way, with employers placing greater emphasis on a combination of specialized skills and practical experience. Those priorities were particularly apparent in product and visual design, where we saw continued interest in experts who can apply AI throughout the product development process and move quickly from ideas to implementation and testing. Employers also valued design professionals who could balance technical capabilities with commercial awareness.

Q3 Preview

"

In Q3, we expect demand to become even more specialized, with strong interest in designers who can combine AI with product thinking, branding, and interactive experiences. We're also expecting demand for animation skills to remain strong as companies look for better ways to communicate ideas and create more engaging digital products. Overall, designers who can connect design decisions with both AI technologies and company objectives will likely remain in the strongest position.

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 (Q2 2026 versus Q1 2026) and YoY (Q2 2026 versus Q2 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 second quarter of 2026 versus the first quarter of 2026 and the second 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.

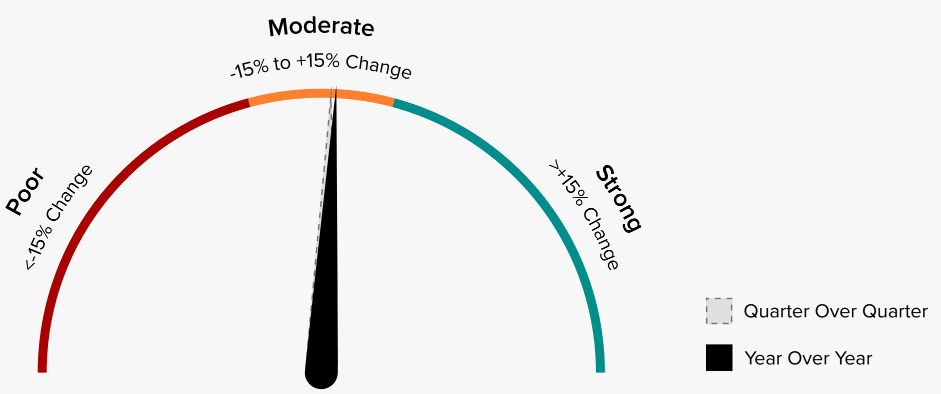
Figure 22

REMOTE AND HYBRID ROLES

Market Strength Score for Developers

+2% 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.

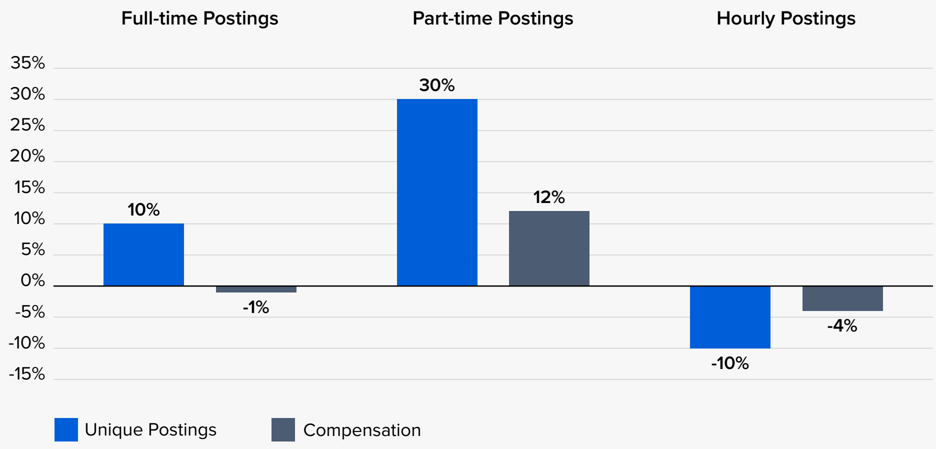
Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid developer roles increased 2% QoQ, aligning with expected seasonality, and 3% YoY, for scores of Moderate. Both the QoQ and YoY scores were driven by growth in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, moderated by declines in hiring.

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 23

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Developers

Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q1 2026 vs. Q2 2026

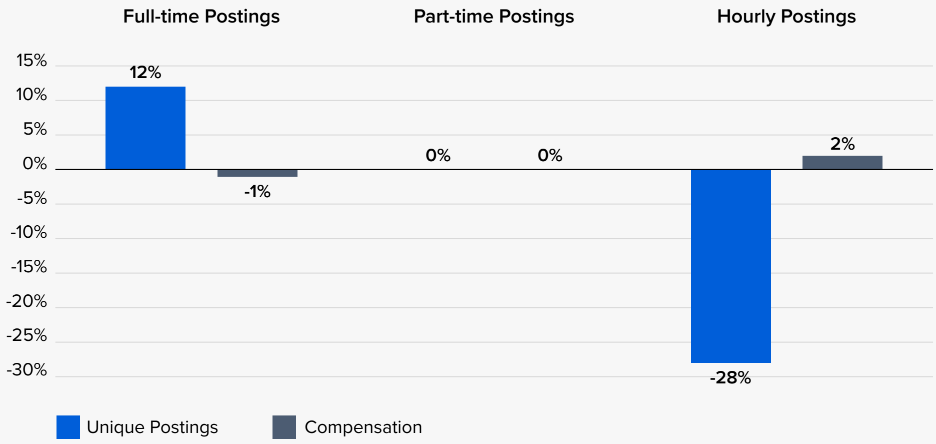


Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data
Note: Hourly role results are based on limited data.

Figure 24

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Developers

Year-Over-Year Trends, Q2 2025 vs. Q2 2026



Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data
Note: Hourly role results are based on limited data.

As shown in Figures 23 and 24, full-time job postings increased 10% QoQ and 12% YoY, while compensation decreased 1% both QoQ and YoY. Part-time job postings rose 30% QoQ and compensation grew 12%; YoY postings and compensation both remained flat. The quarterly posting trends for both time commitments reflect stronger growth than seasonality alone would predict.

Hourly postings declined 10% QoQ and 28% YoY, while compensation decreased 4% QoQ and rose 2% YoY. The findings for hourly roles are based on limited data points and should be taken as general directional indicators of the market.

-5%

QoQ change in developer hires
Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

-6%

YoY change in developer hires
Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

Hiring activity for developers decreased 5% QoQ and 6% 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) showed similar patterns for full-time postings. Full-time compensation diverged, however, showing

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.

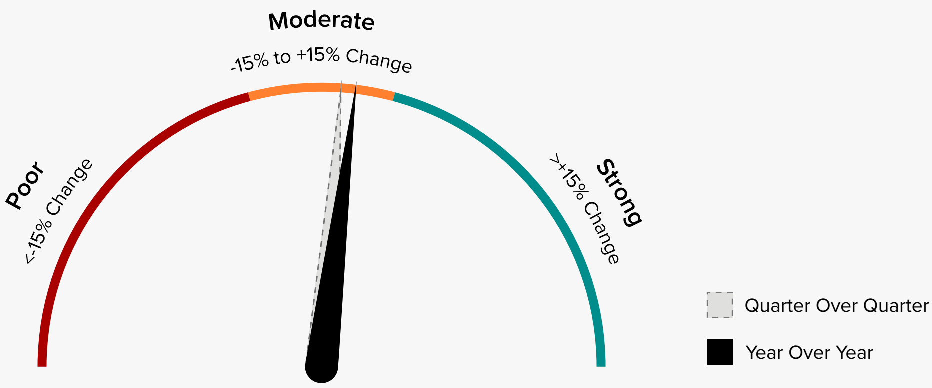
Figure 25

ALL WORK MODELS

Market Strength Score for Developers

+4% QoQ

+7% 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 4% QoQ and 7% YoY, for scores of Moderate. Both scores were driven by growth in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, moderated by declines in hiring.

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.

Paul Cioni
CTO, Technology Services,
Toptal

Q2 Commentary

“Q2 confirmed that AI fluency is no longer enough to differentiate software developers. Employers increasingly prioritized candidates with hands-on experience building and implementing production-ready AI solutions, supported by relevant certifications. Domain expertise remained a key hiring factor, and we saw employers favoring developers who could apply AI skills to solve real-world industry problems.

Q3 Preview

“In Q3, we expect organizations to move beyond AI-assisted development and into the implementation of agentic workflows. As autonomous systems become more embedded in production environments, demand is likely to be particularly strong for specialists in AI security, governance, and identity management. Developers will increasingly be expected to work across these disciplines, balancing technical delivery with the capabilities to deploy AI safely and responsibly. Those professionals who can demonstrate deep AI capability and sound judgment will be best positioned to stand out.

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 (Q2 2026 versus Q1 2026) and YoY (Q2 2026 versus Q2 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 second quarter of 2026 versus the first quarter of 2026 and the second 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.

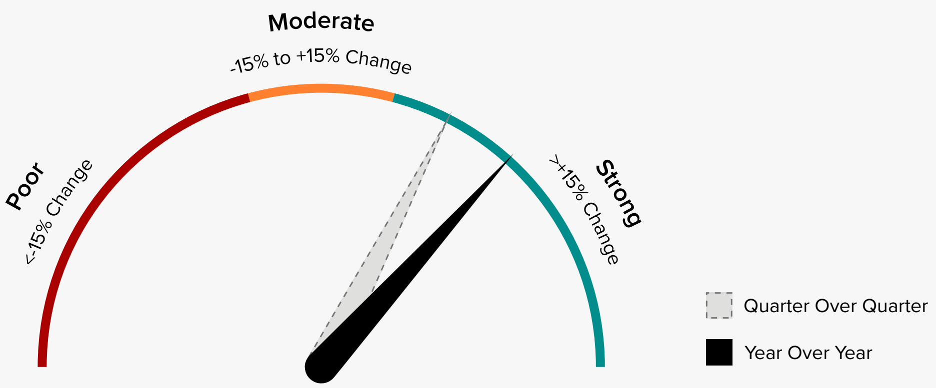
Figure 26

REMOTE AND HYBRID ROLES

Market Strength Score for Finance Consultants

+27% QoQ

+42% 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 experienced remote and hybrid finance consultant roles increased 27% QoQ and 42% YoY, for scores of Strong.

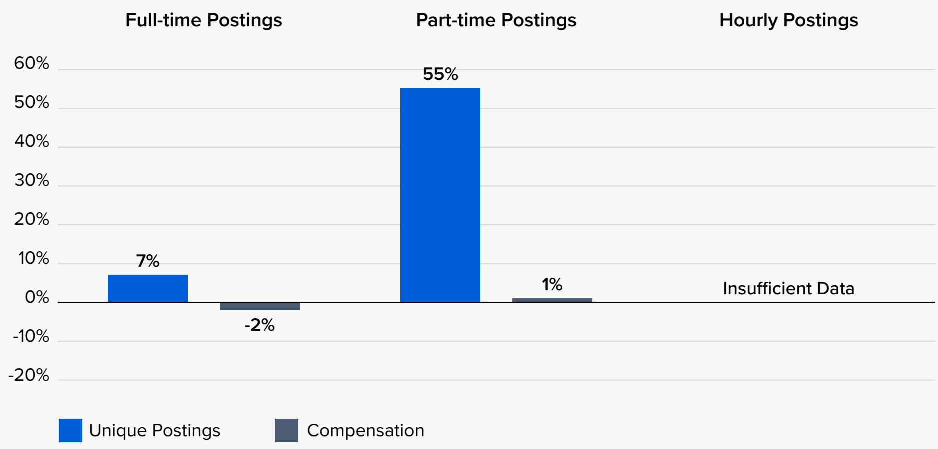
The QoQ score was driven by a 6% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a large increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected strong growth in both stated demand and hiring.

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 27

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Finance Consultants

Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q1 2026 vs. Q2 2026

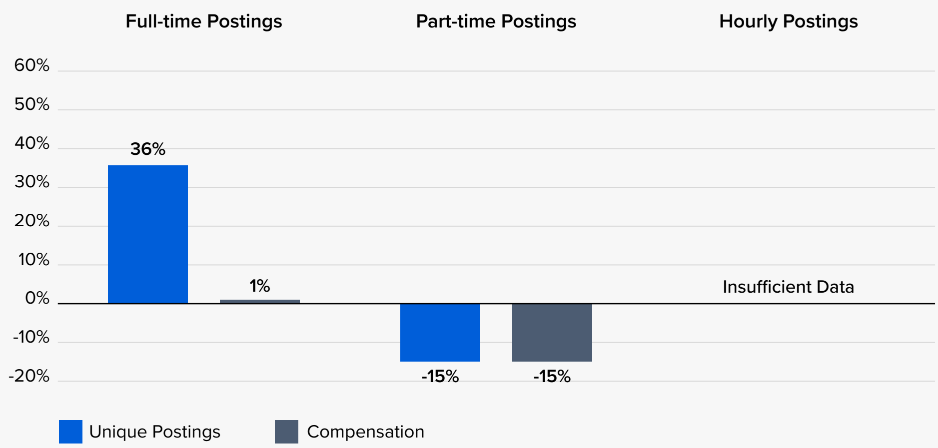


Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data
Note: Part-time role results are based on limited data.

Figure 28

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Finance Consultants

Year-Over-Year Trends, Q2 2025 vs. Q2 2026



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

As shown in Figures 27 and 28, full-time job postings increased 7% QoQ, aligning with expected seasonality, and 36% YoY, while compensation decreased 2% QoQ and increased 1% YoY. Part-time job postings rose 55% QoQ and compensation increased 1%; YoY postings and compensation both declined 15%.

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.

+48%
QoQ change in finance consultant hires
Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

+48%
YoY change in finance consultant hires
Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

Hiring activity for finance consultants increased 48% both QoQ and YoY. This Lightcast hiring data includes all time commitments and work models.

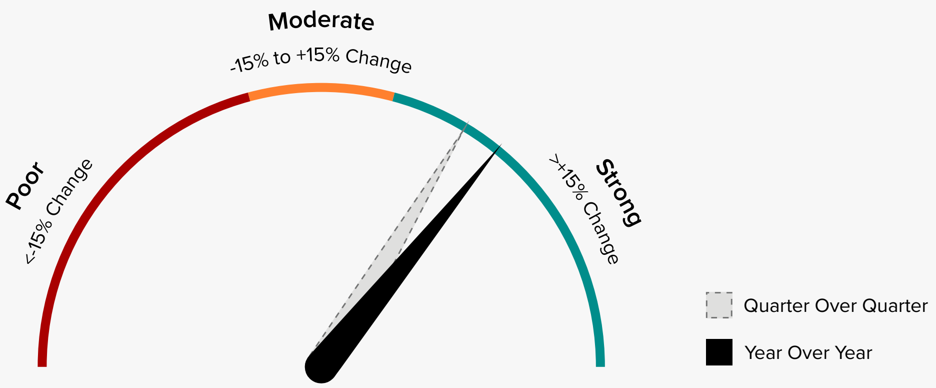
The analysis above includes demand for positions with five or more years of experience. Demand for positions with 10 or more years of experience (a subset of the prior data) showed directionally similar, but more exaggerated, trends. There was one notable difference: Full-time compensation [redacted]

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

+31% 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, 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 31% QoQ and 39% YoY, for scores of Strong. The scores were driven by moderate increases in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside strong growth in hiring.

The scores and dynamics for all work models and the remote and hybrid market were broadly similar, although the overall market showed stronger QoQ but weaker YoY growth compared to the remote and hybrid segment.

Matthew McNaghten
Business Strategy and Finance Consulting Practice Lead, Toptal

Q2 Commentary

“

The financial sector had a banner quarter with IPOs, M&A, and bank earnings all climbing. These improving market conditions drove higher demand for finance professionals, particularly those with diligence, valuation, and accounting expertise. Investment in agentic AI also contributed to increased demand, as organizations looked for help evaluating AI deployment options, assessing risks, and demonstrating ROI. We saw some selectivity in the overall increasing demand, however, and noted a preference for hiring senior practitioners to fulfill specific, near-term needs rather than building broad, ongoing capacity. We also noted reduced demand for open-ended modeling work and interim finance leadership, with companies deferring discretionary projects.

Q3 Preview

“

In Q3, ongoing regulatory scrutiny is likely to create steady demand for compliance and governance expertise. Demand for discretionary projects, such as scenario modeling, capital planning, and FP&A build-outs, will depend on how confident employers feel about the economic outlook for the second half of the year. We expect a continued need for finance consultants who are comfortable across both deal-specific and ongoing finance work and have fluency in AI-enabled tools.

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 (Q2 2026 versus Q1 2026) and YoY (Q2 2026 versus Q2 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 second quarter of 2026 versus the first quarter of 2026 and the second 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.

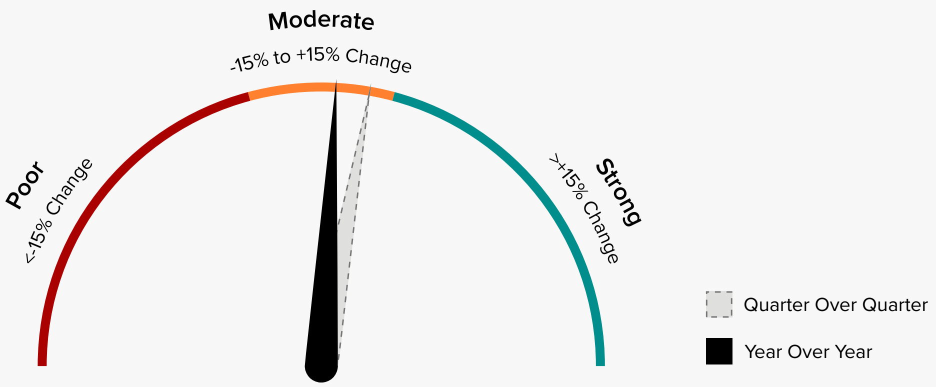
Figure 30

REMOTE AND HYBRID ROLES

Market Strength Score for Information Security Experts

+10% 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 experienced remote and hybrid information security roles increased 10% QoQ and 3% YoY, for scores of Moderate.

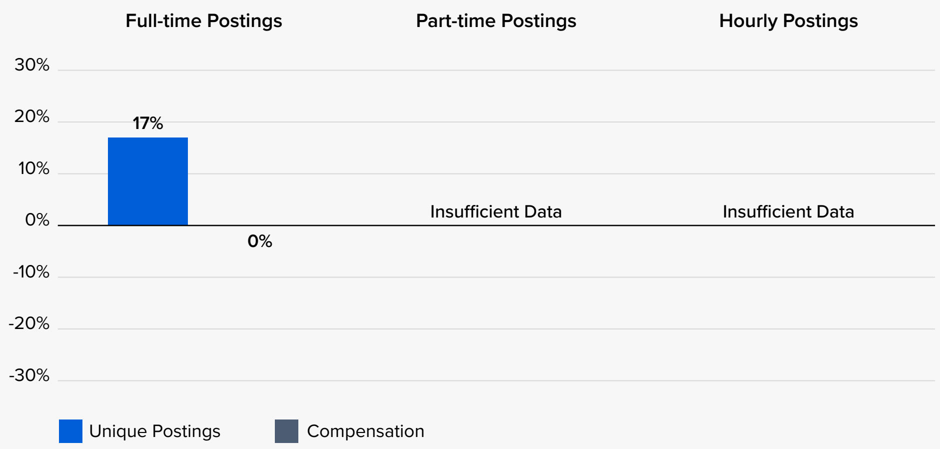
The QoQ score was driven primarily by a 17% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, moderated by a small increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected a 3% increase in both stated demand and hiring.

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 31

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Information Security Experts

Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q1 2026 vs. Q2 2026

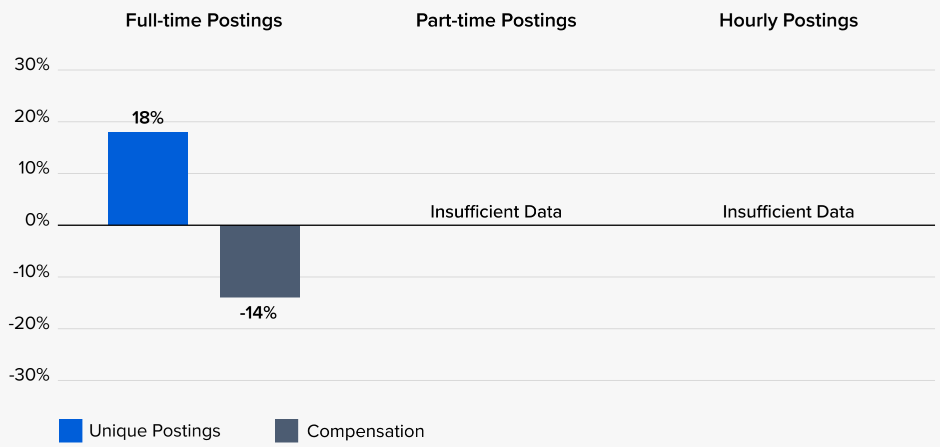


Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

Figure 32

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Information Security Experts

Year-Over-Year Trends, Q2 2025 vs. Q2 2026



Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

As shown in Figures 31 and 32, full-time job postings increased 17% QoQ and 18% YoY, while compensation remained flat QoQ and decreased 14% YoY. Compensation trends failed to keep pace with demand, indicating that employers are retaining bargaining power and may be allocating budgets elsewhere. There was insufficient data available for reliable trends in part-time and hourly positions.

+2%

QoQ change in information security expert hires
Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

+3%

YoY change in information security expert hires
Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

Hiring activity for information security experts increased 2% QoQ and 3% 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) showed stronger demand for senior full-time information security experts. Full-time postings rose [redacted]

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.

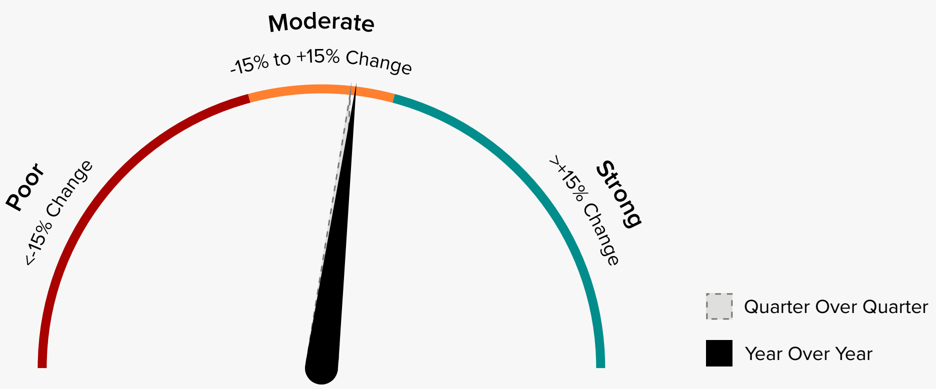
Figure 33

ALL WORK MODELS

Market Strength Score for Information Security Experts

+6% QoQ

+7% 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 6% QoQ and 7% YoY, for scores of Moderate. Both scores were driven by mild increases 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 the overall market showed weaker QoQ but stronger YoY growth compared to the remote and hybrid segment.

Zohra Ibrahimi
Cyber and Information Security Practice Lead, Toptal

Q2 Commentary

“

Q2 confirmed AI’s shift from productivity tool to operational layer, driving demand for senior talent able to govern autonomous systems, manage AI-related identity risks, and satisfy growing regulatory expectations. Organizations increasingly sought specialists who could secure nonhuman identities, oversee AI-enabled detection and response, and connect technical resilience with financial outcomes. At the same time, demand continued to favor fractional leadership, virtual CISOs, and project-based delivery teams, as employers prioritized experienced specialists who could deliver measurable impact without long-term hiring commitments.

Q3 Preview

“

In Q3, the organizations pulling ahead will be the ones treating AI oversight, identity governance, and resilience quantification as one integrated discipline rather than three separate hires, though supply for talent with expertise across all three areas is limited. We are likely to see continued strength in fractional and project-based engagement models, as well as growing demand for practitioners who sit at the intersection of security engineering, AI assurance, and enterprise risk. As regulators pay more attention to operational resilience, organizations will need to be able to demonstrate that their security controls actually work, which will sustain demand for governance and audit-readiness expertise well into Q3.

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 (Q2 2026 versus Q1 2026) and YoY (Q2 2026 versus Q2 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 second quarter of 2026 versus the first quarter of 2026 and the second 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.

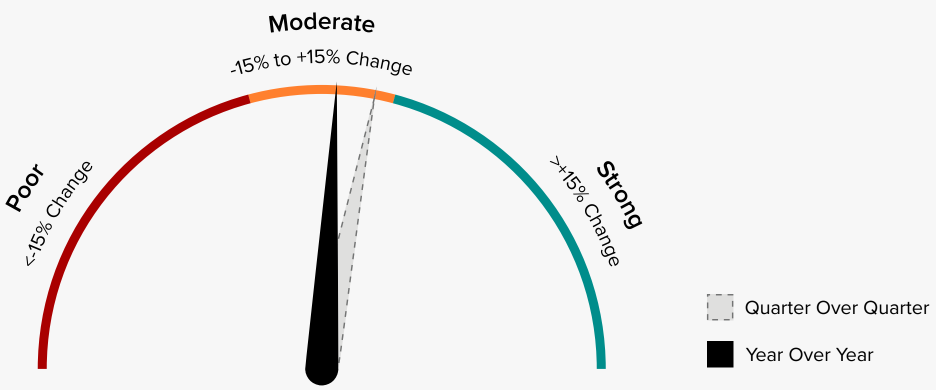
Figure 34

REMOTE AND HYBRID ROLES

Market Strength Score for Management Consultants

+11% 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 experienced remote and hybrid management consulting roles increased 11% QoQ and 3% YoY, for scores of Moderate.

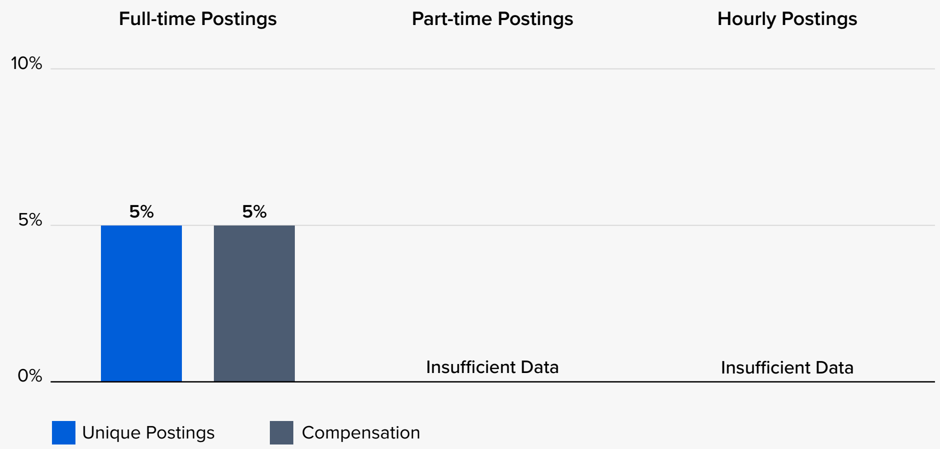
The QoQ score was driven by a 10% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, compounded by a similar increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected flat stated demand alongside a 7% increase in hiring.

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 35

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Management Consultants

Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q1 2026 vs. Q2 2026

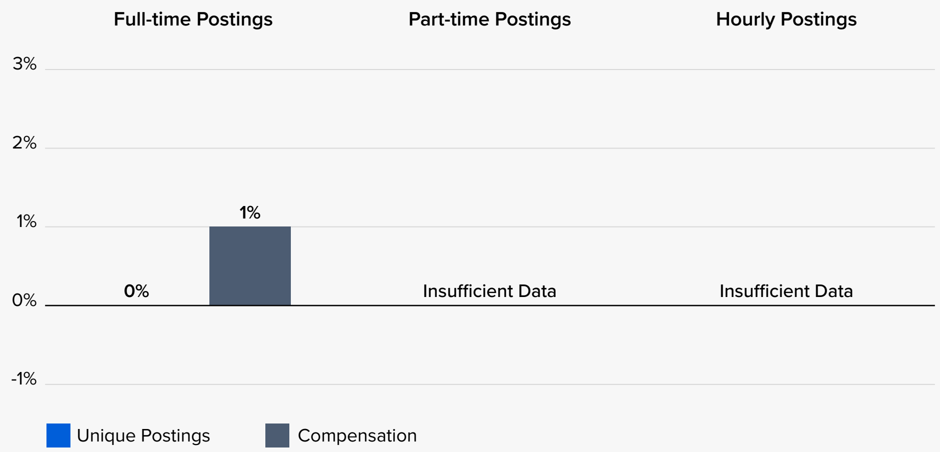


Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

Figure 36

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Management Consultants

Year-Over-Year Trends, Q2 2025 vs. Q2 2026



Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

As shown in Figures 35 and 36, full-time job postings increased 5% QoQ, aligning with expected seasonality, while compensation increased at the same pace. YoY postings remained flat and compensation increased 1%. There was insufficient data available for reliable trends in part-time and hourly positions.

+12%

QoQ change in management consultant hires
Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

+7%

YoY change in management consultant hires
Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

Hiring activity for management consultants increased 12% QoQ and 7% 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) showed broadly similar, but more exaggerated, patterns. There was one notable difference: Full-time postings for senior-level roles increased

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.

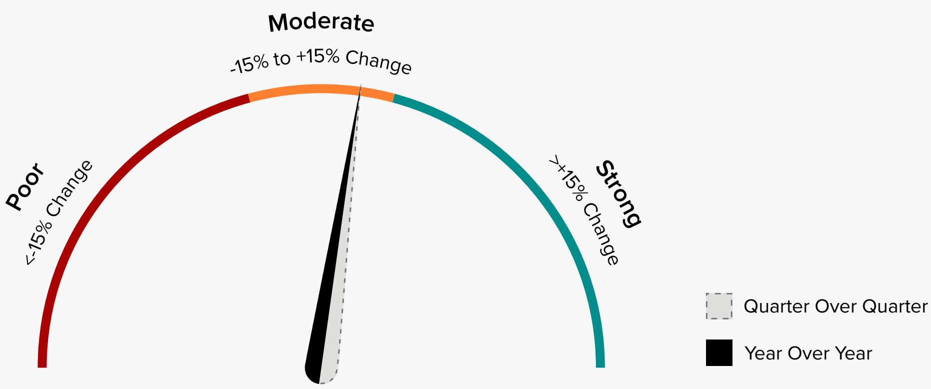
Figure 37

ALL WORK MODELS

Market Strength Score for Management Consultants

+8% QoQ

+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.

Market strength for all experienced management consultant roles increased 8% both QoQ and YoY, for scores of Moderate. The QoQ increase was driven by a small rise in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a larger increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected similar growth in both stated demand and hiring.

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

Matthew McNaghten
Business Strategy and Finance Consulting Practice Lead, Toptal

Q2 Commentary

“

Q2 saw a continued shift in management consultant demand, pointing to less exploration and more execution. Organizations sought senior strategy advisors who could translate AI investment into operating model decisions, placing greater value on implementation expertise. Demand remained steady for program management and delivery professionals, indicating that essential operational needs were protected despite tightening budgets. Companies deferred discretionary work, such as large-scale organizational transformation and broader operational improvement initiatives, and concentrated their spend on projects with clear, near-term paths to impact.

Q3 Preview

“

Demand for management consultants is expected to remain selective in Q3, and to favor senior specialists. As companies move from AI strategy to execution, many will find that significant organizational change is required, increasing demand for transformation and change management expertise. Organizations will continue to need experienced professionals who can oversee program and project delivery, while broader improvement initiatives are likely to remain difficult to justify outside of essential supply chain and procurement work. The consultants that will be most in demand are those with deep domain expertise, a track record of delivery, and credible AI fluency.

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 (Q2 2026 versus Q1 2026) and YoY (Q2 2026 versus Q2 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 second quarter of 2026 versus the first quarter of 2026 and the second 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.

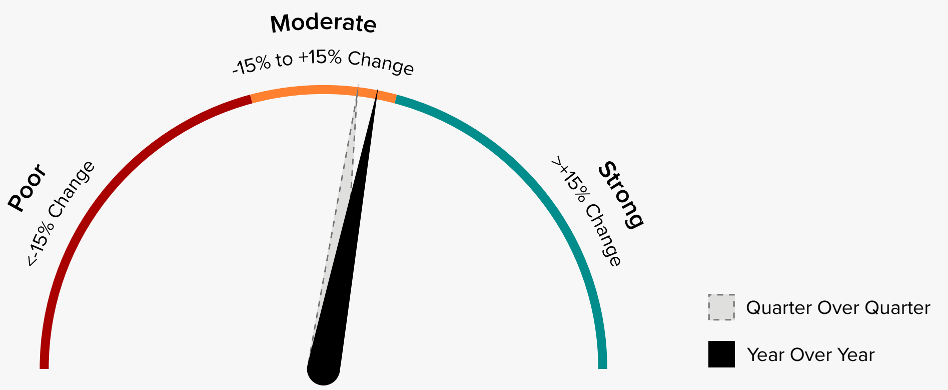
Figure 38

REMOTE AND HYBRID ROLES

Market Strength Score for Marketing Experts

+7% 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 experienced remote and hybrid marketing expert roles increased 7% QoQ and 11% YoY, for scores of Moderate.

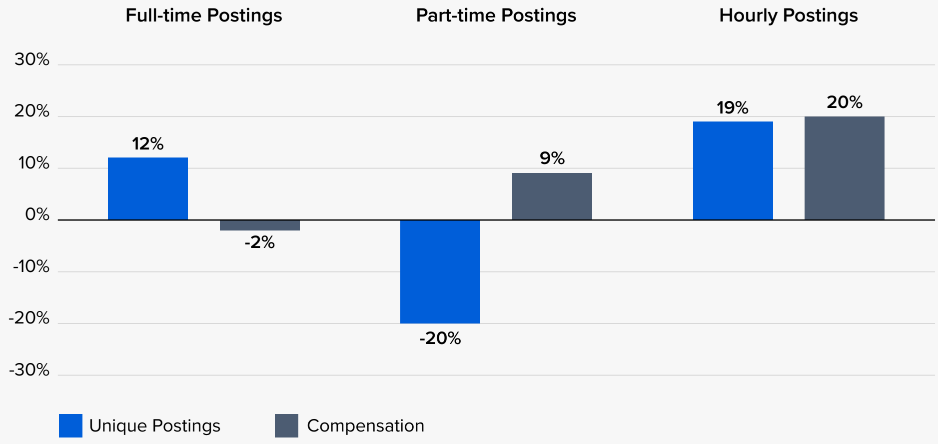
The QoQ score was driven primarily by a 9% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a smaller increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected strong growth in stated demand, moderated by a slight decline in hiring activity.

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, Q1 2026 vs. Q2 2026

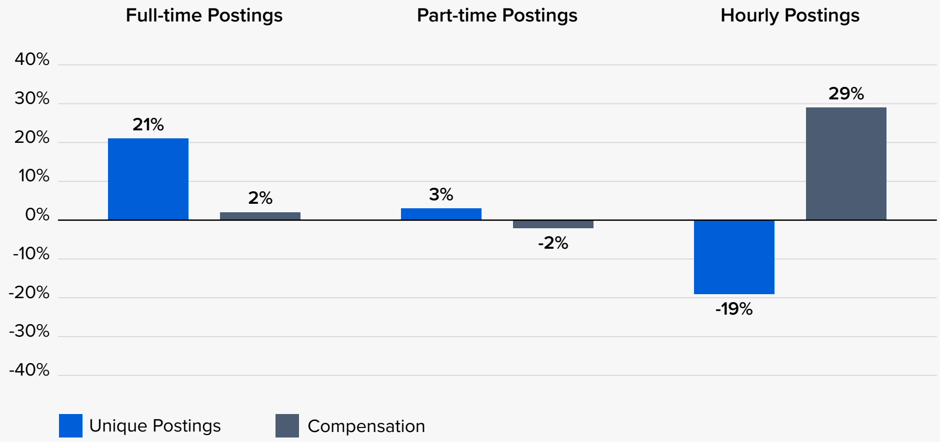


Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data
Note: Hourly role results are based on limited data.

Figure 40

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Marketing Experts

Year-Over-Year Trends, Q2 2025 vs. Q2 2026



Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data
Note: Hourly role results are based on limited data.

As shown in Figures 39 and 40, full-time job postings increased 12% QoQ and 21% YoY, while compensation declined 2% QoQ and increased 2% YoY. Part-time job postings decreased 20% QoQ and increased 3% YoY; compensation increased 9% QoQ and decreased 2% YoY.

Hourly postings increased 19% QoQ but decreased by the same degree YoY, while compensation increased 20% QoQ and 29% YoY. The findings for hourly roles are based on limited data points and should be taken as general directional indicators of the market.

+5%
QoQ change in marketing expert hires
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

-1%
YoY change in marketing expert hires
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

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

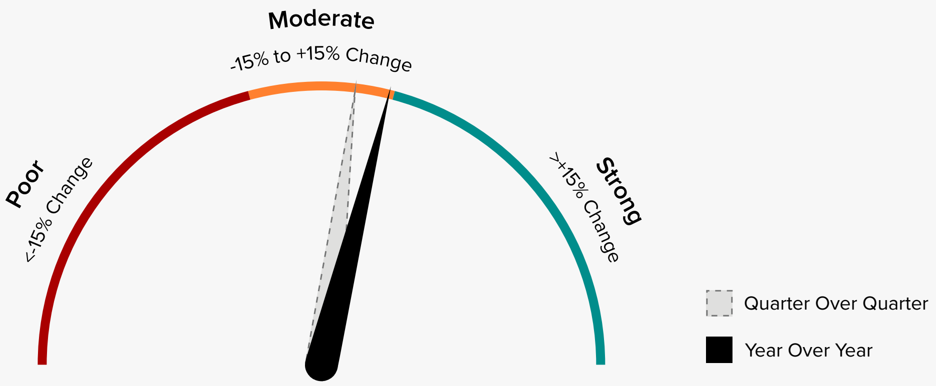
The analysis above includes demand for positions with five or more years of experience. Demand for positions with 10 or more years of experience (a subset of the prior data) showed broadly similar trends with one notable difference: Full-time compensation for senior-level roles increased [redacted]

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

+7% QoQ
+14% 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 7% QoQ and 14% YoY, for scores of Moderate. The QoQ increase was driven by a slight rise in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, compounded by a similar increase in hiring. The YoY score reflected growth in stated demand moderated by a slight 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 YoY than the remote and hybrid segment.

Jeff Gangemi
Growth and Digital Marketing Practice Lead, Toptal

Q2 Commentary

“Q2 brought rapid shifts across the marketing ecosystem. On the demand side, we noted a sharp spike in hiring for GTM engineers, the marketing specialists who build AI systems and automations that push targeting, personalization, and efficiency deeper into go-to-market operations. Demand for generative engine optimization (GEO) and answer engine optimization (AEO) specialists also stayed strong despite volatility and rapid change in the space. Most firms are still working out how to balance traditional SEO against GEO, so specialists with expertise across both disciplines were especially valued. The other defining trend was a response to the homogenizing effect of AI on marketing output: Brands prioritized messaging frameworks, product differentiation, brand strategy, and content development as they worked to stand out in a market saturated with similar positioning.

Q3 Preview

“In Q3, we expect many organizations to continue struggling to adopt AI systems and new ways of working. In place of the wholesale revolution many predicted, firms will throttle the pace of change so teams can upskill. Demand should hold for the roles outlined above, along with other AI-native technologists. At the same time, seasoned, advisory-level marketers will come back into favor as firms seek a steady hand to guide and execute transformational change. Talent equally capable of leading a department, a team, or a single project will continue to command a premium as demand increases and supply grows more limited across industries.

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 (Q2 2026 versus Q1 2026) and YoY (Q2 2026 versus Q2 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.

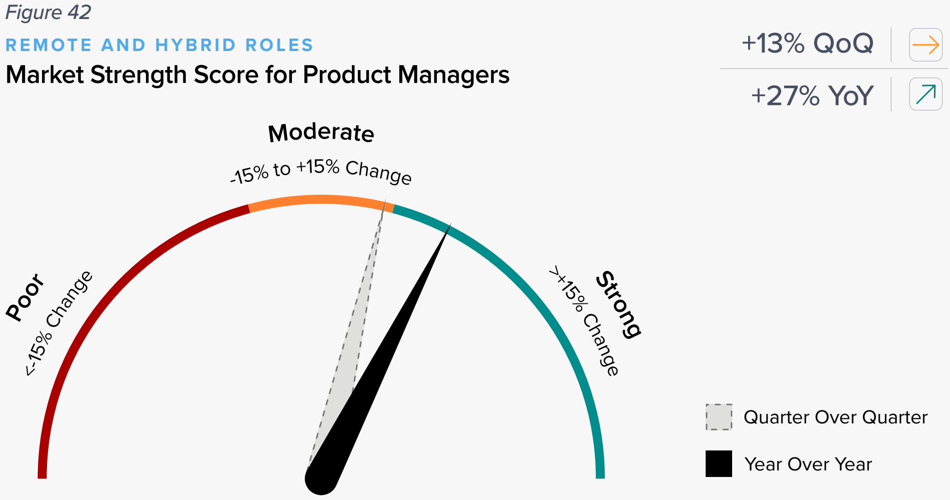
Product Manager Market Strength: Remote and Hybrid Roles

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

Figure 42

REMOTE AND HYBRID ROLES

Market Strength Score for Product Managers



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 experienced remote and hybrid product manager roles increased 13% QoQ and 27% YoY, for scores of Moderate and Strong.

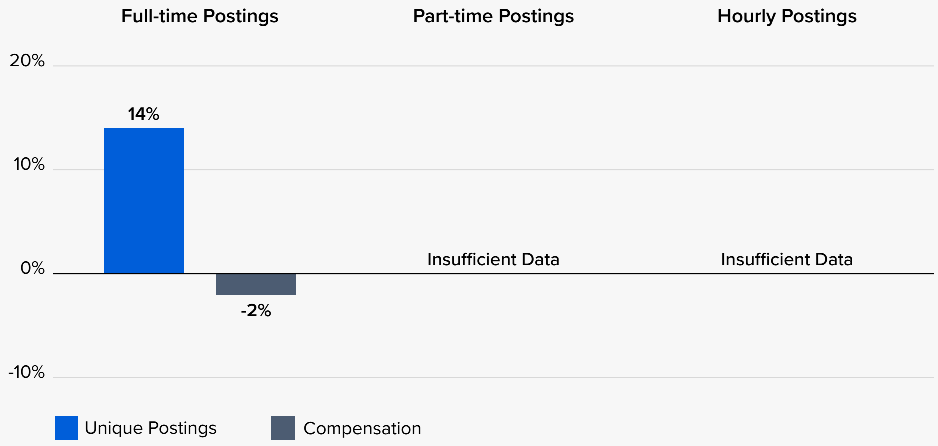
Both QoQ and YoY scores were driven wholly by stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, since Lightcast does not report on hiring activity for product managers. It's important to note that while stated demand provides an important market signal, it can also overstate the true demand 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, Q1 2026 vs. Q2 2026

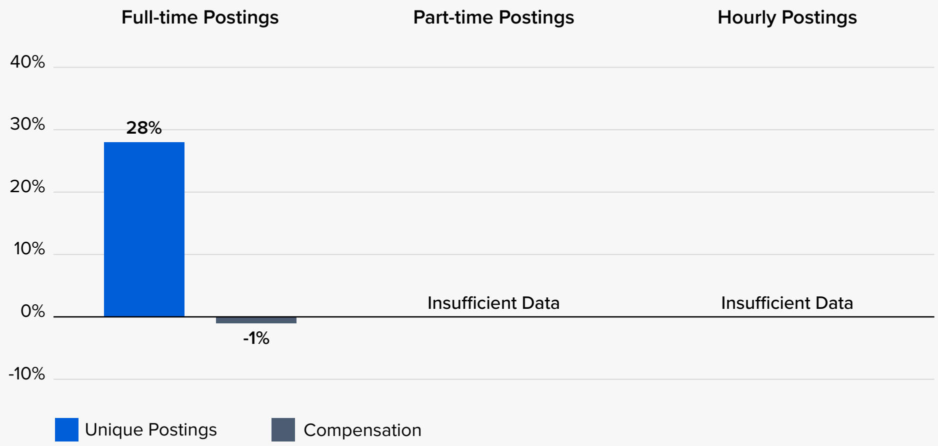


Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

Figure 44

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Product Managers

Year-Over-Year Trends, Q2 2025 vs. Q2 2026



Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

As shown in Figures 43 and 44, full-time job postings increased 14% QoQ and 28% YoY; compensation decreased 2% QoQ and 1% YoY. Compensation trends failed to keep pace with demand, indicating that employers are retaining bargaining power and may be allocating budgets elsewhere. There was insufficient data available for reliable trends in part-time and hourly positions.

+6%

Average QoQ change in hiring for all Toptal areas of expertise
Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

+2%

Average YoY change in hiring for all Toptal areas of expertise
Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

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

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 6% QoQ and 2% YoY.

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) showed stronger growth in some areas. Full-time job postings for senior-level roles rose

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.

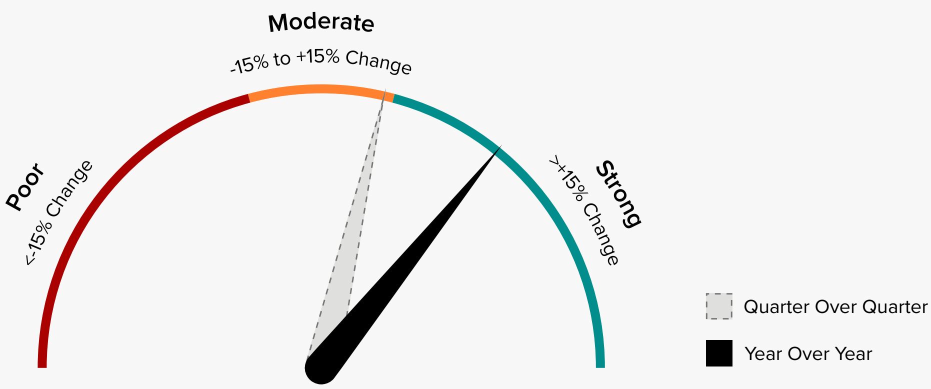
Figure 45

ALL WORK MODELS

Market Strength Score for Product Managers

+13% 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 13% QoQ and 39% YoY, for scores of Moderate and 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 similar, although the overall market outperformed the remote and hybrid segment YoY.

Érico Sabino
Enterprise Matching
Team Lead,
Toptal

Q2 Commentary

“

Demand for product managers stayed strong through Q2, with the focus on AI maturing from broad interest in LLMs into specific demand for agentic AI and workflow-automation expertise across a range of sectors, from CPG and healthcare to fintech. Alongside steady enterprise appetite for technical product managers and data product owners, we saw early signals of demand for tool-specific fluency, with some employers seeking candidates with proven experience in particular AI platforms. The key takeaway: Generalist product skills are necessary but no longer sufficient. Those who pair strong delivery fundamentals with hands-on AI capability are best positioned to take advantage of demand in the second half of the year.

Q3 Preview

“

In Q3, demand in the product manager vertical will continue to be reshaped by AI. Enterprises will likely seek product managers fluent in AI and LLMs, including agentic platforms, RAG, and AI-driven analytics, while SMB employers are expected to prioritize hands-on technical product managers driving 0-to-1 and MVP builds in fintech, healthtech, and consumer apps. Applied AI capability has shifted from a differentiator to a baseline expectation, and demand will likely be highest for product managers who pair strong discovery and roadmapping skills with real experience delivering AI-centric products.

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 (Q2 2026 versus Q1 2026) and YoY (Q2 2026 versus Q2 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 second quarter of 2026 versus the first quarter of 2026 and the second 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.

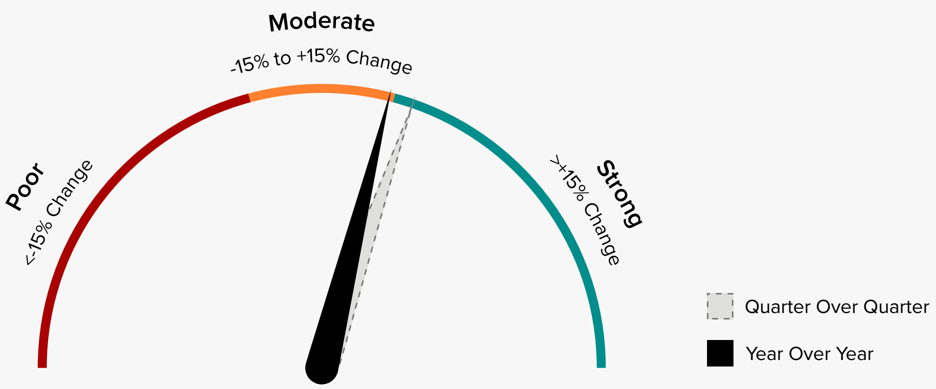
Figure 46

REMOTE AND HYBRID ROLES

Market Strength Score for Project Managers

+19% QoQ

+14% 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 experienced remote and hybrid project manager roles increased 19% QoQ and 14% YoY, for scores of Strong and Moderate.

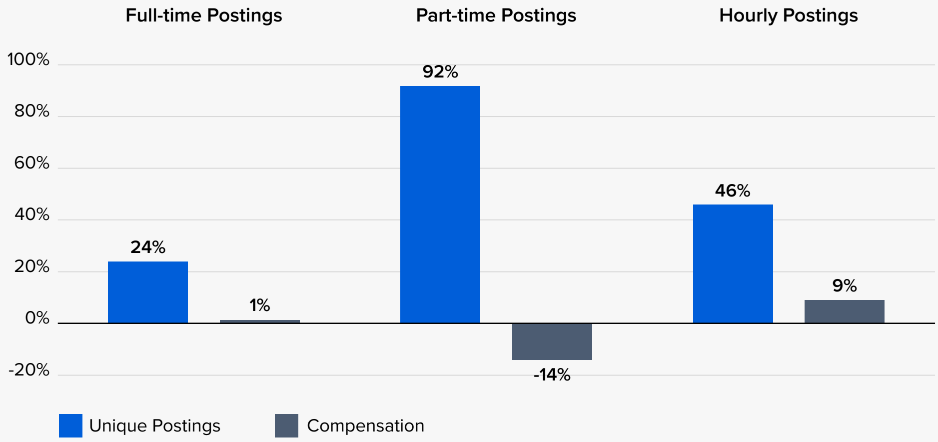
Both the QoQ and YoY scores were driven primarily by a strong increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside smaller increases in hiring.

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 47

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Project Managers

Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q1 2026 vs. Q2 2026

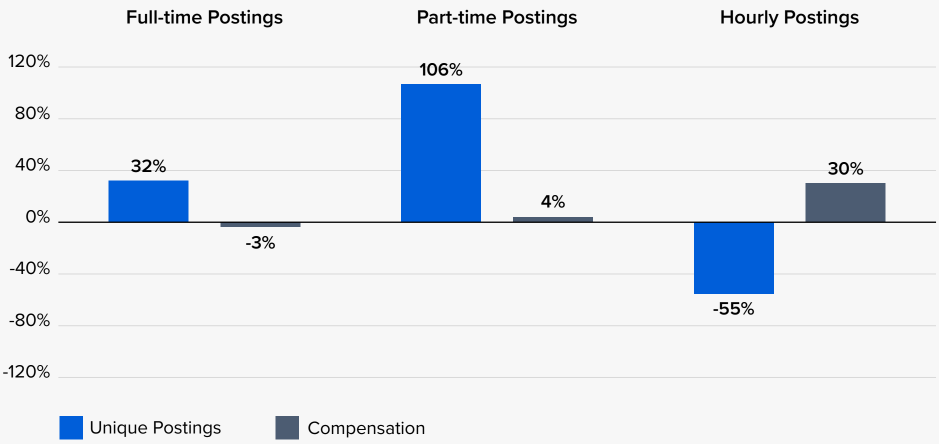


Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

Figure 48

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Project Managers

Year-Over-Year Trends, Q2 2025 vs. Q2 2026



Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

As shown in Figures 47 and 48, full-time job postings increased 24% QoQ and 32% YoY, while compensation rose 1% QoQ and declined 3% YoY. Part-time job postings increased 92% QoQ and 106% YoY; compensation decreased 14% QoQ and increased 4% YoY. Hourly postings increased 46% QoQ but decreased 55% YoY. Hourly compensation increased 9% QoQ and 30% YoY. The quarterly posting trends for all time commitments reflect stronger growth than seasonality alone would predict.

+13%

QoQ change in project manager hires
Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

+1%

YoY change in project manager hires
Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

Hiring activity for project managers increased 13% QoQ and 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) showed broadly similar trends with some small differences. Full-time postings for senior-level positions rose [redacted]

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.

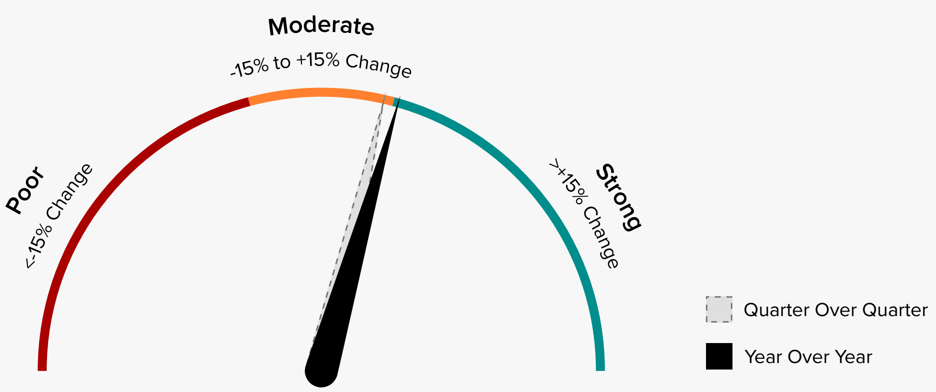
Figure 49

ALL WORK MODELS

Market Strength Score for Project Managers

+13% QoQ

+16% 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 13% QoQ and 16% YoY, for scores of Moderate and Strong. The QoQ increase was driven by a 6% rise in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, compounded by a larger increase in hiring. Conversely, the YoY score reflected 15% growth in stated demand moderated by a slight increase in hiring activity.

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

Sergio Castro
Product and Project Management Matching Team Lead, Toptal

Q2 Commentary

“

Q2 sustained strong demand for project managers, with the sharpest growth in technical program managers, Agile delivery leaders, and AI-focused project managers. Enterprise transformation, such as ERP, cloud migration, and M&A integration, was a major driver, concentrated primarily in CPG, fintech, and healthcare. That demand favored project managers with both technical depth and experience leading complex change initiatives. Domain knowledge was also valuable, as employers sought professionals who could navigate the specific operational and regulatory requirements of their industries.

Q3 Preview

“

In Q3, demand is likely to be driven by applied AI, with a clear premium for project managers who can lead technical delivery of AI initiatives across enterprise and SMB alike. We expect that enterprises will need seasoned program managers for complex transformation work, while smaller businesses will seek versatile technical project managers with domain-specific depth and hands-on experience of modern delivery platforms. Agile fluency will remain table stakes, but the real differentiator this quarter will be pairing rigorous execution with genuine technical judgment. To stay competitive, project managers should deepen their technical and AI capabilities alongside proven Agile and program-governance expertise, and be ready to lead complex, cross-functional transformations in regulated environments.

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 (Q2 2026 versus Q1 2026) and YoY (Q2 2026 versus Q2 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 YoY 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.

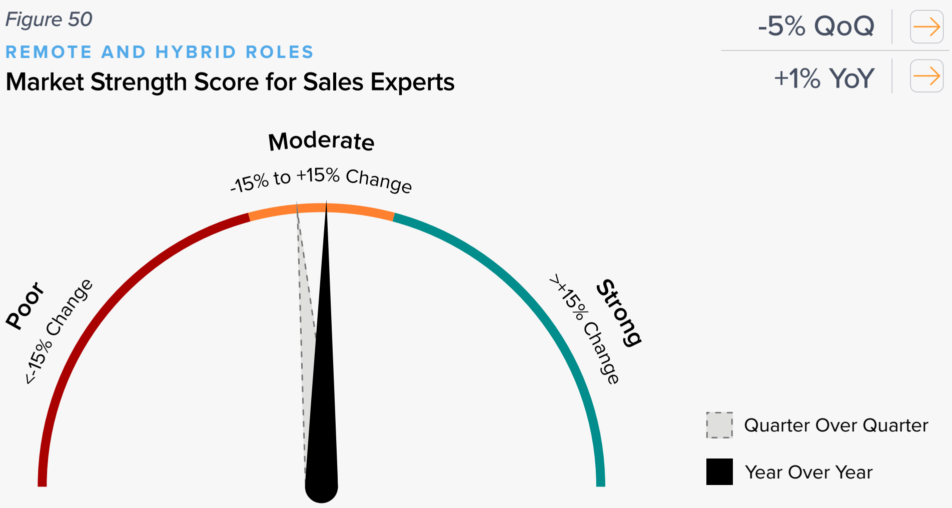
Sales Expert Market Strength: Remote and Hybrid Roles

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

Figure 50

REMOTE AND HYBRID ROLES

Market Strength Score for Sales Experts



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, YoY hiring activity figures are estimates.

Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid sales expert roles decreased 5% QoQ and increased 1% YoY, for scores of Moderate.

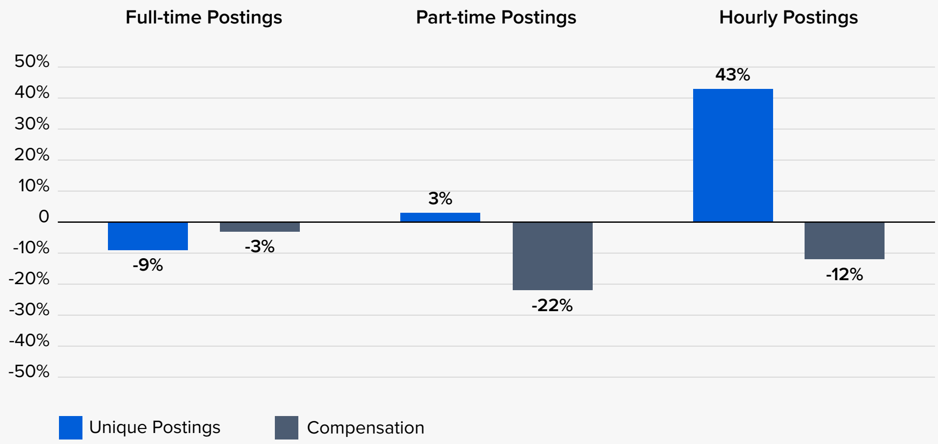
The QoQ score was driven primarily by a 11% decrease in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, alongside a slight increase in hiring activity. The YoY score reflected 6% growth in stated demand moderated by a decrease in hiring.

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 51

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Sales Experts

Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q1 2026 vs. Q2 2026

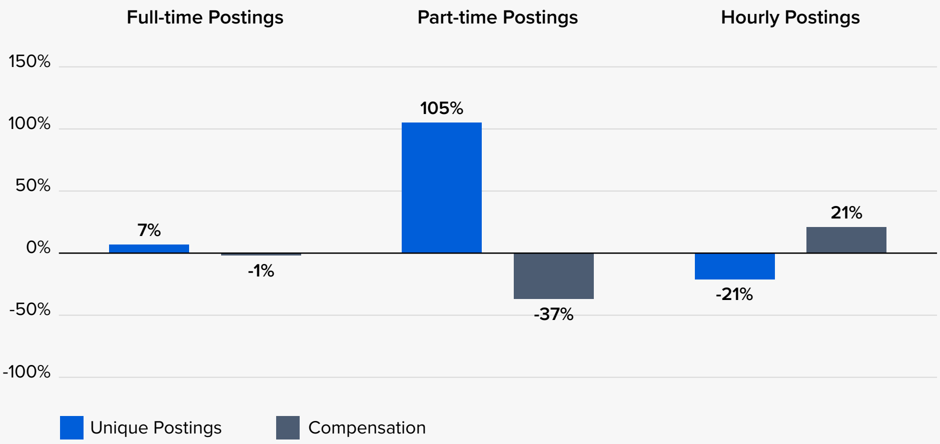


Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data
Note: Hourly role results are based on limited data.

Figure 52

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Sales Experts

Year-Over-Year Trends, Q2 2025 vs. Q2 2026



Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data
Note: Hourly role results are based on limited data.

As shown in Figures 51 and 52, full-time job postings decreased 9% QoQ and increased 7% YoY, while compensation decreased 3% QoQ and 1% YoY. Part-time job postings increased 3% QoQ and 105% YoY, but compensation fell 22% QoQ and 37% YoY. Compensation trends failed to keep pace with demand, indicating that employers are retaining bargaining power and may be allocating budgets elsewhere.

Hourly postings increased 43% QoQ but decreased 21% YoY. Conversely, compensation decreased 12% QoQ but increased 21% 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 sales expert hires
Source: Toptal, based on Lightcast data

-4%
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, the YoY figure is an estimate.

Hiring activity for sales experts increased 2% QoQ and decreased 4% YoY. This Lightcast hiring data includes all time commitments and work models.

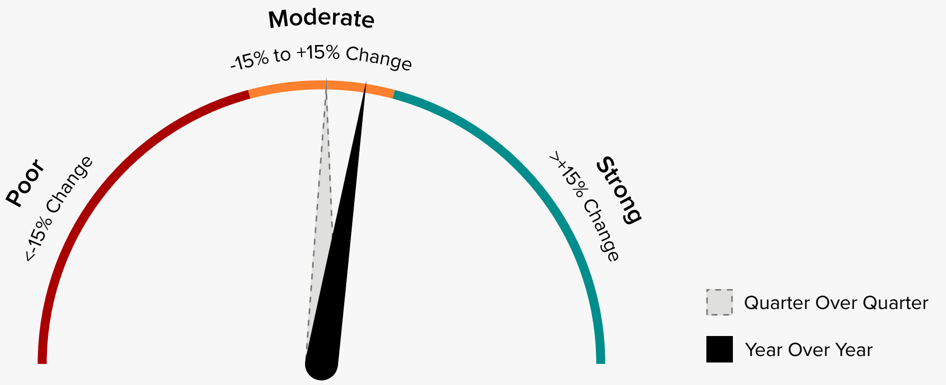
The analysis above includes demand for positions with five or more years of experience. Demand for positions with 10 or more years of experience (a subset of the prior data) showed directionally similar patterns, but occasionally exaggerated, trends. Part-time postings for senior-level roles rose [redacted]

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

+1% QoQ
+9% 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, YoY hiring activity figures are estimates.

Market strength for all experienced sales expert roles increased 1% QoQ and 9% YoY, for scores of Moderate. The QoQ score was driven primarily by a slight rise in hiring activity, while stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, remained flat. The YoY score reflected 11% growth in stated demand moderated by a slight decline in hiring.

The scores and dynamics for all work models and the remote and hybrid market showed slight differences, with the overall market growing both QoQ and YoY while the remote and hybrid segment declined QoQ.

Toby Dusina
Sales Development Director,
Toptal

Q2 Commentary

“

Q2 marked a decisive shift from headcount expansion toward hiring selectivity, as organizations replaced volume-based ramp plans with fewer, higher-impact hires. The most marketable sales professionals were those who could demonstrate measurable impact on business outcomes rather than activity metrics, as well as those fluent in data analytics, AI-assisted workflows, and ROI-based selling. Hiring managers increasingly screened for business acumen and executive communication over raw pipeline generation, signaling a structural move toward advisory talent. Enterprise sales experience and strategic account management became baseline expectations rather than differentiators, while the ability to operate across product, RevOps, and customer success emerged as a key marker of candidate quality.

Q3 Preview

“

As budgets tighten in the second half of the year, recruiting decisions will favor sales professionals who pair technical fluency in cloud, AI, and automation with the executive communication skills to translate that fluency into C-suite relevance. We expect to see continued consolidation of roles, with companies seeking versatile experts who can carry strategic accounts end to end, rather than specialists confined to a single funnel stage. To stay competitive, sales experts should invest in demonstrable AI literacy and quantifiable impact stories, positioning themselves as advisors who reduce buyer risk rather than vendors who push products. The sales experts that thrive in Q3 will be those who focus on solving meaningful business problems, using judgment and commercial expertise to build trust with executives.

Key Takeaways

Significant insights from this report are summarized below.

- **Demand for experienced remote and hybrid technology and professional services personnel rose 5.4% QoQ and 8.9% YoY.**
- **Demand for all experienced technology and professional services roles, including in-office jobs, increased 7.1% QoQ and 12.6% YoY, slightly outperforming remote and hybrid roles alone.**
- **Broader job market data points to weaker demand for more junior roles and those based primarily on routine tasks.** Postings for all professions and all levels of experience in the US and most other large economies decreased by an average of 3.6% QoQ and 9% YoY.
- **Technology company layoffs decreased 47% QoQ, but increased 5% YoY.** The QoQ drop is largely due to an unusually high number of layoffs in Q1, when Oracle dismissed approximately 20,000 workers at the very end of the quarter. The YoY elevation of tech layoffs 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.

+ **Broader economic conditions are another contributor to the trends described in this report.**
  - The US labor market, a bellwether for global financial and economic health, was more resilient in Q2 than in Q1 but remains unpredictable, with modest job gains in April and May but slower growth in June.

Since 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 Q3 2026:

+ **Job growth for all US roles is projected to increase slightly.**
  Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data shows that job growth has been declining at an average rate of 3.5% per quarter for the last several years. Our model suggests a departure from the BLS trends for Q3, with slightly positive growth.
+ **Job growth for US professional services roles is projected to be effectively flat.**
  BLS data shows that professional services job growth fell at a rate of about 4% per quarter for the last several years. Our model suggests a departure from the BLS trends for Q3, with that decline leveling off.
+ **Job growth for US information services (technology) roles is projected to increase moderately.**
  BLS data shows that information services job growth fell at a rate of about 5.5% per quarter for the last several years. Our model suggests a departure from the BLS trends for Q3, with a moderate increase in growth.
+ **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 3.2% per quarter for the last several years. According to our model, job growth for this segment will continue to increase in Q3, but at a larger magnitude than its historical average.

Appendix

Data Sources

This report uses data from the following sources:

Source	Data Type
Hacker News Hiring	Job postings for technology professionals
Indeed Hiring Lab	Data drawn from the popular site for job postings for the US and other major economies
Layoffs.fyi	Layoff data for technology professionals
Lightcast	Unique job postings and offered compensation by talent profile, aggregated from approximately 220,000 job boards, company career sites, and job posting aggregators
LinkedIn Economic Graph	Hiring trends in the technology, information technology, and media sectors at the national level for the US and other major economies
Staffing Industry Analysts (SIA)	Trends in demand for engineering and information technology professionals via the staffing industry
We Work Remotely	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 Q2 2026 is described below.

Data Inputs

The model draws on the following data sources:

+ 16 years of remote and hybrid job postings on Lightcast. (Remote and hybrid hiring patterns serve as leading indicators for broader market trends, in part because companies often tap the larger distributed talent pool to address urgent needs before expanding hiring more broadly.)

+ Bureau of Labor Statistics job posting data

+ Key macroeconomic indicators, including:

  - U-6 unemployment rate: Unlike the headline U-3 unemployment rate, which only counts people who are unemployed and actively seeking work, the U-6 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
Data Science Experts	Data Scientists
Designers	Graphic Designers Web and Digital Interface Designers
Developers	Software Developers
Finance Consultants	Financial and Investment Analysts
Information Security Experts	Information Security Analysts
Management Consultants	Management Analysts Business Operations Specialists
Marketing Experts	Marketing Managers Market Research Analysts Marketing Specialists
Product Managers	Positions with “Product Manager” included in job title
Project Managers	Project Management Specialists
Sales Experts	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

Toptal

The World's Top Talent, On Demand.®

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clients served

85,000+
engagements

140+
countries