

TALENT MARKET REPORT



High-skilled Job Report for Q4 2025

JANUARY 2026

Table of Contents

| | |
|-----------|---|
| 3 | SUMMARY |
| 7 | INTRODUCTION |
| 8 | 2025 YEAR-END INSIGHTS |
| 10 | TRENDS IN THE GLOBAL AND US JOB MARKET |
| 10 | Broad Global Demand Trends |
| 12 | Global Technology Demand Trends |
| 15 | Select US Demand and Hiring Trends |
| 17 | Select Remote and Hybrid Demand and Hiring Trends |
| 19 | Market Strength Scores for Technology and Professional Services |
| 22 | US JOB MARKET FORECAST FOR Q1 2026 |
| 24 | DEMAND TRENDS BY TOPTAL TALENT AREA OF EXPERTISE |
| 25 | Data Science Expert Trends |
| 29 | Designer Trends |
| 33 | Developer Trends |
| 37 | Finance Consultant Trends |
| 41 | Information Security Expert Trends |
| 45 | Management Consultant Trends |
| 49 | Marketing Expert Trends |
| 53 | Product Manager Trends |
| 57 | Project Manager Trends |
| 61 | Sales Expert Trends |
| 65 | KEY TAKEAWAYS |
| 67 | APPENDIX |
| 67 | Data Sources |
| 69 | Talent Market and Vertical Demand Data Analysis |

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.

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. We also calculate and share secondary market strength scores that apply to all work models, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. Throughout this Q4 report, year-over-year (YoY) trends compare Q4 2025 to Q4 2024. In certain instances, we also offer data comparing all of 2025 to all of 2024 for a more complete picture of the full year.

A significant new addition to this quarter’s report is a [US Job Market Forecast](#) that shares directional signals for the strength of the US job market in Q1 2026.

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 | -4% | +19.8% |
| Data Science Experts | -11% | +32% |
| Designers | -8% | -2% |
| Developers | -6% | +30% |
| Finance Consultants | -5% | +1% |
| Information Security Experts | -14% | -2% |
| Management Consultants | -7% | -2% |
| Marketing Experts | +2% | +33% |
| Product Managers | -3% | +30% |
| Project Managers | -3% | +6% |
| Sales Experts | -5% | +12% |

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 and sales expert roles are more volatile due to differences in the available data.

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

Trends in the Technology and Professional Services Job Market



-4%

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

As of Q4 2025, market strength for experienced remote and hybrid technology and professional services roles decreased 4% quarter over quarter (QoQ), for a Toptal Market Strength score of Moderate, but increased 19.8% Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024, for a YoY score of Strong. Comparing full-year data from 2025 to 2024, there was a 10.9% increase in market strength, for a score of Moderate.

The overall technology and professional services market, which includes all work models (remote, hybrid, and in-office), showed extremely similar trends, but slightly underperformed compared to the distributed job market. See [Toptal Market Strength Scores for Technology and Professional Services](#) for more details.



+19.8%

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

As with prior quarters, specific trends vary across areas of expertise, time commitments (i.e., full-time, part-time, and hourly positions), and experience level, which we discuss at length in this report. (See [Demand Trends by Toptal Talent Area of Expertise](#) for more details.)



+10.9%

Full-year Toptal Market Strength Score (2025 versus 2024) for the remote and hybrid technology and professional services job market
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

Trends in the Broader Job Market

In addition to calculating Toptal Market Strength Scores and analyzing data that closely aligns with professional profiles in the talent network, Toptal also monitors workforce activity in the wider US and global markets. For these trends, we are looking at QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024).

Job posting trends for the broader job market were generally less positive than those for experienced technology and professional services roles:

- + New postings for all professions and levels of experience fell YoY in the US and most other large economies with comparable data, according to [Indeed Hiring Lab](#) data. Canada was the single exception, with an increase of 2.4%.
- + QoQ trends were more mixed, with Australia, France, and Ireland all down by single digits, and Germany virtually flat. Postings in the United Kingdom, US, and Canada were up by 1.5%, 2.1%, and 5.8%, respectively.

Meanwhile, there were several indications of potential stabilization and growth in the technology job market:

- + New technology job postings on [Hacker News](#) increased by 10.9% QoQ and 15.7% YoY.
- + After three consecutive quarters of decline, [LinkedIn](#) reported a 6.2% YoY increase in hiring in the US technology, media, and information sector.
- + Postings for US developers of all levels of experience on Indeed increased 7.6% QoQ and were essentially flat YoY, compared to decreases of 2.9% and 6.7% in Q3.

Despite the positive signals above, layoffs continue to impact the global technology sector:

- + Tech layoffs increased by 3% QoQ and more than doubled YoY, but this is because Q4 was an outlier and had the fewest layoffs of any quarter in the last two years by a significant margin.
- + When looking at the full year, we see the absolute number of workers laid off in all of 2025 was almost 20% lower than the number in 2024: 122,500 versus 152,900.

The broader market data above indicates that while demand for experienced technology and professional services talent has started to rebound from the market low in Q4 2023 (see [Aggregate Demand for Toptal-relevant Positions, Q4 2021-Q4-2025](#) for an illustration of this trend), the general US and global job market has been slower to turn around. One reason that demand for Toptal-relevant roles generally outperformed the broader market is that AI adoption is impacting junior positions a great deal more than mid- and senior-level ones. See [Trends in the Global and US Job Market](#) for more details.



Erik Stettler
Chief Economist, Toptal

“

The talent market is undergoing a structural shift as organizations redefine how work gets done, finding a balance between AI and human judgment, and between remote flexibility and in-person collaboration. This transition is creating real friction between talent supply and demand: As automation expands across technology and professional services, some roles and skill sets are gaining momentum while others are being compressed.

Many calculations in this report are based on targeted indicators that naturally fluctuate, and the quarter-over-quarter results in particular reflect both the volatility of short-term labor metrics and the deeper instability of this moment. Some trends may seem contradictory, such as hiring growth alongside elevated layoffs, or higher demand for senior talent alongside limited pathways for new entrants. But these divergent trends reflect a common reality: Companies are still experimenting, validating ROI, and rebuilding teams around new technology and new ways of working. This turbulence has been challenging for many professionals and company leaders, but those who can adapt will thrive. Organizations that build optionality through disciplined experimentation and individuals who combine technical fluency with contextual judgment and strategic insight will be positioned to lead in the emerging equilibrium.



Hari Mahadevan
AVP of Talent
Operations, Toptal

“

Q4 marked a clear transition from cost pressure and experimentation toward disciplined execution and scalable growth. Across functions, companies continued to invest in AI, large language models (LLMs), and cybersecurity, but the emphasis shifted toward making those investments durable. We saw increased focus on strengthening core systems through enterprise resource planning implementations, digital transformation programs, and improved operating models, alongside rising demand for product, project, and consulting talent capable of turning AI initiatives into measurable business outcomes. Sales, marketing, and finance leaders reinforced the same pattern: Success depended less on volume or speed, and more on coordination, value clarity, and system health across teams.

As organizations navigated macro uncertainty late in the quarter, many paused discretionary spending and doubled down on foundational capabilities. This drove demand for flexible, adaptable talent who could operate across strategy and execution, collaborate more closely in person when needed, and help modernize processes without adding unnecessary complexity. Design, product, and project management roles increasingly sat at the intersection of AI adoption, business impact, and cross-functional delivery.

Looking ahead to Q1, momentum is expected to return with greater intentionality. With new budgets in place, companies will prioritize scalable infrastructure, embedding AI into core workflows, and strengthening financial rigor to justify investment. Talent demand will favor professionals who combine technical depth with business judgment, agility with execution discipline, and the ability to work collaboratively across teams to drive sustainable growth in a more resource-conscious environment.

Introduction

This Q4 2025 report analyzes the technology and professional services job market as well as broader global and US hiring trends, including:

- + Year-end insights highlighting major 2025 job market trends
- + QoQ and YoY market conditions as of the end of Q4 2025
- + A Q1 2026 forecast for the US job market
- + Q4 analysis and preliminary impressions of Q1 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.

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.)

2025 Year-end Insights

As discussed in the [Summary](#), the Q4 2025 data shows that demand for experienced technology and professional services personnel has grown YoY, even as technology layoffs and general volatility persist.

This data, and the conversations Toptal leaders have had with clients across sectors, point to two major patterns that defined the job market in 2025:

- + AI is reshuffling business operations and hiring in ways that favor experienced workers over entry-level ones.
- + Distributed work has become a permanent and valuable feature of the job market.

In this section, we discuss these dynamics, providing critical context for interpreting the rest of the quantitative findings presented in this report.

The Impact of AI on the Job Market

Throughout 2025, labor-market indicators showed a widening gulf between opportunities for junior professionals and senior ones, as AI reshapes which tasks add value. Entry-level job postings generally softened across the market segments we analyzed, while senior-level postings proved more resilient, suggesting that employers are selective about where they invest human capital in an AI-augmented environment.

However, there are rising concerns that AI is also beginning to erode the security of experienced roles that were once considered immune; specifically, those where professional judgment has become standardized or largely analytical.

Layoffs in technology and broader white-collar sectors evolved in 2025 from initial broad cuts to more targeted reductions, as firms thinned layers and concentrated investment in roles where human judgment is indispensable.

The [job cuts at McKinsey & Company](#), for example, signal that AI is now encroaching on the more routine portions of senior work: the parts of expertise that rely on precedent, structured synthesis, or standardized analysis. This is forcing firms to distinguish between judgments that can and cannot be automated.

AI is not simply “replacing jobs.” Rather, work is being structurally redesigned. In this emerging equilibrium, technology and human roles are partitioned based on task type. While AI handles repetitive synthesis and information processing, senior human judgment brings insight to strategy, ethics, and client solutions. To succeed in this landscape, technology professionals and business leaders must prioritize skills and roles that leverage human judgment and contextual leadership, and reengineer workflows so that AI amplifies, rather than replaces, critical thinking.

Distributed Versus In-office Work in 2025

As the year concluded, remote and hybrid work arrangements emerged as a permanent fixture of the job market rather than a temporary holdover from the COVID-19 pandemic. After the initial disruption in 2020 and subsequent experimentation, patterns have stabilized into a sustained equilibrium of distributed and in-office work.

Office occupancy has recovered from pandemic-era lows, but [remains significantly below 2019 levels](#) across major US markets, according to agencies that track foot traffic and occupancy. This reduced occupancy appears stable, indicating that fewer people are working in offices full time, and that this pattern is likely to continue.

The evolution of work models mirrors the evolution of AI adoption. Just as early experimentation with generative AI has evolved into purposeful integration that combines technology's strengths with human engagement, the initial shift to remote-only work has given way to the adoption of more intentional mixed models. In both cases, firms are discovering that technology enables information management and routine tasks while humans excel at the critical judgment, collaboration, and nuanced decision-making essential to innovation and culture. The emerging equilibrium emphasizes purposeful on-site time for judgment-intensive and culture-building activities alongside remote and AI-augmented execution.

For technology professionals and business leaders, the actionable guidance is to design work policies and environments that align collaboration with occasions requiring human judgment, using hybrid modalities to strengthen rather than dilute organizational performance. Professionals and leaders who understand when AI and distributed work create the most value, and who integrate them deliberately with human judgment and in-person collaboration, will be most resilient in this economic and technological transition.

In the next section, we share QoQ and YoY trend data for several key segments of the global and US job markets.

Trends in the Global and US Job Market

The data we consider in this section indicates that, while the overall global and US job market has yet to begin its full turnaround, demand for experienced technology and professional services personnel has increased.

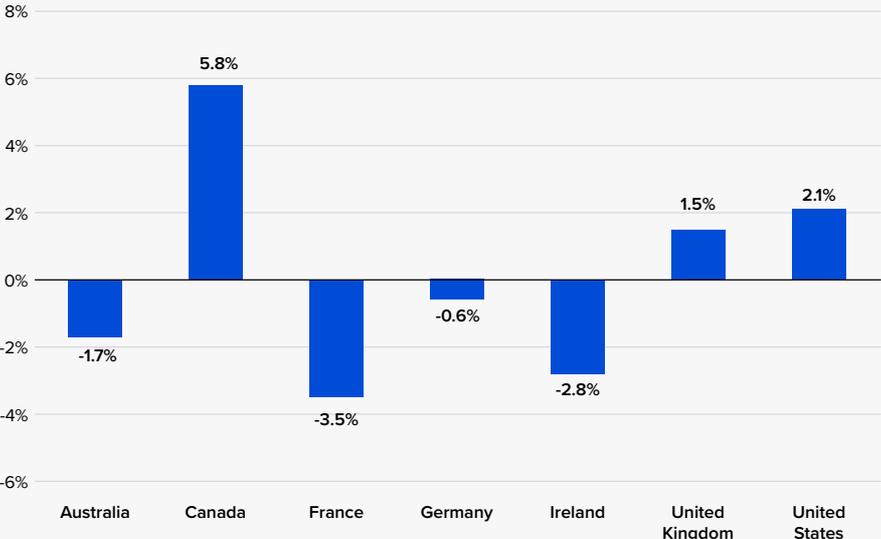
In this section, we discuss QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024) trends in the broad global and US job markets, as well as trends that apply more specifically to experienced technology and professional services personnel like those in the Toptal Talent Network. We will start 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 Mixed QoQ, and Mostly Down YoY

The chart below 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 Q4 2025.

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

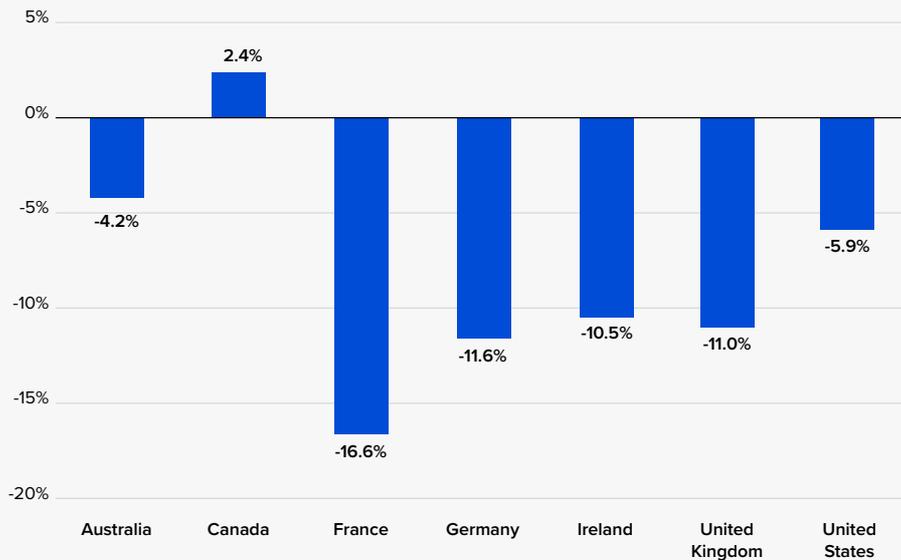


Source: Toptal, based on [Indeed Hiring Lab](#) data

QoQ trends in new job postings were mixed, with decreases ranging from 0.6% to 3.5% for Germany, Australia, Ireland, and France. The United Kingdom, US, and Canada all showed single-digit increases: 1.5% for the United Kingdom, 2.1% for the US, and 5.8% for Canada.

Job listings in the eurozone, which includes [all countries that use the euro](#) currency, decreased 1.3% QoQ. The next chart shows YoY trends.

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



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

Job postings in most countries were down YoY with the exception of Canada, which showed a 2.4% increase.

The two previous charts 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

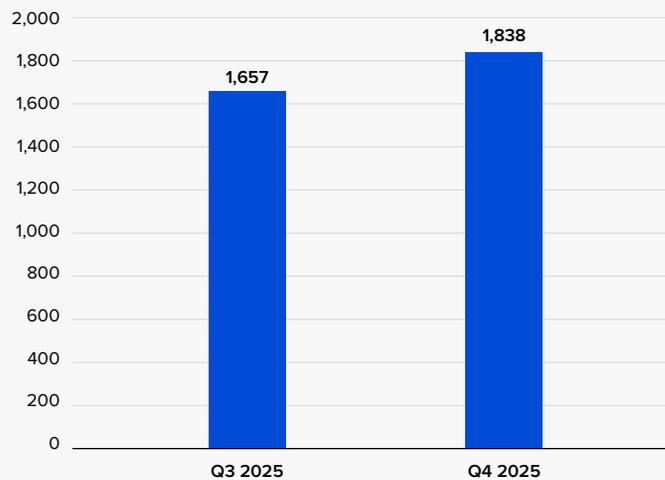
In this section, we discuss changes in the number of job listings for technology positions, the number of hires made, and global technology layoffs.

Changes in Technology Job Listings

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. As a niche platform specific to technology and the startup community, it is likely less affected by ghost job postings than broader platforms with higher general marketplace visibility and larger pools of users. The chart below shows the 10.9% QoQ increase in technology job postings on that site. These roles include all experience levels and work models (i.e., remote, hybrid, and in-office).

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

+10.9% | 

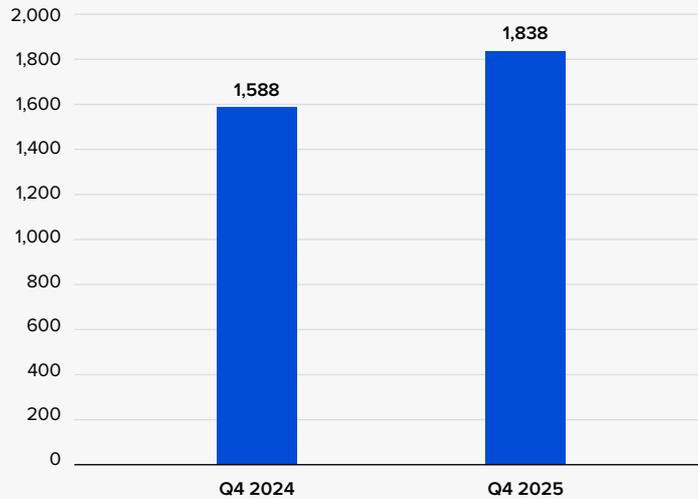


Source: Toptal, based on [Hacker News Hiring](#) data

The chart on the next page demonstrates a comparable YoY trend with a 15.7% increase in postings. The larger historical context here is that demand, as measured by job postings on Hacker News, is down significantly versus a few years ago. The number of job postings in Q4 2025 represents a 48% decrease from the number of postings in Q4 2022.

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

+15.7%

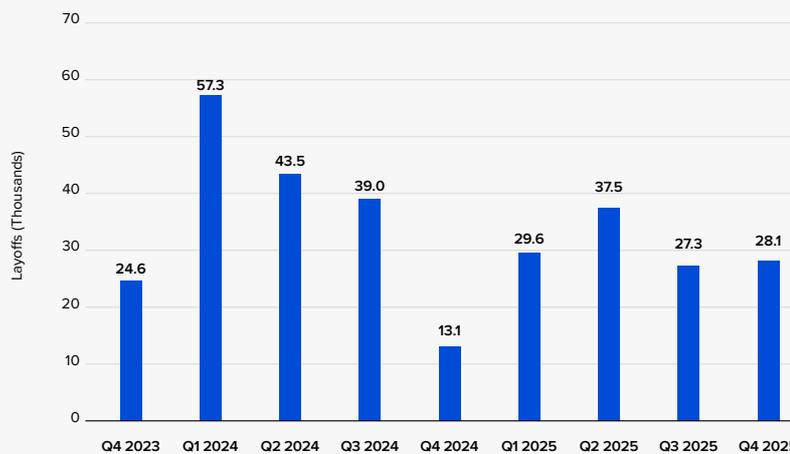


Source: Toptal, based on [Hacker News Hiring](#) data

Global Tech Layoffs

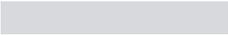
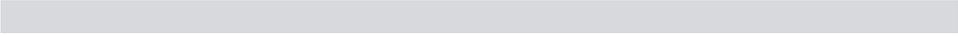
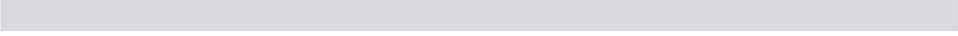
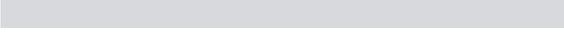
Layoffs provide an important and early indicator of the health of a particular job market. Tech layoff trends are especially important to track since the technology sector generally adopts AI and other new technologies first, meaning what is happening in this sector may point to the future direction of other categories. The chart below shows two years of technology layoffs, from the fourth quarter of 2023 through the fourth quarter of 2025.

Global Tech Layoffs Increase Quarter Over Quarter and Year Over Year Layoffs of Technology Professionals, Q4 2023-Q4 2025



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

We use data from Layoffs.fyi, a real-time aggregator that covers all economic sectors on the employer side (finance, retail, healthcare, etc.) and is regularly cited by *The Wall Street Journal*, Bloomberg, and TechCrunch. According to this data, layoffs increased slightly QoQ (3%). Layoffs more than doubled YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024), but this is because Q4 2024 was an outlier and had the fewest layoffs of any quarter in the past two years by a significant margin. When looking at the full year, we see that the absolute number of workers laid off in all of 2025 was almost 20% lower than the number in 2024: 122,500 versus 152,900.

In Q4, Amazon was the company most affected by layoffs, accounting for just under half of all the quarter's reductions. Layoffs remained highly concentrated overall: The top four companies most affected, Amazon, HP, 




Important notes about the technology layoff trends:

- + While the Q4 trends heavily reflect specific circumstances at Amazon, large technology companies provide important data points on the possibility of a recession, the overall volatility in the technology sector, and the vulnerability of even the most established companies to rapid, AI-related changes.
- + Beyond Q4 trends, technology layoffs are significantly elevated compared to five years ago. Excluding the Q2 2020 spike in layoffs prompted by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the two-year period from Q1 of 2020 to Q1 of 2022 saw approximately 5,800 layoffs per quarter; about 20% of the total layoffs in Q4 of 2025.
- + 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.

TechCrunch offers more detail on [firms conducting layoffs](#), supplementing the Layoffs.fyi data with context on company circumstances and affected departments. Factors cited as possible contributors to elevated layoffs include increased implementation of AI, pressure from US economic uncertainty and high interest rates, a more difficult venture capital environment that has strained startup budgets, and the hopes of capitalizing on the stock market's statistical tendency [to respond positively to layoffs](#) under certain conditions. See [Recommended Further Reading](#) for more information about 2025's technology layoffs.

Select US Demand and Hiring Trends

When looking at 2025 overall, the US job market picture is sobering. The US economy added 584,000 jobs in 2025 versus 2 million in 2024, according to the [US Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). Note that this refers to the number of people newly employed over this time period (rather than the number of job postings) in the entire job market, for all professions and all levels of experience. A closer look, however, reveals more nuance, with specific segments like experienced technology professionals 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).



+6.2%

YoY change in hiring for the US technology, information, and media sector

Source: [LinkedIn](#) data

LinkedIn's [December Workforce Report](#), which looks at US hiring data through November 2025, showed a 6.2% YoY increase in hiring in the US technology, information, and media sector. This growth follows three quarters of downward YoY trends.



-3%

YoY change in US professional services staffing hours

Source: [Staffing Industry Analysts](#) data

SIA's [Bullhorn Staffing Indicator index](#), which tracks hours for IT staffing and professional services including engineering, information technology, and finance, showed a 3% YoY decrease in professional services hours as of the end of Q4, following two consecutive quarters of 4% decline. IT staffing hours also declined slightly, by 1% YoY.



-1%

YoY change in US IT staffing hours

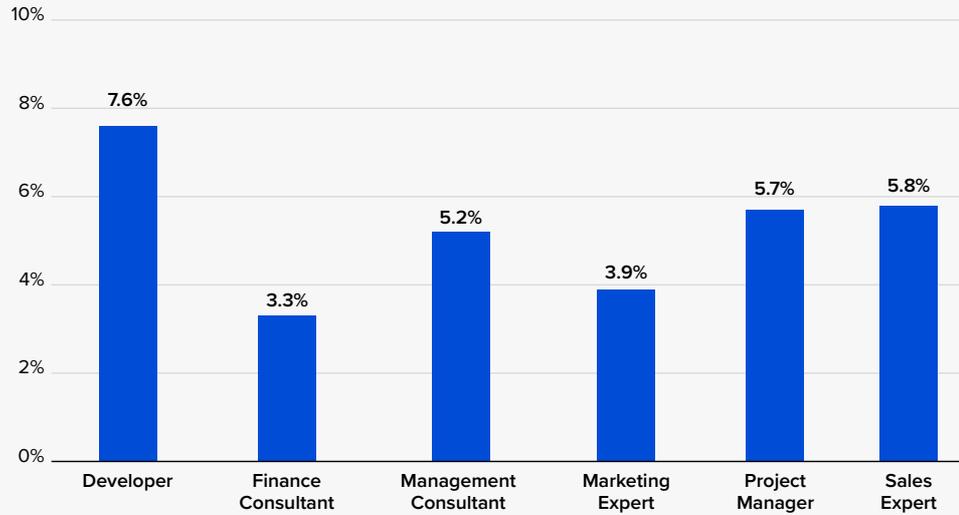
Source: [Staffing Industry Analysts](#) data

US Job Postings for Select Technology and Professional Services Areas

We now turn to Indeed for QoQ trends for 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).

Changes in US Job Postings for 6 Key Areas of Expertise on Indeed
Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q3 2025 vs. Q4 2025

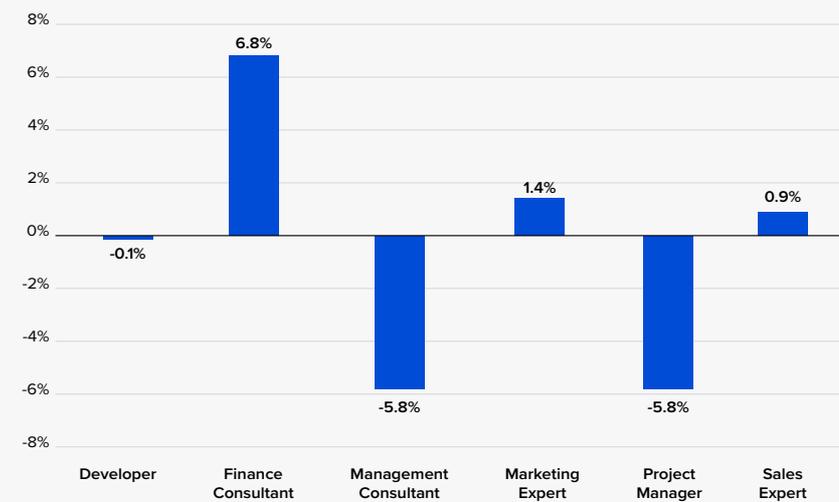


Source: Toptal, based on [Indeed Hiring Lab](#) data

The results show positive QoQ trends with single-digit increases across the board, ranging from 3.3% for finance consultants to 7.6% for developers. This is a reversal from Q3, when four out of the six areas showed single-digit decreases.

The next graph shows mixed YoY trends, with job postings on Indeed down for management consultants and project managers, up for finance consultants, marketers, and sales experts, and essentially flat for developers.

Changes in US Job Postings for 6 Key Areas of Expertise on Indeed
Year-Over-Year Trends, Q4 2024 vs. Q4 2025



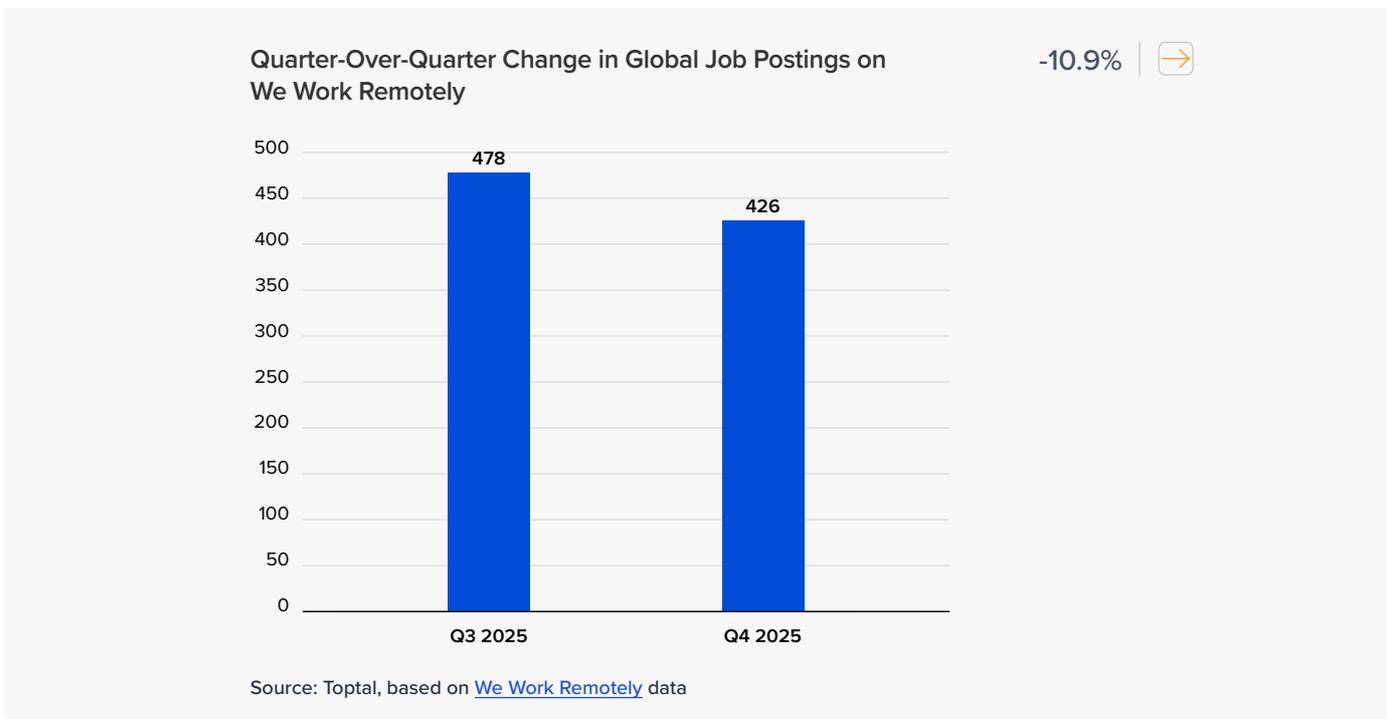
Source: Toptal, based on [Indeed Hiring Lab](#) data

Select Remote and Hybrid Demand and Hiring Trends

Postings on We Work Remotely Are Slightly Down QoQ and YoY

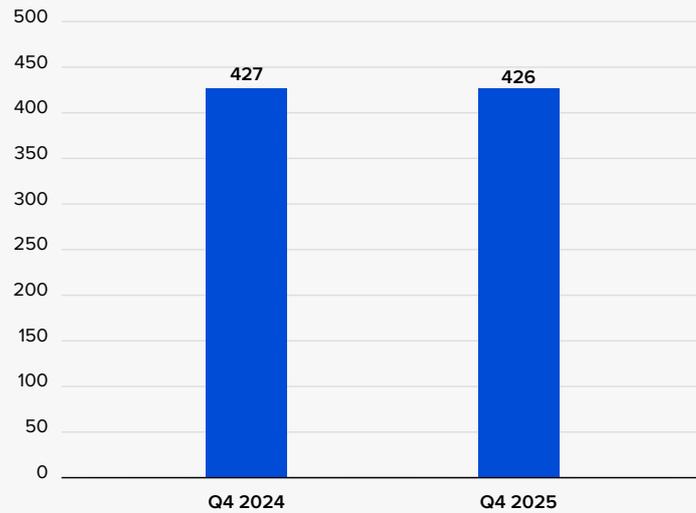
For a look at remote jobs aligned with Toptal's areas of expertise, we turn to the world's largest remote job board, We Work Remotely (WWR). The WWR data, which Toptal has exclusive access to, differs from the Indeed data in that it is for remote and hybrid jobs only. WWR data also differs from Toptal Market Strength Scores. It includes entry-level roles instead of focusing on those that require five or more years of experience, and combines some areas of expertise into single categories (e.g., sales and marketing experts).

The chart below shows a 10.9% QoQ decrease in postings on WWR for roles deemed most comparable to Toptal's areas of expertise. WWR data has historically shown a 20% seasonal decline in postings during Q4 versus the rest of the year; the Q4 2025 decline slightly outperforms this seasonality.



The next chart shows a nearly flat YoY trend with a 0.2% decrease in postings.

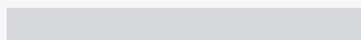
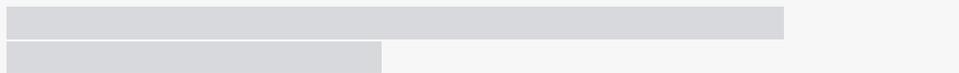
Year-Over-Year Change in Global Job Postings on We Work Remotely -0.2% 



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. This data differs from Toptal Market Strength Scores in that it is US-only and doesn't include hiring activity. As seen below,

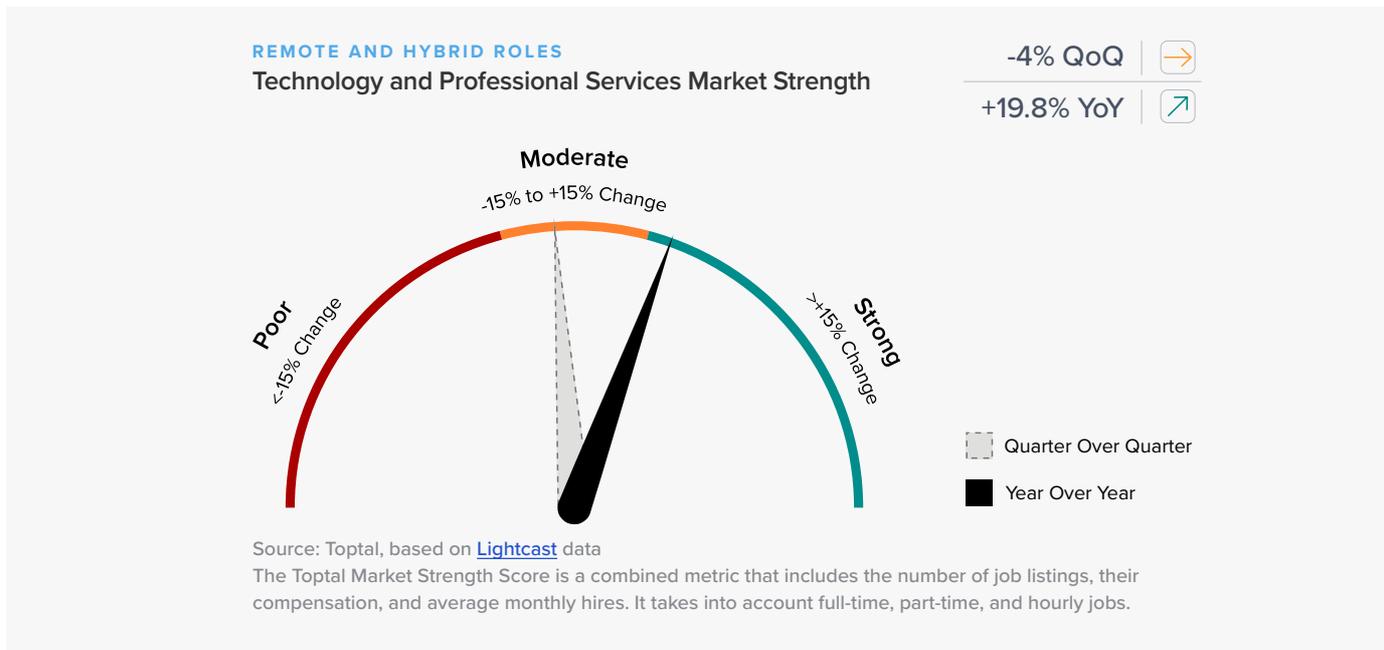


Market Strength Scores for Technology and Professional Services

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

Remote and Hybrid Technology and Professional Services Market Strength

As of Q4 2025, market strength for the experienced remote and hybrid technology and professional services job market decreased 4% QoQ, for a Toptal Market Strength Score of Moderate. Market strength increased 19.8% YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024), for a score of Strong. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 10.9% increase for 2025 compared to 2024.



The QoQ score reflects a 7.3% decrease in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, and a 1% decrease in hiring. Job postings declined by 8% for full-time roles, 9% for part-time roles, and 25% for hourly roles. Compensation was mixed, with increases of 1% and 7% for full-time and hourly roles, but a 9% decrease for part-time roles.

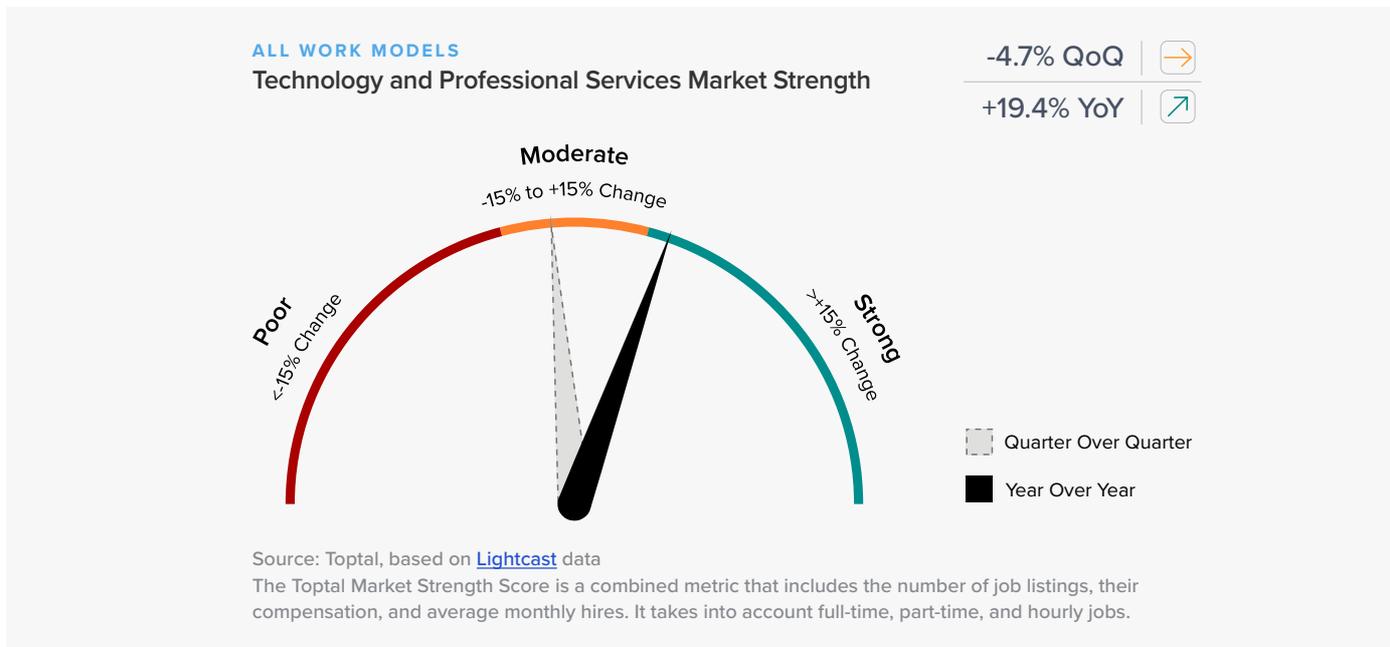
The YoY score reflects a 36% increase in hiring and a 3.3% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation. Postings increased 3% for full-time roles and 72% for part-time roles, but decreased by 64% for hourly roles. Compensation increased by a fraction of a percent for full-time positions and by 3% for part-time roles, but decreased by 9% for hourly jobs.

These trends indicate that the market is considerably stronger than it was a year ago, with demand and hiring both up, but that employers may have more bargaining power around compensation due to layoffs.

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 Q4 2025, market strength for the overall experienced technology and professional services job market (including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles) decreased 4.7% QoQ for a score of Moderate. Market strength increased 19.4% YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024), for a score of Strong. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 10.5% increase for 2025 compared to 2024.



The overall technology and professional services market (which includes all work models) slightly underperformed compared to the remote and hybrid market. Though the gap between the scores is quite small (-4.7% versus -4% for QoQ, and 19.4% versus 19.8% for YoY), the fact that remote and hybrid roles alone performed better than the combined work models means in-office roles had to underperform to bring down the score.

The 4.7% QoQ decrease in market strength reflects an 8.8% decrease in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, and a 1% decrease in hiring activity. Job postings declined by 9% for full-time roles, 12% for part-time roles, and 27% for hourly roles. Compensation was flat for part-time and hourly roles, and increased 1% for full-time roles.

The 19.4% YoY rise in market strength reflects a 36% increase in hiring and a 2.5% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation. Job postings increased 1% for full-time roles and 4.9% for part-time roles, but decreased by 35% for hourly roles. Compensation increased 2% for full-time roles and 1% for part-time roles, but fell by 5% for hourly positions.

US Job Market Forecast for Q1 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)

The model is based on the past four years of remote and hybrid job postings on We Work Remotely, the world's largest remote work job board. Toptal has exclusive access to this proprietary information. The resulting trends are then compared to Toptal's own client demand for remote and hybrid professionals for the same time frame.

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

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

US Job Market Forecast Signals

Toptal's predictive model suggests the following market signals for Q1 2026:

- + **Job growth for all US roles is projected to decline moderately.**
BLS data shows that job growth fell at a rate of about 11% per year for the last several years. Our model suggests job growth in Q1 is likely to continue on this trajectory.
- + **Job growth for US professional services roles is projected to decline slightly.**
BLS data shows that professional services job growth also fell at a rate of about 11% per year for the last several years. Our model suggests job growth will decline in Q1, but at a smaller magnitude than the BLS average.

+ Job growth for US information services (technology) roles is projected to increase slightly.

BLS data shows that information services job growth fell at a rate of about 21% per year for the last several years. In a departure from the BLS trends, and despite predicted declines in all professional services jobs combined, the picture for technology-specific roles is quite different: According to our model, job growth for this segment will be slightly positive in Q1 2026. The BLS, too, projects that employment in computer and information technology occupations is expected to [grow much faster](#) than the average for all occupations through 2034.

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

Note that these signals do not constitute complete predictions for Q1 outcomes.

The US job market is in a period of transition and volatility. Employers [added 584,000 jobs in all of 2025](#), compared to 2 million in 2024, making 2025 the [worst year for employment growth in the US since 2020](#). While Toptal's model takes this volatility 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 overall 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 (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024).

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 | -11% | +32% |
| Designers | -8% | -2% |
| Developers | -6% | +30% |
| Finance Consultants | -5% | +1% |
| Information Security Experts | -14% | -2% |
| Management Consultants | -7% | -2% |
| Marketing Experts | +2% | +33% |
| Product Managers | -3% | +30% |
| Project Managers | -3% | +6% |
| Sales Experts | -5% | +12% |

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 and sales expert roles are more volatile due to differences in the available data.

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

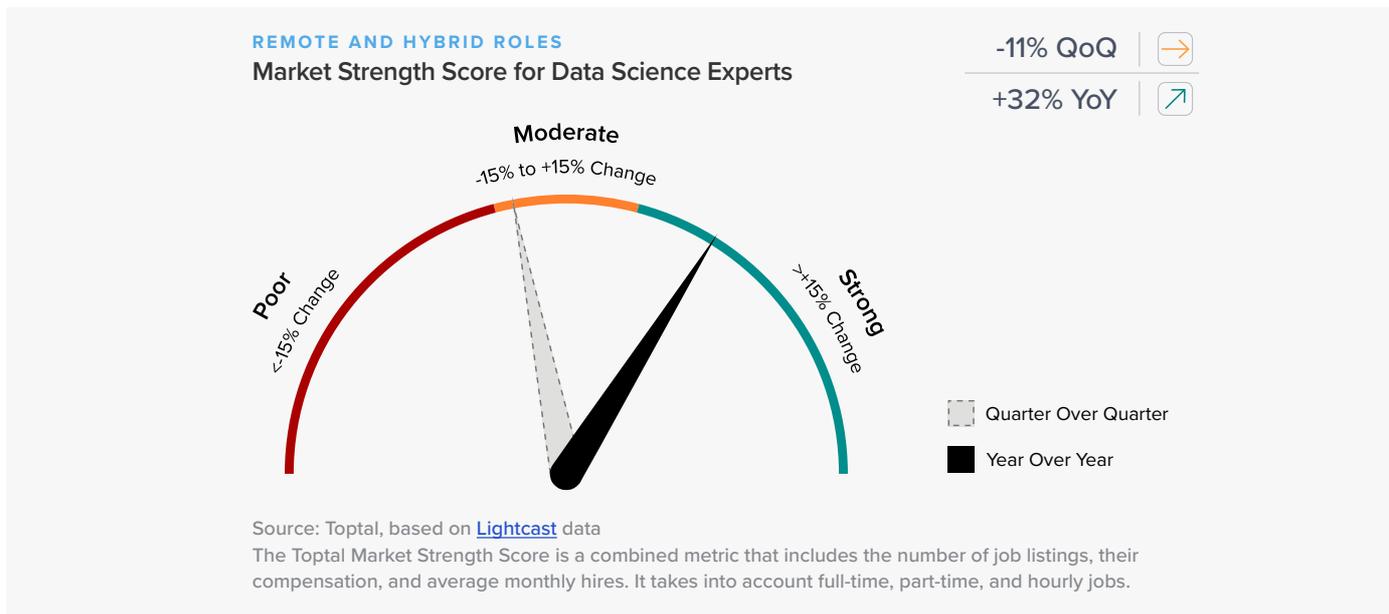
Data Science Expert Trends

As discussed in the [Summary](#), 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 (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024) changes in the number of new job postings, median offered compensation in those postings, and actual hiring activity.

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

Data Science Expert Market Strength: Remote and Hybrid Roles

The graphic below shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in data science in the fourth quarter of 2025 versus the third quarter of 2025 and the fourth quarter of 2024. Note that while the market strength score below reflects remote and hybrid demand, hiring data is only available for all work models, and that figure is used in this calculation.

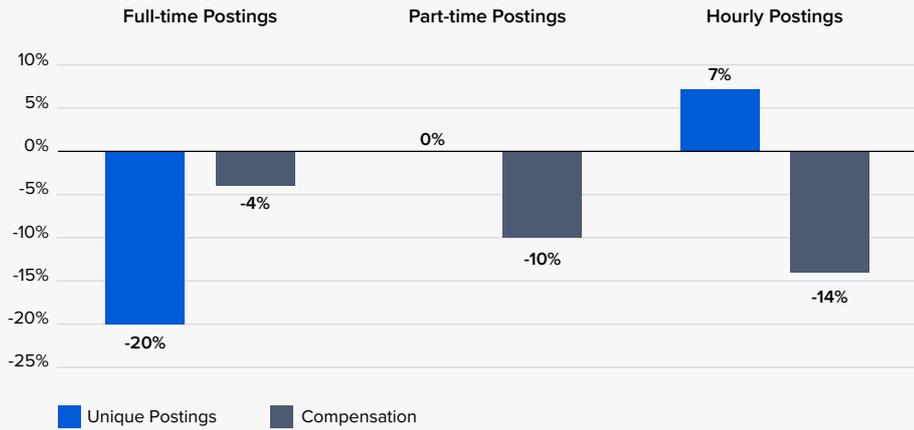


Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid data science roles decreased 11% QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and, when comparing Q4 2025 to Q4 2024, increased 32% YoY, for scores of Moderate and Strong. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 10.4% increase for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

The QoQ decrease was heavily driven by a drop in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, and a much smaller decrease in hiring. The YoY score was bolstered by a substantial increase in actual hiring, moderated by a single-digit decrease in stated demand.

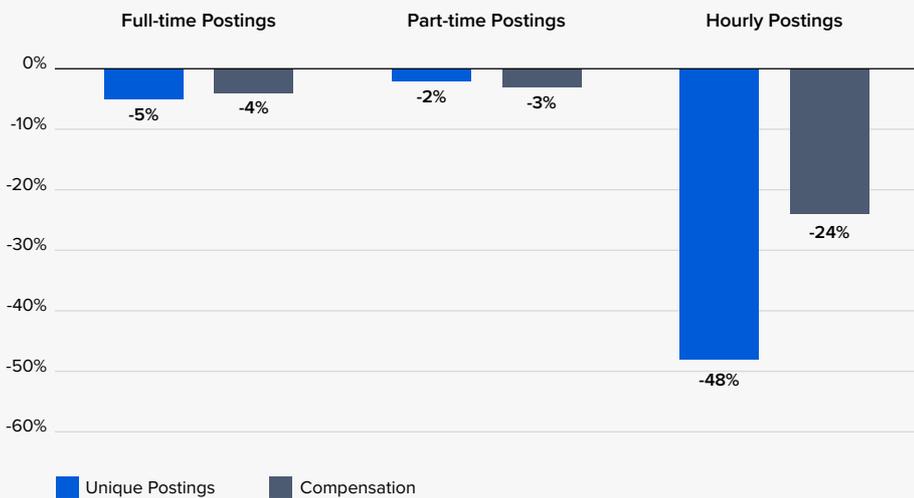
We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Data Science Experts Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q3 2025 vs. Q4 2025



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

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Data Science Experts Year-Over-Year Trends, Q4 2024 vs. Q4 2025



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

Full-time job postings decreased 20% QoQ and 5% YoY, and compensation fell by 4% both QoQ and YoY. Part-time job postings were flat QoQ, with a 10% decrease in compensation, while postings and compensation were down 2% and 3% YoY, respectively. These trends may indicate a shorter-term slowdown, driven in part by seasonality, after a significant ramp-up of part-time demand during Q1 and Q2 2025.

Hourly postings increased by 7% QoQ, but compensation decreased by 14%. Postings and compensation decreased by 48% and 24% YoY. The findings for part-time and hourly roles are based on limited data points and should be taken as general directional indicators of the market.

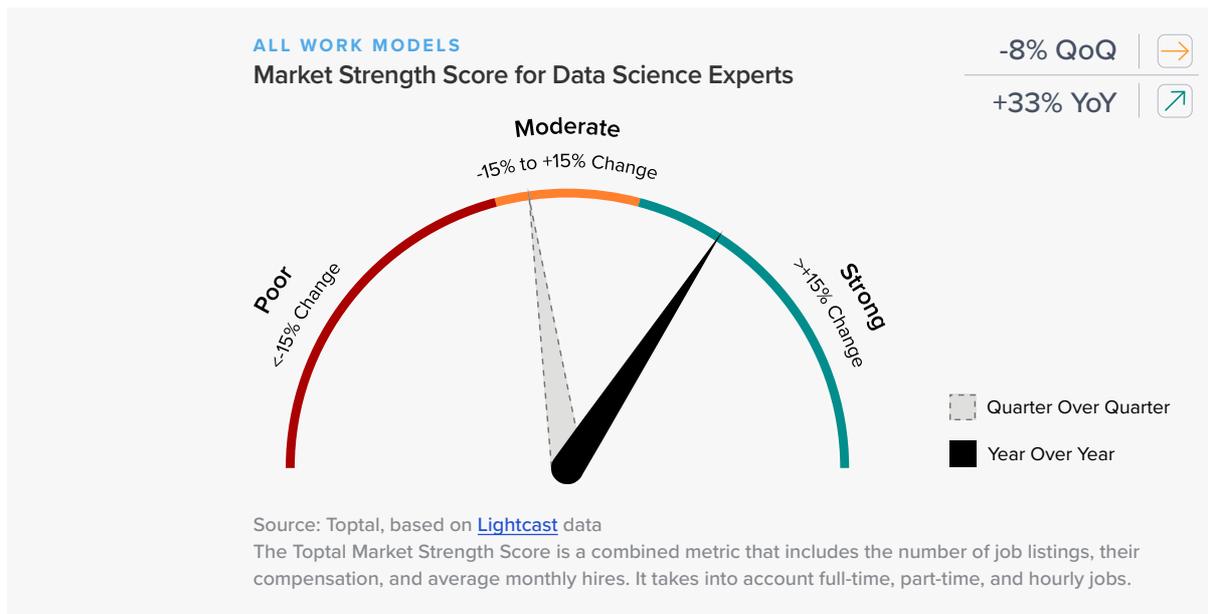
Hiring activity, which Lightcast only makes available for all data science positions combined, decreased 2% QoQ, reflecting expected seasonality, but remained up by 69% YoY.

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) shows some notable differences. When comparing Q4 2025 to Q4 2024,



Data Science Expert Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. The graphic below shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in data science, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The time periods and methodology for determining the score remain the same.



Market strength for all experienced data science roles decreased 8% QoQ and increased 33% YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024), for scores of Moderate and Strong. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 10.2% increase for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

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



Vrinda Dabke
VP, Global
Technology Services
Delivery, Toptal

Q4 Commentary



Demand for data science talent in Q4 2025 remained strong but selective, with employers prioritizing experienced, hybrid AI and data professionals who directly support AI, ML, and measurable revenue impact. Employers increasingly hired for specialized roles that blended machine learning, data engineering, and domain expertise. They also shifted away from generalist data scientists in favor of specialized Gen AI engineers, MLOps specialists, and product data scientists who could deploy, monitor, and scale models with modern tooling. Practical, production-grade experience outweighed academic credentials, and companies favored versatile candidates who could manage end-to-end pipelines, work effectively in distributed or global teams, and move generative AI from experimentation to ROI-focused deployment.

Q1 Preview



We are cautiously optimistic about Q1 2026 hiring and predict it will continue to focus on AI-enabling disciplines such as data science, ML, and engineering. Despite macroeconomic uncertainty, existing AI and analytics programs will likely sustain demand for specialized data talent who can bridge modeling, engineering, and business impact. We anticipate the market will prioritize ROI and robust data foundations in quality, pipelines, and governance. Hiring will likely be selective, emphasizing capability building for essential technical roles like cybersecurity-integrated AI and data privacy. As AI continues to handle more and more routine tasks, we see employers continuing to value mathematical intuition and business translation; data professionals must be able to interpret the “why,” not just the “how” of the code.

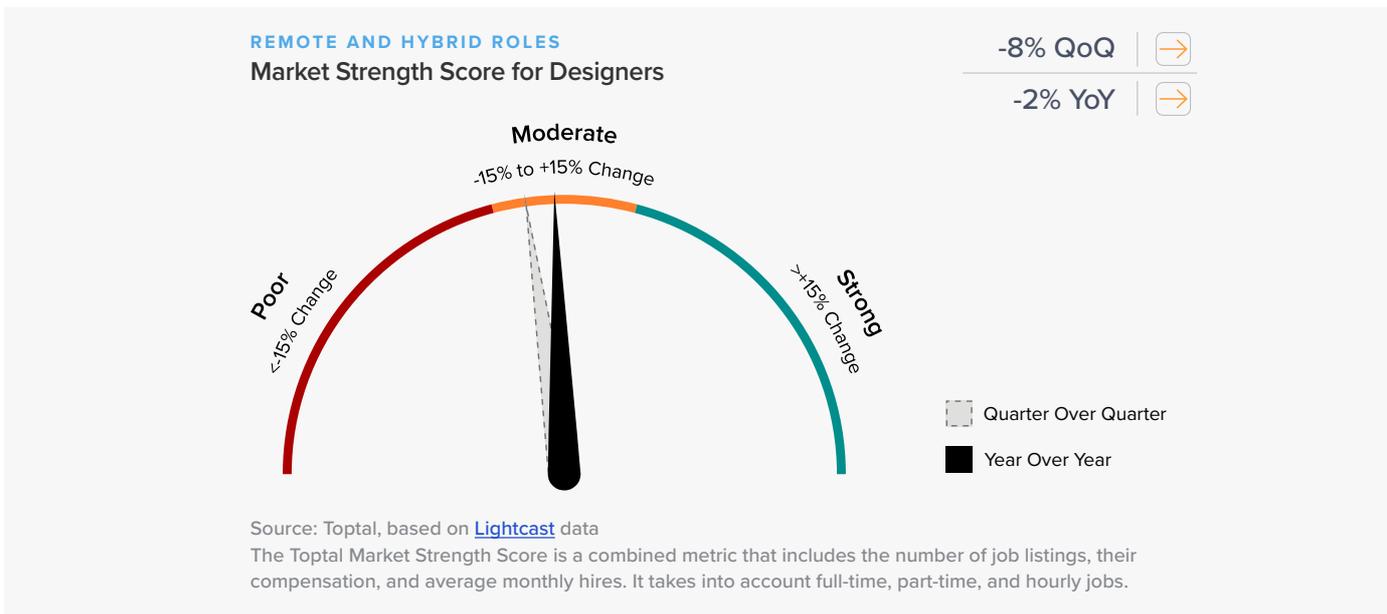
Designer Trends

As discussed in the [Summary](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent 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 the QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024) changes in the number of new job postings, median offered compensation in those postings, and actual hiring activity.

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

Designer Market Strength: Remote and Hybrid Roles

The graphic below shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in design in the fourth quarter of 2025 versus the third quarter of 2025 and the fourth quarter of 2024. Note that while the market strength score below reflects remote and hybrid demand, hiring data is only available for all work models, and that figure is used in this calculation.

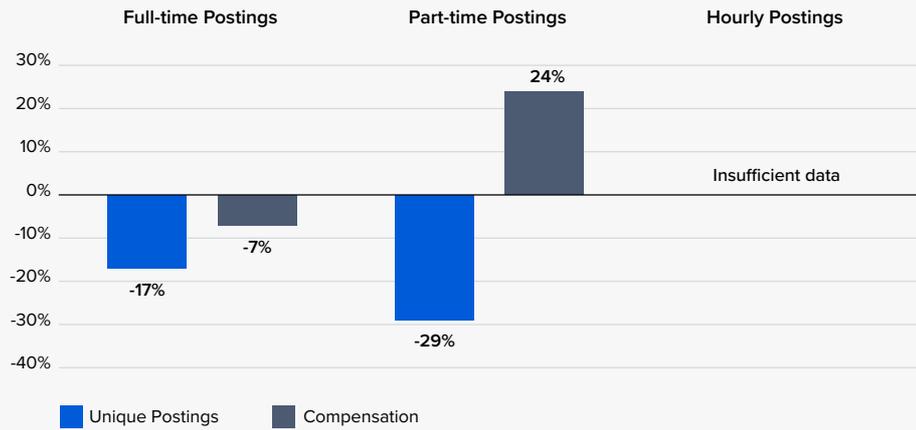


Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid designer roles decreased 8% QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and, when comparing Q4 2025 to Q4 2024, decreased 2% YoY, for scores of Moderate. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 3.3% decrease for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

The QoQ decrease was driven by a 14% decrease in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, and a 2% decrease in hiring. The YoY decrease reflected a 26% drop in stated demand, which was mostly offset by a 22% increase in actual hiring activity.

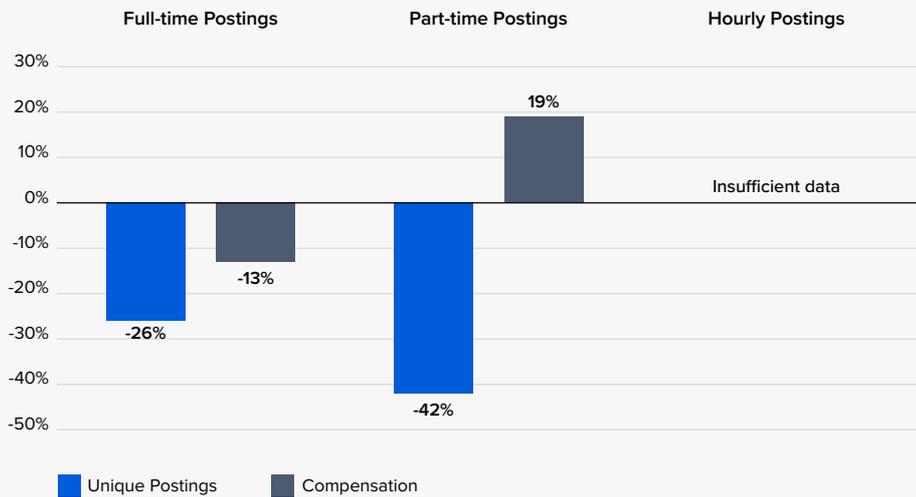
We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Designers Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q3 2025 vs. Q4 2025



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

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Designers Year-Over-Year Trends, Q4 2024 vs. Q4 2025



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

Full-time job postings decreased 17% QoQ and 26% YoY, while compensation decreased 7% QoQ and 13% YoY. The part-time market dynamics were distinct from full time, with steeper declines in job postings and double-digit jumps in compensation: Part-time job postings decreased 29% QoQ and 42% YoY, while compensation went up 24% QoQ and 19% YoY. 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.



-2%

QoQ change
in remote and hybrid
designer hires
Source: Toptal, based
on [Lightcast](#) data



+22%

YoY change
in remote and hybrid
designer hires
Source: Toptal, based
on [Lightcast](#) data

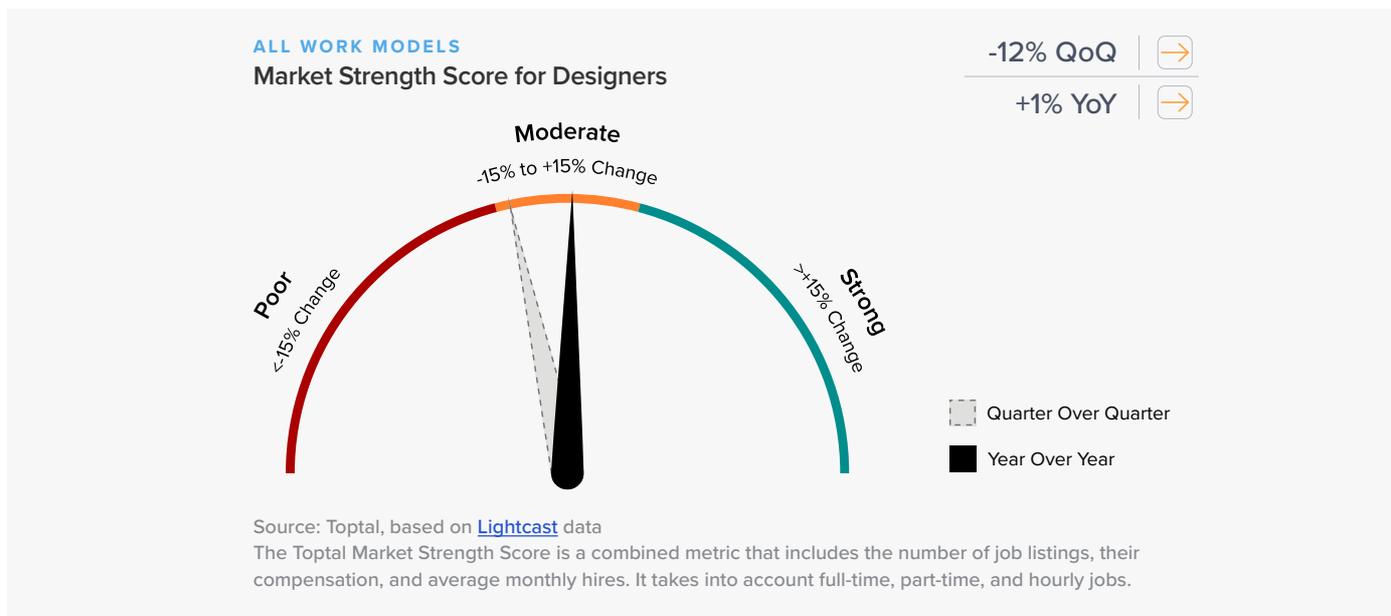
Hiring activity, which Lightcast only makes available for all design positions combined, decreased 2% QoQ but increased 22% YoY.

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 certain important differences. Part-time roles, for example,



Designer Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. The graphic below shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in design, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The time periods and methodology for determining the score remain the same.



Market strength for all experienced design roles decreased 12% QoQ and increased 1% YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024), for scores of Moderate. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 3% increase for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

The trends for all work models and the remote and hybrid market were very similar. The QoQ score reflected a 21% decrease in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, and the YoY score reflected a 20% decrease in stated demand.



Pedro Esteves
Design Matching
Team Lead, Toptal

Q4 Commentary



Design is a core driver of product and revenue performance, and even amid year-end slowdowns, companies continued to invest in designers who operate at the intersection of product strategy, execution, and business outcomes. Demand concentrated on talent capable of reducing complexity, accelerating decision-making, and improving experience quality at scale. AI became a meaningful advantage for teams that used it to strengthen insight, speed, and alignment, while design judgment, systems thinking, and craft remained key differentiators.

Q1 Preview



Entering Q1, demand is decisively favoring designers who pair strong UX fundamentals with product leadership and practical fluency in AI-enabled workflows. Organizations are prioritizing designers who can shape direction early, eliminate ambiguity, and drive momentum across delivery cycles. SMBs continue to seek versatile, end-to-end designers, while enterprises double down on systems thinking and consistency at scale. Designers who cannot connect craft to measurable impact will likely face increasing pressure as expectations rise in early 2026.

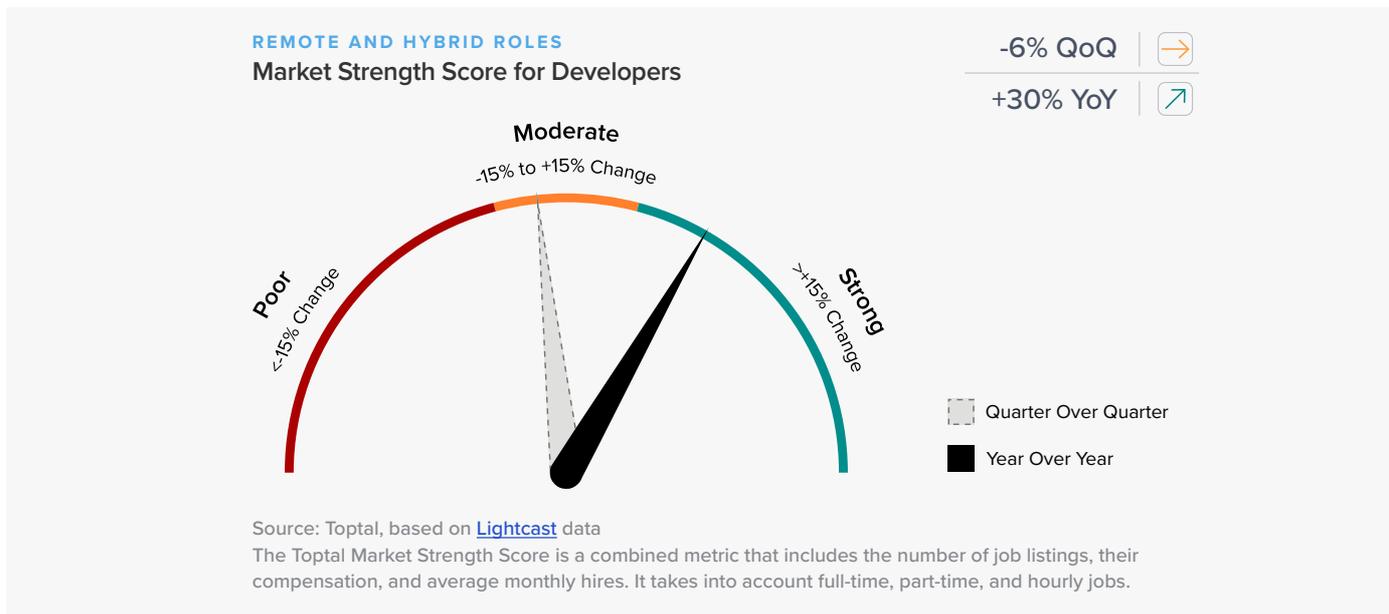
Developer Trends

As discussed in the [Summary](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent 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 the QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024) changes in the number of new job postings, median offered compensation in those postings, and actual hiring activity.

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

Developer Market Strength: Remote and Hybrid Roles

The graphic below shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in development in the fourth quarter of 2025 versus the third quarter of 2025 and the fourth quarter of 2024. Note that while the market strength score below reflects remote and hybrid demand, hiring data is only available for all work models, and that figure is used in this calculation.

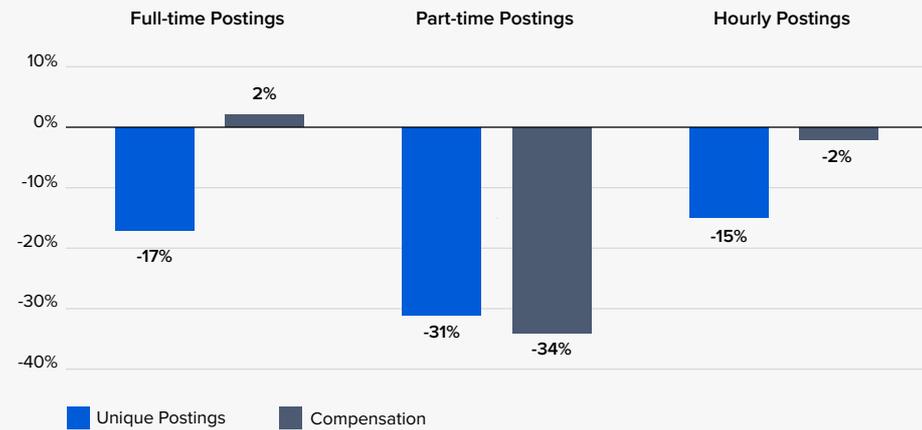


Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid developer roles decreased 6% QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and when comparing Q4 2025 to Q4 2024, increased by 30% YoY, for scores of Moderate and Strong. Full-year data provides additional context, showing an 11.4% increase for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

The QoQ score was driven by a 17% decrease in stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, and a 5% increase in hiring activity. The YoY score was driven by a large increase in hiring that was partly offset by a 4% decrease in stated demand.

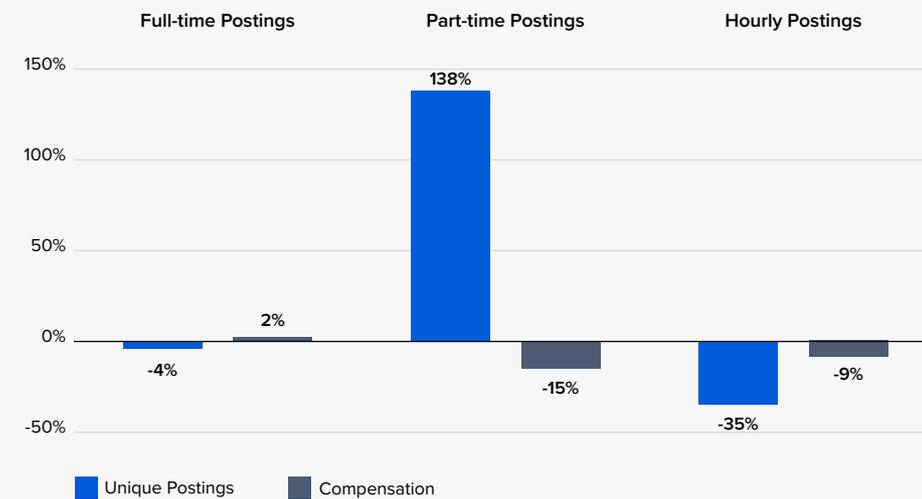
We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Developers Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q3 2025 vs. Q4 2025



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

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Developers Year-Over-Year Trends, Q4 2024 vs. Q4 2025



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

Full-time roles decreased by 17% QoQ and 4% YoY, but compensation for those roles increased by 2% for both time periods. Part-time postings declined 31% QoQ but increased 138% YoY, while part-time compensation fell across both time periods, by 34% QoQ and by 15% YoY. Hourly postings decreased 15% QoQ and 35% YoY, and compensation decreased 2% QoQ and 9% 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 remote and hybrid developer hires
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

Hiring activity, which Lightcast only makes available for all time commitments combined, increased 5% QoQ and 64% YoY.

The analysis above includes demand for roles with five or more years of experience. Demand for roles with 10 or more years of experience (a subset of the prior data) was

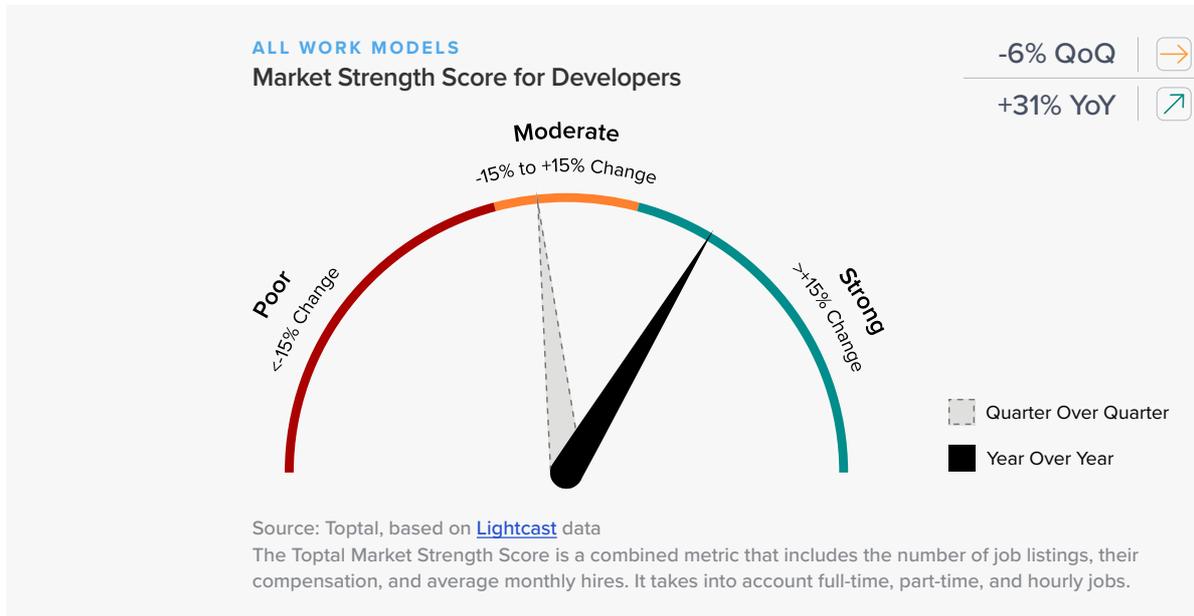


+64%

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

Developer Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. The graphic below shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in development, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The time periods and methodology for determining the score remain the same.



Market strength for all experienced developer roles decreased 6% QoQ and increased 31% YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024), for scores of Moderate and Strong.

The scores were nearly equivalent to those for the remote and hybrid market, driven by very similar trends in postings and compensation for both time periods.

Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 9.9% increase for all work models in 2025 compared to 2024.



Vrinda Dabke
VP, Global
Technology Services
Delivery, Toptal

Q4 Commentary

“

Q4 2025 hiring was cautious due to year-end budgets focusing on high quality and slowing for noncritical roles, but there was strong selective demand for senior, AI-adjacent, and full-stack profiles. Demand shifted from generic to specialized skills like AI integration, back end, cloud, and security, prioritizing multistack or platform engineers. Senior-level postings increased while entry-level declined, reflecting a need for proven impact. Employers expected developers to combine coding with cloud, scalability, security, and system design expertise. The market was selectively strong but cautious, shaped by economic uncertainty and rapid AI adoption, with employers prioritizing deep experience, practical AI skills, and strong soft skills.

Q1 Preview

“

As Q1 2026 begins, we anticipate steady but selective hiring, with an emphasis on core engineering, AI, and platform roles that foster efficiency and automation. Structural shifts due to AI and macroeconomics mean the market will be competitive, but developers with specialized, up-to-date skills, especially those with cloud certifications (e.g., AWS, Azure) and fluency in “AI-native” languages (e.g., Python, Rust, Go), are well-positioned. We also expect that infrastructure and security roles will remain resilient and that DevSecOps and data engineering will spike as companies build for new AI models. Led by agentic AI and cloud-native architecture, the market is poised for a cautious rebound, with mid- to senior-level engineers specializing in AI governance, cybersecurity, and system design having significant leverage.

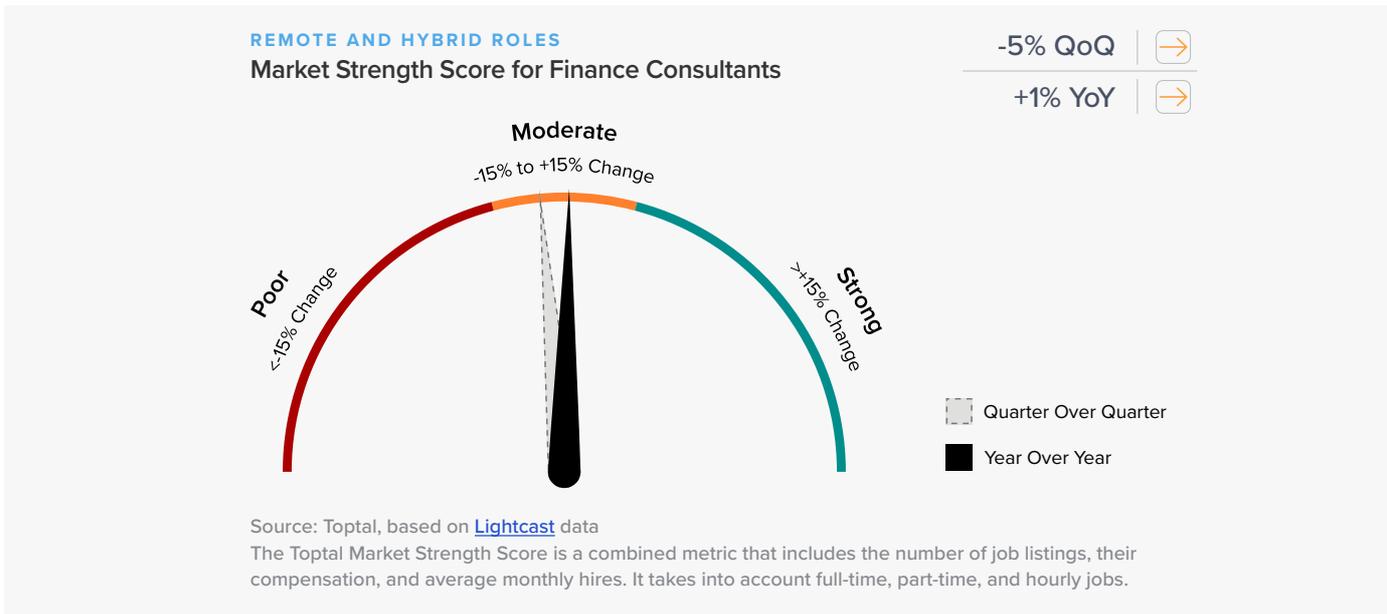
Finance Consultant Trends

As discussed in the [Summary](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent 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 (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024) changes in the number of new job postings, median offered compensation in those postings, and actual hiring activity.

First, we will 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

The graphic below shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in finance consulting in the fourth quarter of 2025 versus the third quarter of 2025 and the fourth quarter of 2024. Note that while the market strength score below reflects remote and hybrid demand, hiring data is only available for all work models, and that figure is used in this calculation.

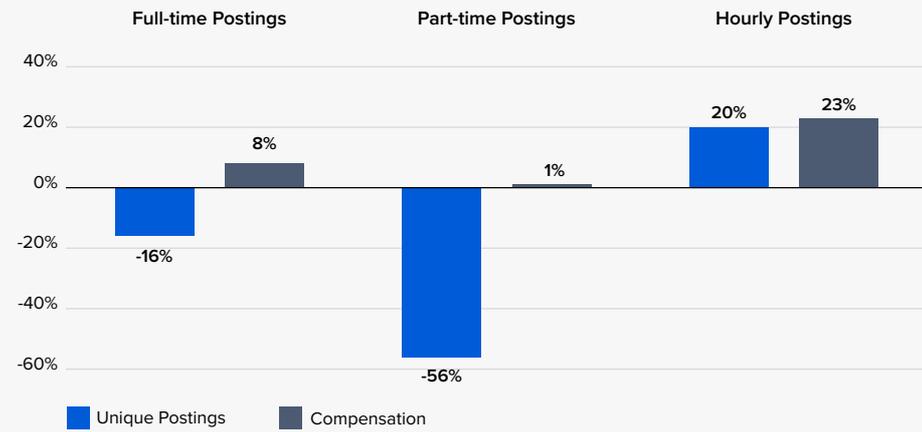


Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid finance consultant roles decreased 5% QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and, when comparing Q4 2025 to Q4 2024, increased 1% YoY, for scores of Moderate. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 12.5% increase for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

The QoQ score was driven by a 16% decrease in stated demand, partly offset by a 7% increase in hiring activity. The YoY score reflected a 15% increase in stated demand, mostly offset by a 14% decrease in actual hiring.

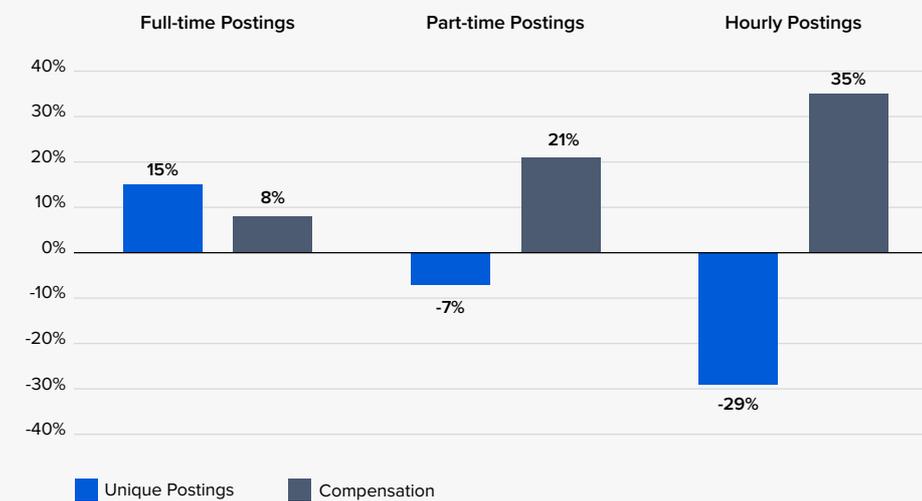
We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Finance Consultants Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q3 2025 vs. Q4 2025



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

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Finance Consultants Year-Over-Year Trends, Q4 2024 vs. Q4 2025



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

Full-time job postings decreased 16% QoQ, but increased 15% YoY, with 8% increases in compensation across both time periods. Part-time postings decreased 56% QoQ and 7% YoY, while compensation increased by 1% QoQ and 21% YoY. Hourly postings rose 20% QoQ but decreased 29% YoY. Compensation increased in both time periods, by 23% QoQ and 35% YoY.



+7%

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

Hiring activity, which Lightcast only makes available for all finance positions combined, increased 7% QoQ and decreased 14% YoY.



-14%

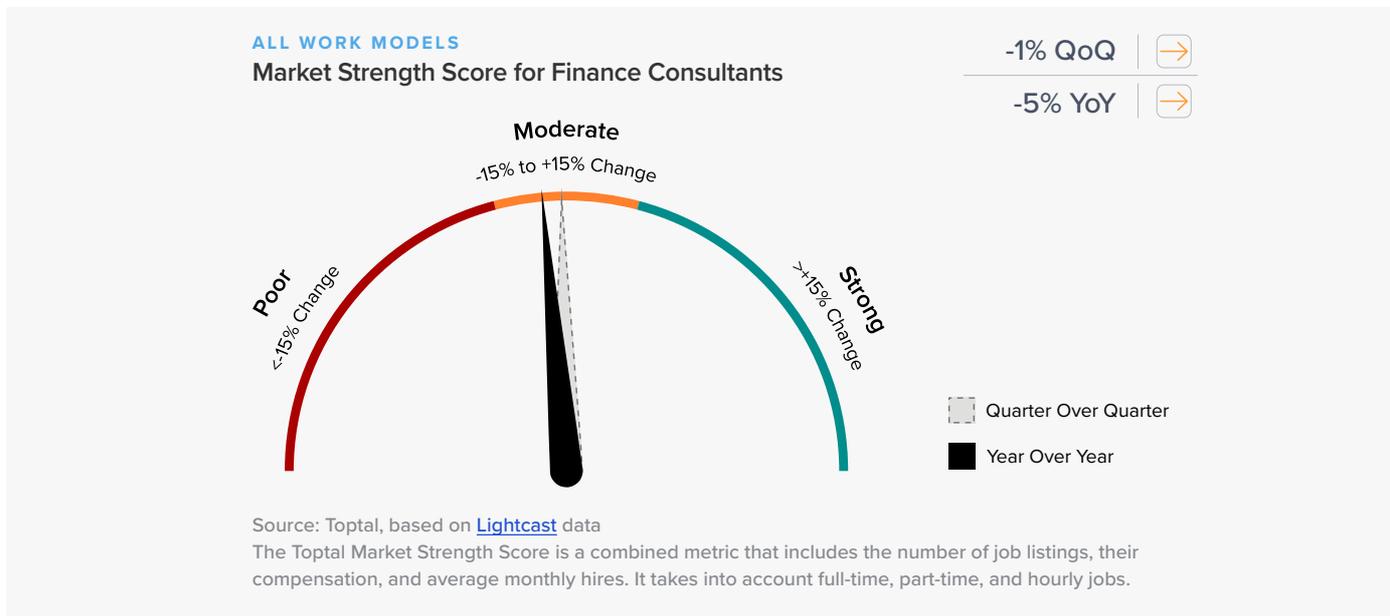
YoY change in remote and hybrid finance consultant hires
Source: Toptal, based on [Lightcast](#) data

The analysis of data 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 a few important differences. When comparing Q4 2025 against Q4 2024,



Finance Consultant Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. The graphic below shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in finance consulting, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The time periods and methodology for determining the score remain the same.



Market strength for all experienced finance consultant roles decreased 1% QoQ and 5% year YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024), for scores of Moderate. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 12.1% increase for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

The QoQ and YoY trends for all work models and the remote and hybrid market were both fairly muted. But the 5% YoY decrease in market strength for the overall market underperformed compared to a 1% YoY increase in strength for the remote and hybrid segment.

The QoQ score for all work models was driven by a 9% decrease in stated demand, as defined by job postings and compensation. The YoY score reflected a 4% increase in stated demand.



Michael Valocchi
Senior Client
Solutions Advisor,
Toptal

Q4 Commentary



Measuring and driving financial outcomes remained one of the key issues for the C-suite at the end of 2025, as lingering macroeconomic issues necessitated a laser focus on financial results in enterprises of any size. This led to increased demand for strategic and financial skills. The CFO role, for example, became more strategic as entities continued to focus on AI-driven transformation. In Q4 companies sought deep financial modeling skills required to justify investments and model the impact on organizations' 2026 results. Against expectations, M&A activity did not rebound in the fourth quarter, so demand for those skills was muted.

Q1 Preview



The AI-driven transformation and the need for financial rigor continues to drive demand for deep financial skills in early 2026. As interest rates decline, we expect M&A activity to increase, fueled in part by industry consolidation and private equity firms' need to divest older assets. We also expect demand for fractional CFOs to increase in 2026, as emerging companies need senior finance leaders to drive stronger financial discipline and attract increased investment.

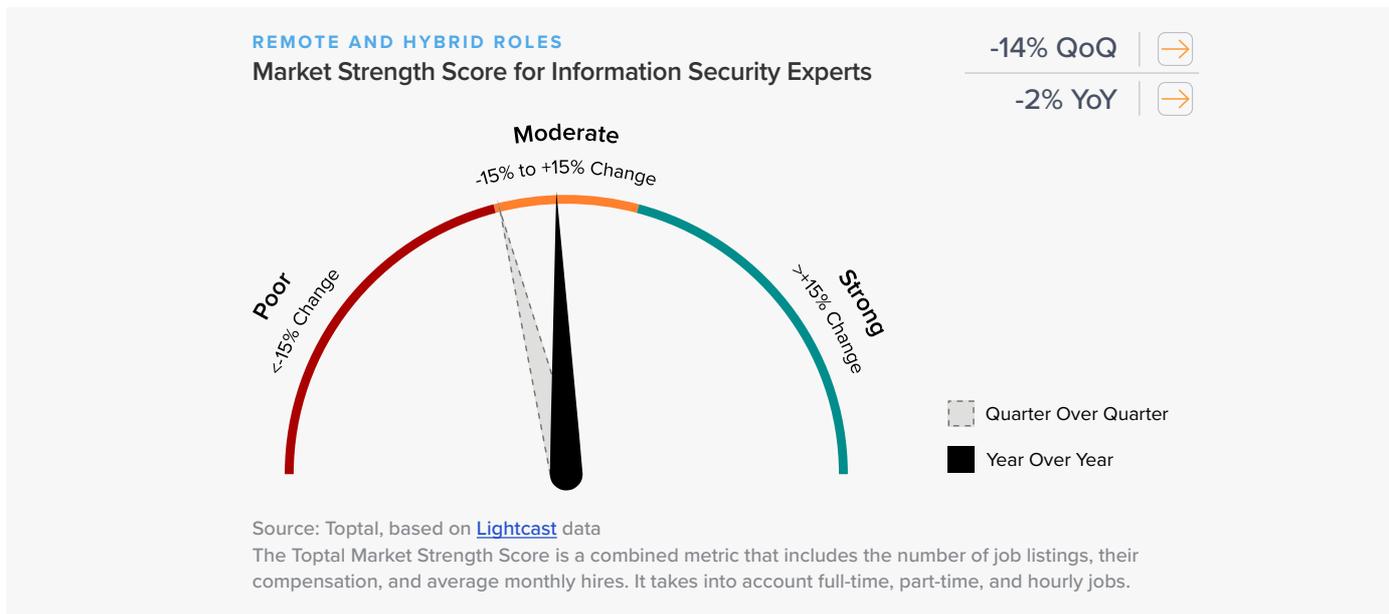
Information Security Expert Trends

As discussed in the [Summary](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent 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 the QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024) changes in the number of new job postings, median offered compensation in those postings, and actual hiring activity.

First, we will 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

The graphic below shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in information security in the fourth quarter of 2025 versus the third quarter of 2025 and the fourth quarter of 2024. Note that while the market strength score below reflects remote and hybrid demand, hiring data is only available for all work models, and that figure is used in this calculation.

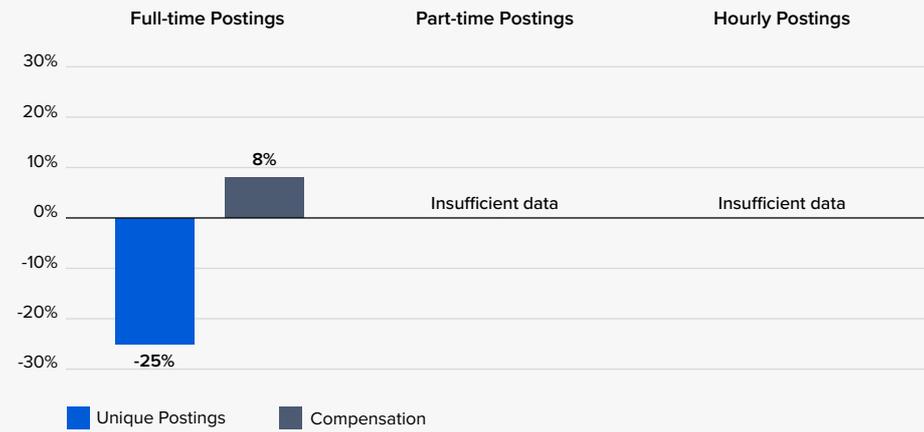


Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid information security roles decreased 14% QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and, when comparing Q4 2025 to Q4 2024, decreased 2% YoY, for scores of Moderate. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 10.7% decrease for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

The quarterly score was driven by a 25% decrease in stated demand and 3% decrease in actual hiring, while the YoY score was driven by a 51% decrease in stated demand that was heavily offset by a 47% increase in hiring.

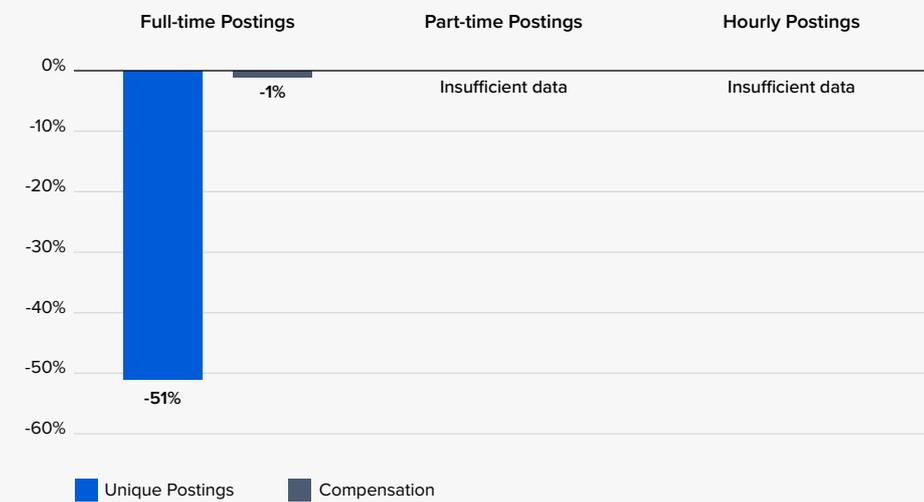
We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Information Security Experts
Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q3 2025 vs. Q4 2025



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

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Information Security Experts
Year-Over-Year Trends, Q4 2024 vs. Q4 2025



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

Full-time job postings declined 25% QoQ and 51% YoY. Compensation trends were up 8% QoQ, but decreased 1% YoY. There was insufficient data available for reliable trends in part-time and hourly positions.



-3%

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

Hiring activity, which Lightcast only makes available for all information security positions combined, decreased 3% QoQ but increased 47% YoY.

The analysis above includes demand for positions with five or more years of experience. Both QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024) demand for positions with 10 or more years of experience (a subset of the prior data) reflected

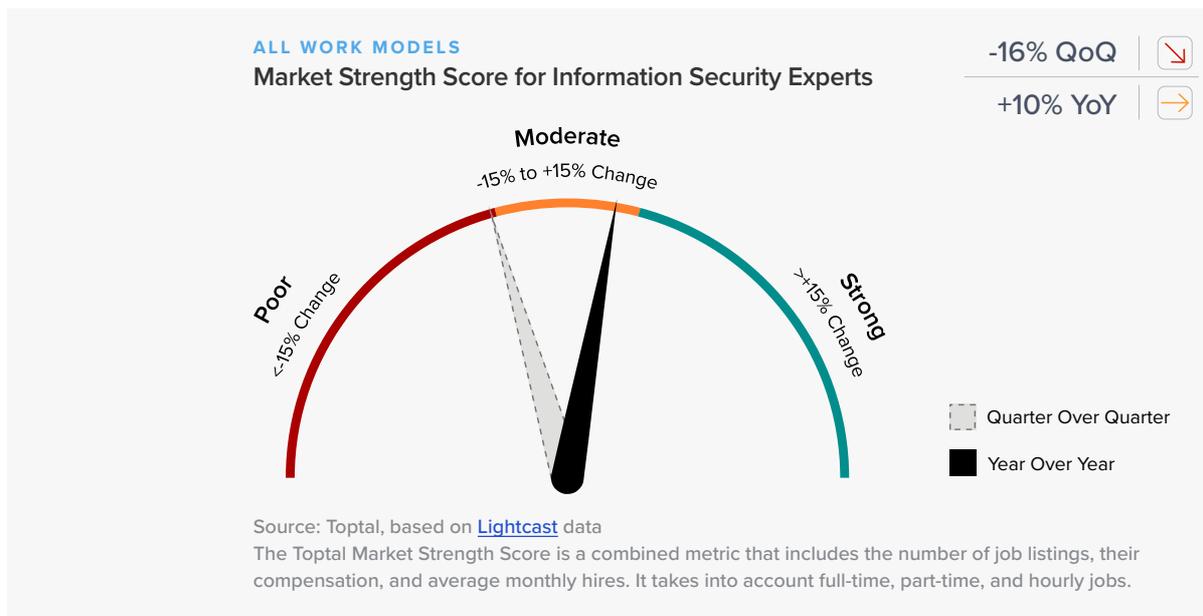


+47%

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

Information Security Expert Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. The graphic below shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in information security, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The time periods and methodology for determining the score remain the same.



Market strength for all experienced information security roles decreased 16% QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and increased 10% YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024), for scores of Poor and Moderate. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 1.9% increase for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

The QoQ trends for the overall market were similar to the remote and hybrid market. But YoY, the 10% growth in overall market strength outpaced the remote and hybrid segment, which declined 2%.

The QoQ score for all work models was driven by a 28% decrease in stated demand, as measured by job postings and offered compensation. The YoY score was affected by a 26% decrease in stated demand, but the drop was less pronounced than the 51% decrease in the remote and hybrid market.



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

Q4 Commentary



In Q4 2025, hiring was disciplined, with organizations reducing junior hires while increasing reliance on adaptable, business-focused senior professionals who could deliver rapid impact. The information security market completed a shift from maturity-driven programs toward measurable operational resilience, with organizations focusing on the financial impact of security failures and recovery speed rather than static defenses. This transition favored senior advisory experts capable of translating security investments into business outcomes, particularly in complex, multicloud environments.

Identity security and AI governance emerged as the top drivers of demand as generative AI enabled scalable social engineering and regulatory pressure intensified. Enterprises prioritized continuous identity visibility, behavioral analytics, and least privilege enforcement, creating strong demand for professionals who could redesign identity architecture and implement adaptive, AI-enhanced controls.

Q1 Preview



As Q1 begins, the security agenda is expected to focus on governing autonomous AI-driven systems, while treating cyber resilience as a measurable economic asset. Organizations will require governance frameworks to ensure accountability and risk control over automated security decisions, driving demand for advisors who understand both machine learning and security risk. Budget caution will persist, reinforcing the shift toward flexible senior talent over permanent headcount and favoring fractional leaders, interim architects, and outcome-oriented engagements that deliver immediate value. The highest demand will concentrate on cross-functional security leaders who combine technical depth with regulatory fluency and business acumen as security becomes a core business capability.

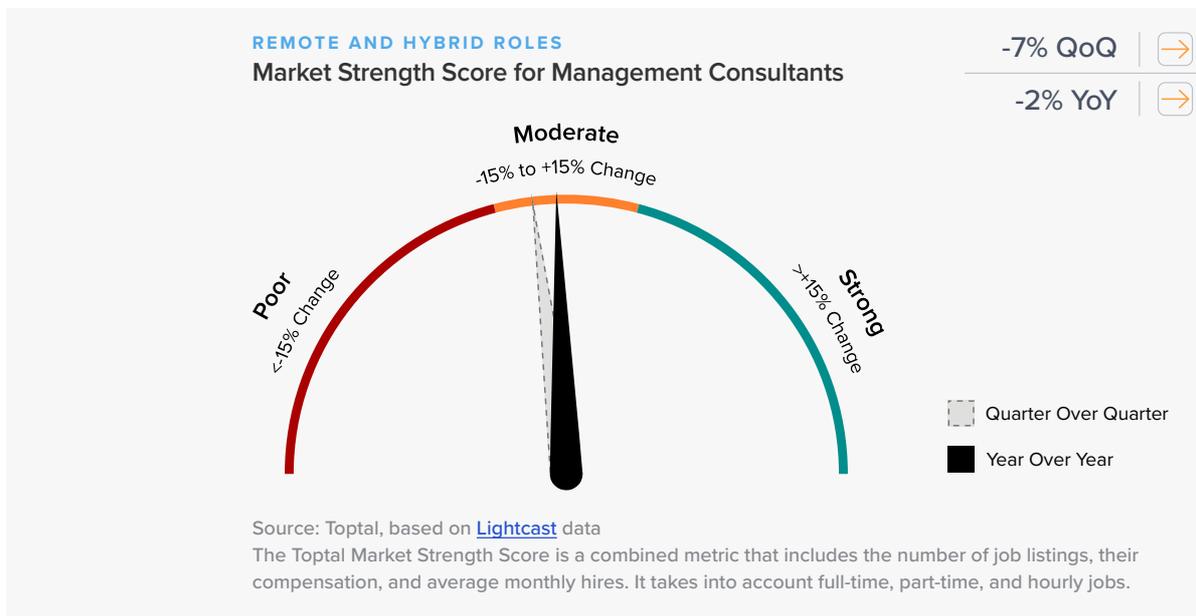
Management Consultant Trends

As discussed in the [Summary](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent 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 the QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024) 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 will 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

The graphic below shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in management consulting in the fourth quarter of 2025 versus the third quarter of 2025 and the fourth quarter of 2024. Note that while the market strength score below reflects remote and hybrid demand, hiring data is only available for all work models, and that figure is used in this calculation.

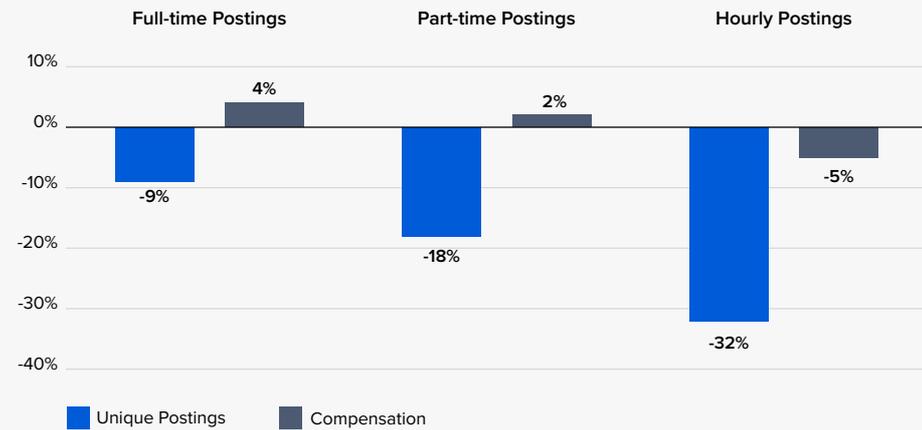


Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid management consulting roles decreased 7% QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and, when comparing Q4 2025 to Q4 2024, decreased 2% YoY, for scores of Moderate. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 1.7% increase for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

The QoQ score reflects slight decreases in both stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation, and hiring activity. The YoY score was driven by a large 21% decrease in stated demand, and partly offset by a 16% increase in hiring.

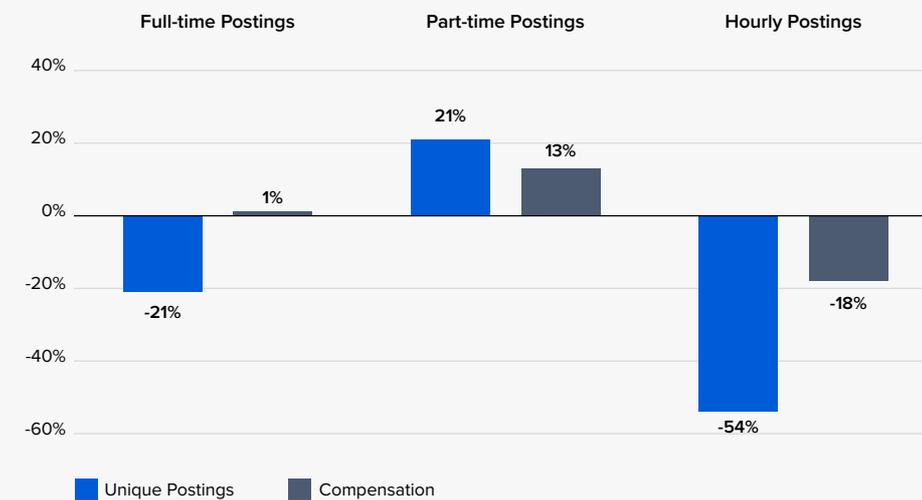
We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Management Consultants Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q3 2025 vs. Q4 2025



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

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Management Consultants Year-Over-Year Trends, Q4 2024 vs. Q4 2025



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

Full-time job postings decreased 9% QoQ and 21% YoY, but compensation rose slightly across both time periods, 4% QoQ and 1% YoY. Part-time job postings decreased 18% QoQ but increased 21% YoY. Part-time compensation increased across the board, by 2% QoQ and 13% YoY. Hourly postings dropped 32% QoQ and 54% YoY, while compensation dropped by 5% and 18%, respectively. Due to limited data points, however, part-time and hourly findings should be taken only as general directional indicators of the market.



-5%

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

Hiring activity, which Lightcast only makes available for all management consulting positions combined, decreased 5% QoQ and increased 16% 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

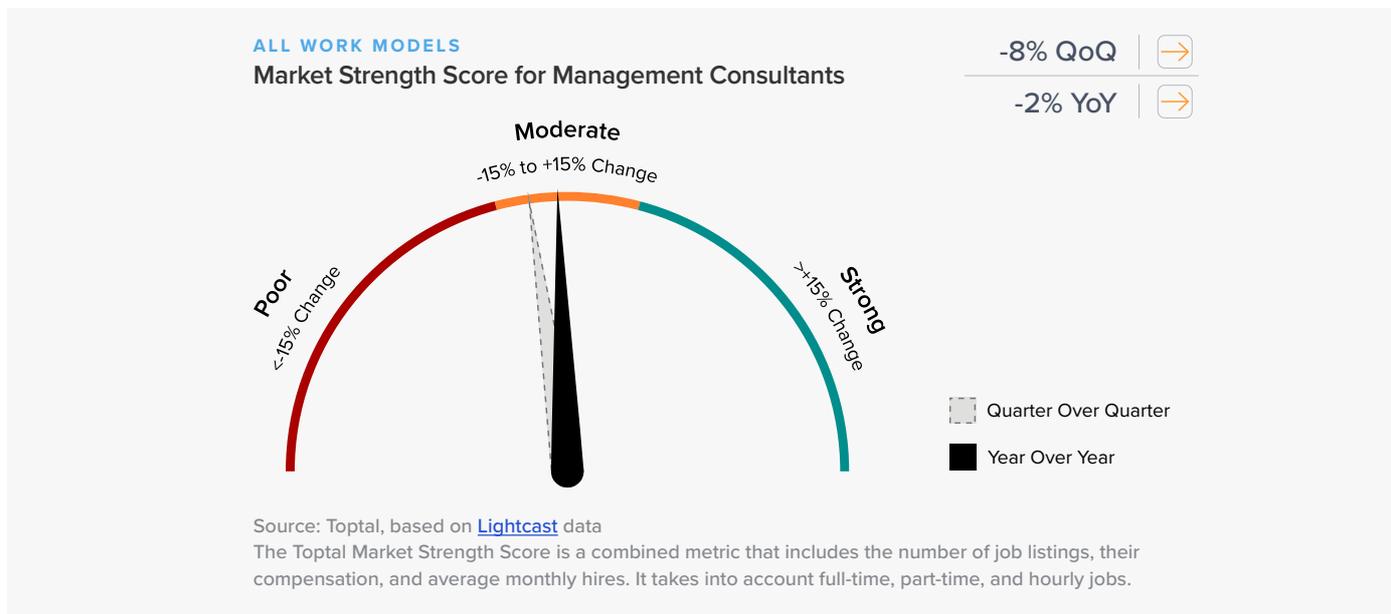


+16%

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

Management Consultant Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. The graphic below shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in management consulting, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The time periods and methodology for determining the score remain the same.



Market strength for all experienced management consultant roles decreased 8% QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and 2% YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024), for scores of Moderate. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 1.8% increase for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024. The demand trends and drivers of those trends were effectively equivalent to those for the remote and hybrid market.



Michael Valocchi
Senior Client
Solutions Advisor,
Toptal

Q4 Commentary



Q4 reflected ongoing disruption requiring deep strategic and transformational skills across enterprises and SMBs. Organizations focused on accelerating value from AI investments through digital-driven transformation, prioritizing the integration of AI into human-centric processes. While technology remained critical, companies looked for professionals with the process and domain knowledge needed for AI-driven transformation, including operating model design, strategic planning, performance improvement, and change management. Top-line growth initiatives also drove demand for business-focused product managers with management consulting skills.

These trends led to a steady demand for management consultants, most pronounced in October, with slight tapering as year end approached. Strategy and transformation skills represented the highest-demand areas. Consumer and industrial products remained the strongest industry sectors.

Q1 Preview



As we enter 2026, AI-driven transformation remains front and center. Companies will pursue performance improvement through operating model redesign and embedded AI rather than isolated point solutions. We anticipate that organizations will renew their focus on measurable outcomes, requiring business transformation skills with deeper industry expertise. This shift will likely revive change management demand as executives push initiatives deeper into their organizations. Additionally, we expect smaller companies to continue accessing senior strategic talent through fractional roles.

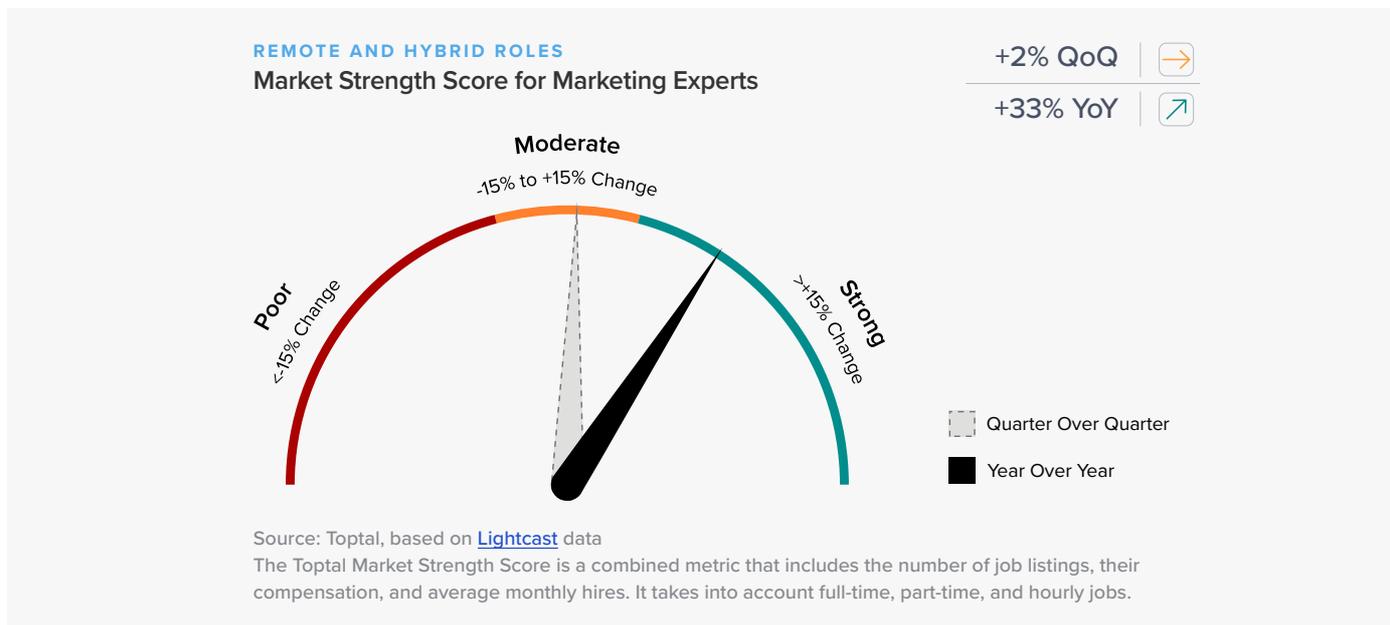
Marketing Expert Trends

As discussed in the [Summary](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent 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 (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024) changes in the number of new job postings, median offered compensation in those postings, and actual hiring activity.

First, we will 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

The graphic below shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in marketing in the fourth quarter of 2025 versus the third quarter of 2025 and the fourth quarter of 2024. Note that while the market strength score below reflects remote and hybrid demand, hiring data is only available for all work models, and that figure is used in this calculation.

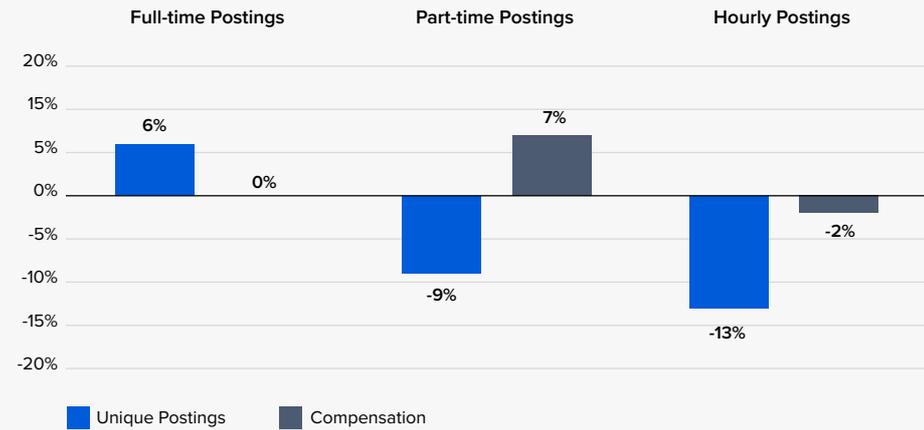


Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid marketing expert roles increased 2% QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and, when comparing Q4 2025 to Q4 2024, increased 33% YoY, for scores of Moderate and Strong. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 13% increase for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

The QoQ score was driven by a 6% increase in stated demand, as measured by job postings and offered compensation, moderated by a slight decrease in hiring activity. The YoY score reflects a substantial increase in hiring and a 23% increase in stated demand.

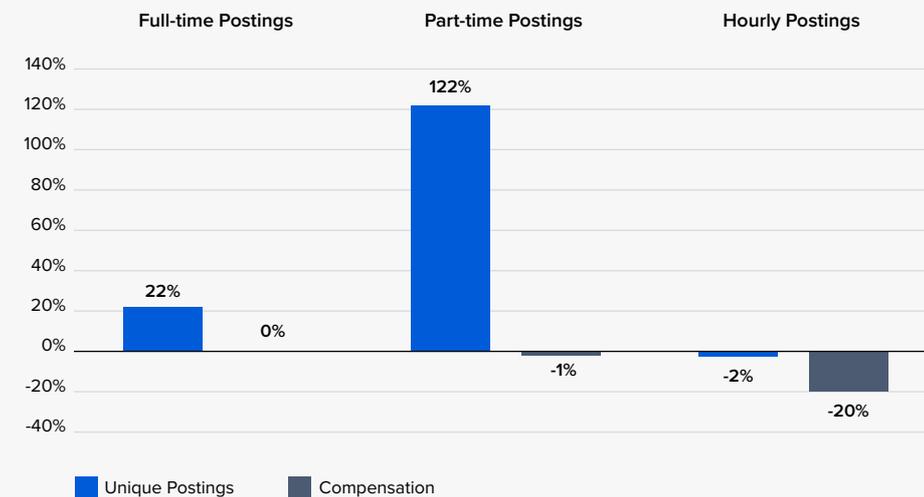
We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Marketing Experts Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q3 2025 vs. Q4 2025



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

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Marketing Experts Year-Over-Year Trends, Q4 2024 vs. Q4 2025



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

Full-time job postings saw a QoQ increase of 6% and a YoY increase of 22%. Compensation was flat QoQ and YoY. Part-time job postings declined 9% QoQ and increased 122% YoY. Compensation, however, was more muted, increasing 7% QoQ and decreasing 1% YoY. Hourly positions saw declining trends, with a 13% decrease in job postings and a 2% decrease in compensation QoQ, and a 2% drop in postings and 20% decline in compensation YoY. Due to the limited data available for hourly positions, these findings should be taken only as general directional indicators of the market.



-1%

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



+44%

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

Hiring activity, which Lightcast only makes available for all marketing positions combined, decreased 1% QoQ but remained up 44% YoY.

The analysis above includes demand for roles with five or more years of experience. When comparing Q4 2025 to Q4 2024, YoY demand for positions with 10 or more years of experience (a subset of the prior data) was

Marketing Expert Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. The graphic below shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in marketing, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The time periods and methodology for determining the score remain the same.



Market strength for all experienced marketing expert roles decreased 2% QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and increased 27% YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024), for scores of Moderate and Strong. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 12.6% increase for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

The QoQ and YoY scores for the remote and hybrid market and all work models were similar. But the 27% YoY growth in overall market strength underperformed compared to the 33% growth of the remote and hybrid segment.

The QoQ scores for all work models were driven by lower stated demand, with a 3% QoQ decrease versus the 6% increase for remote and hybrid roles, and a 10% YoY increase versus the 23% increase for remote and hybrid roles.



Chris Krohn
GM, Toptal's
Marketing Agency

Q4 Commentary



Q4 started strong, but macroeconomic uncertainty triggered caution and tighter budgets at year end. This conservative outlook played out across enterprise and SMB companies, with virtually all industry segments and geographies seeing a contraction in marketing talent demand, especially in the consumer products and services sector. This trend was more pronounced than the typical Q4 downturn, when many companies shift from holiday-related hiring to execution.

Creative and content marketing demand grew fastest in Q4, while marketing, sales, and revenue operations saw the strongest growth YoY. Still, growth marketing continued to decline from peak demand in Q2 2025, consistent with the gradual shift away from aggressive growth initiatives in 2025 toward a focus on cost-effective execution. Significantly, 2025 YoY growth was strong, especially for consumer products firms and the financial services sector.

Q1 Preview



Heading into Q1, we expect to see an uptick in demand for marketing experts. It is likely that much of the “missing” spending in November and December stemmed from companies postponing hiring and project work until Q1, not from permanent headcount or budget cuts. In addition, the last two weeks of December saw higher-than-expected spending in marketing, particularly among SMBs. These indicators may point to a resumption of demand growth in 2026 if macroeconomic trends stabilize.

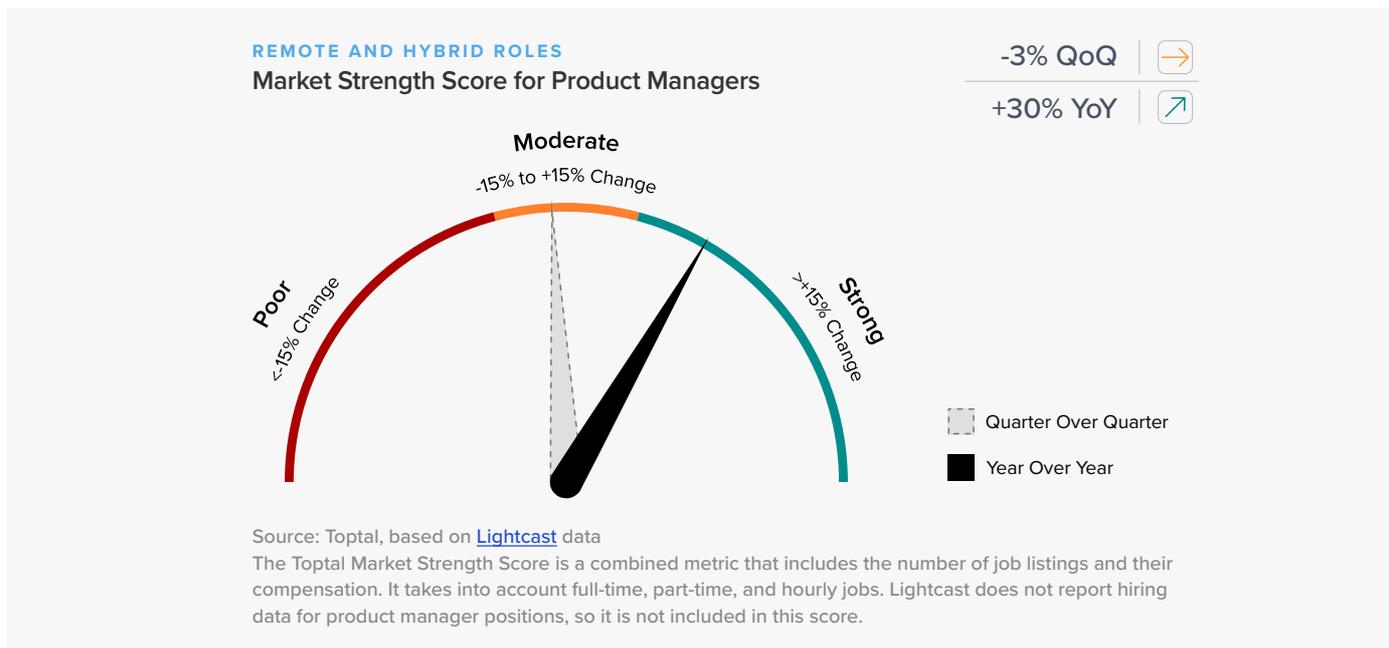
Product Manager Trends

As discussed in the [Summary](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent 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 (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024) changes in the number of new job postings and the median offered compensation in those postings. Lightcast does not report hiring activity for product manager positions.

First, we will 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

The graphic below shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in product management in the fourth quarter of 2025 versus the third quarter of 2025 and the fourth quarter of 2024.

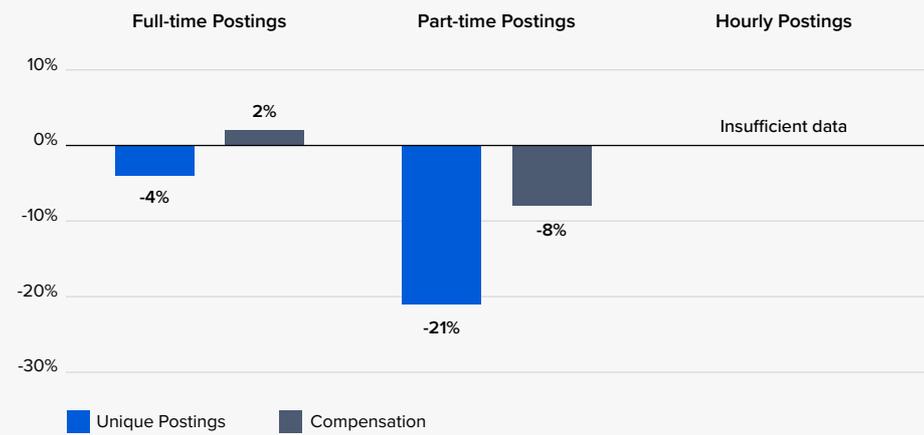


Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid product manager roles decreased 3% QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and, when comparing Q4 2025 to Q4 2024, increased 30% YoY, for scores of Moderate and Strong. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 31.5% increase for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

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 [Summary](#) section.

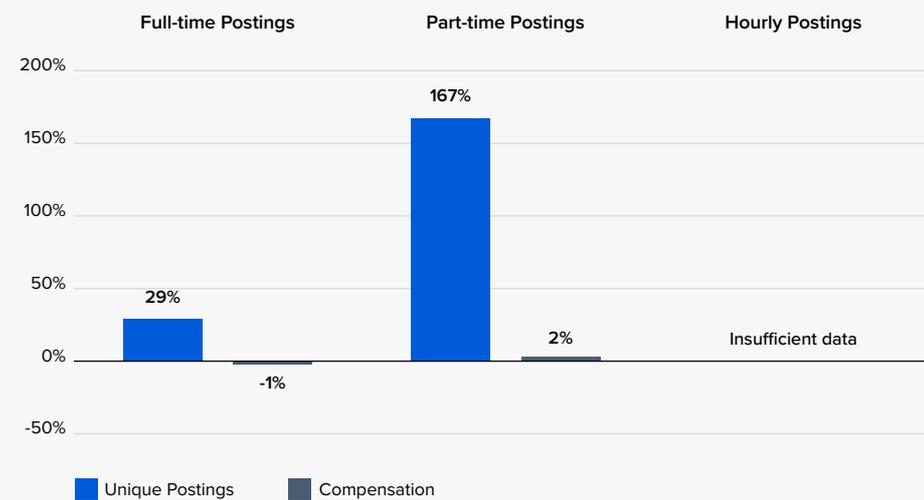
We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Product Managers Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q3 2025 vs. Q4 2025



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

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Product Managers Year-Over-Year Trends, Q4 2024 vs. Q4 2025



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

Full-time postings declined 4% QoQ but increased 29% YoY. Compensation increased 2% QoQ and dropped 1% YoY. Part-time positions saw opposite trends for the two time periods, with job postings decreasing 21% QoQ but increasing 167% YoY. Compensation decreased 8% QoQ and increased 2% YoY. Due to the limited data available for part-time positions, these findings should be taken only as general directional indicators of the market. There was insufficient data available for reliable trends in hourly positions.



-1%

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



+36%

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

While Lightcast does not gather hiring data for product managers, the data from other talent areas of expertise included in this report shows hiring activity decreasing by an average of 1% QoQ and increasing 36% YoY.

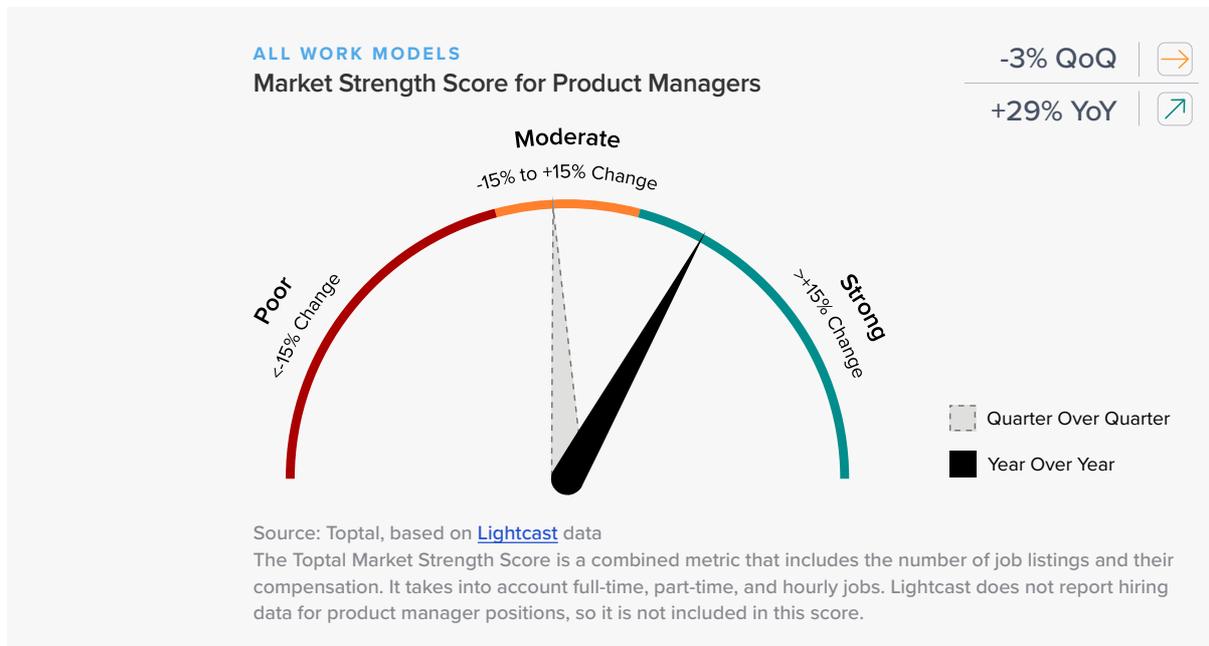
The analysis above includes demand for positions with five or more years of experience. Demand for positions with 10 or more years of experience (a subset of the prior data) was



Product Manager Market Strength: All Work Models

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

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. The graphic below shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in product management, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The time periods and methodology for determining the score remain the same.



Market strength for all experienced product manager roles decreased 3% QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and rose 29% YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024), for scores of Moderate and Strong. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 28.5% increase for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

The demand trends were effectively equivalent to those for the remote and hybrid market and were wholly driven by job postings and compensation, since Lightcast does not report on hiring activity for product managers.



Érico Sabino
Enterprise Matching
Team Lead, Toptal

Q4 Commentary

“

Q4 highlighted a steady demand for product managers skilled in large language models and AI, underscoring the industry's focus on leveraging AI across sectors and domains like healthcare, legal, fintech, and data analytics. The trends showed a persistent move toward integrating advanced AI into product management to drive innovation and efficiency. Professionals who honed skills in AI-driven product roadmapping, MVP creation, and technical product management were therefore better positioned. This shift toward AI specialization reflected an enduring change in the skills companies seek to support a successful tech-centric future.

Q1 Preview

“

As we enter Q1, the demand for product managers with expertise in AI and Agile product management remains strong. Industries are increasingly integrating AI into their operations, emphasizing the need for professionals skilled in AI-driven product roadmapping and MVP creation. This trend reflects a broader move toward leveraging technology for innovation and efficiency.

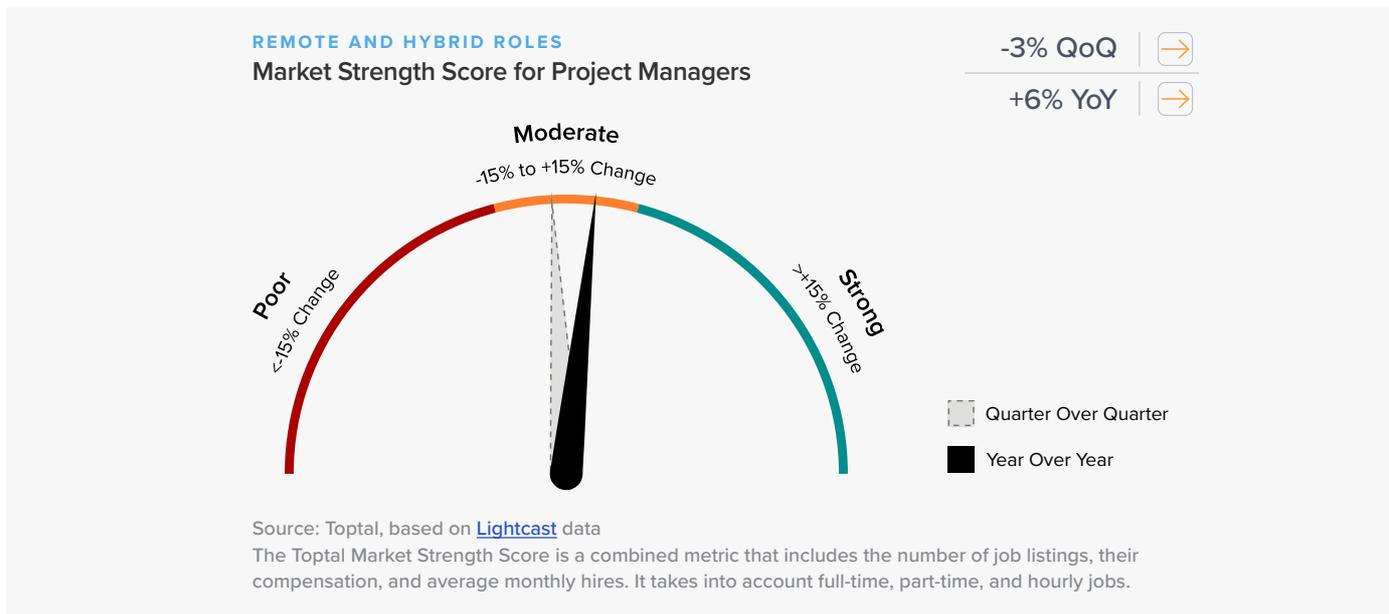
Project Manager Trends

As discussed in the [Summary](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent 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 (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024) changes in the number of new job postings, median offered compensation in those postings, and actual hiring activity.

First, we will 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

The graphic below shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in project management in the fourth quarter of 2025 versus the third quarter of 2025 and the fourth quarter of 2024. Note that while the market strength score below reflects remote and hybrid demand, hiring data is only available for all work models, and that figure is used in this calculation.

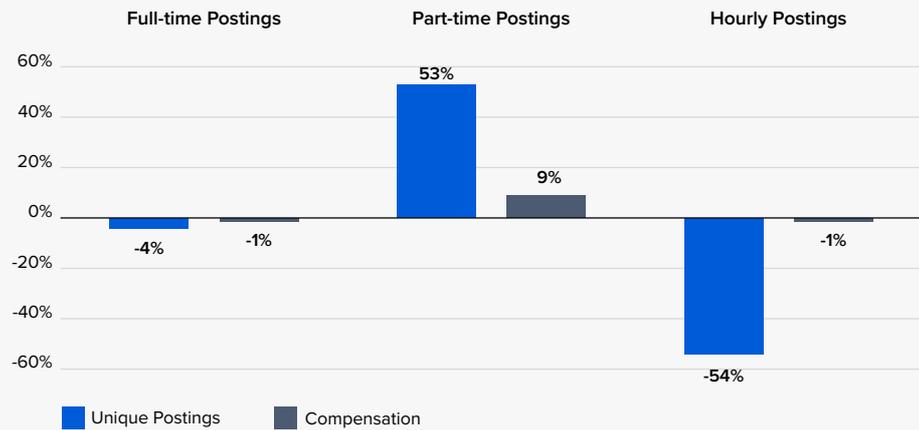


Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid project manager roles decreased 3% QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and, when comparing Q4 2025 to Q4 2024, increased 6% YoY, for scores of Moderate. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 1.2% increase for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

The QoQ score reflects a 5% decrease in stated demand, as measured by job postings and offered compensation, and a 1% decrease in hiring activity. The YoY score was driven by a 30% increase in hiring, moderated by an 18% decrease in stated demand.

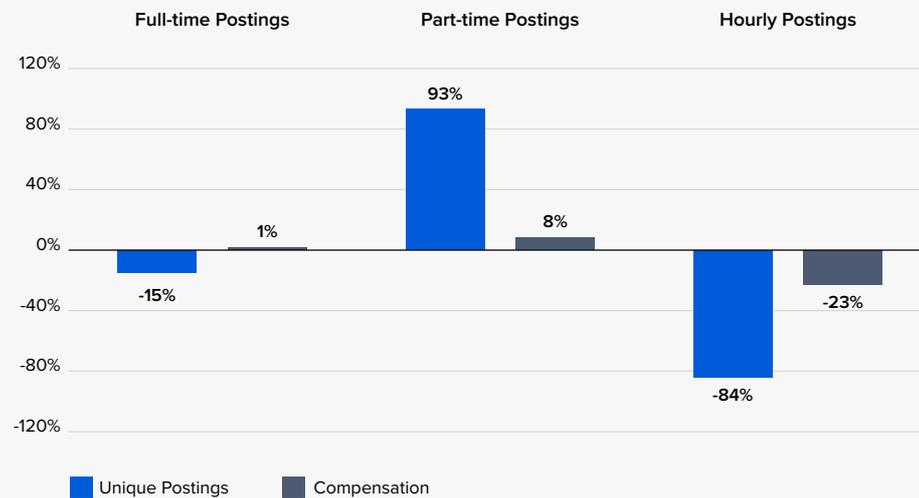
We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and hiring on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Project Managers Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q3 2025 vs. Q4 2025



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

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Project Managers Year-Over-Year Trends, Q4 2024 vs. Q4 2025



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

Full-time job postings decreased 4% QoQ and 15% YoY, while compensation decreased 1% QoQ and grew 1% YoY. Part-time positions showed upward trends, with job postings increasing 53% QoQ and 93% YoY, and compensation increasing 9% QoQ and 8% YoY. Hourly job postings saw decreases of 54% QoQ and 84% YoY. Hourly compensation declined 1% QoQ and 23% YoY. The findings for hourly roles are based on limited data points and should be taken only as general directional indicators of the market.



-1%

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

Hiring activity, which Lightcast only makes available for all project management roles combined, fell 1% QoQ but rose 30% 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

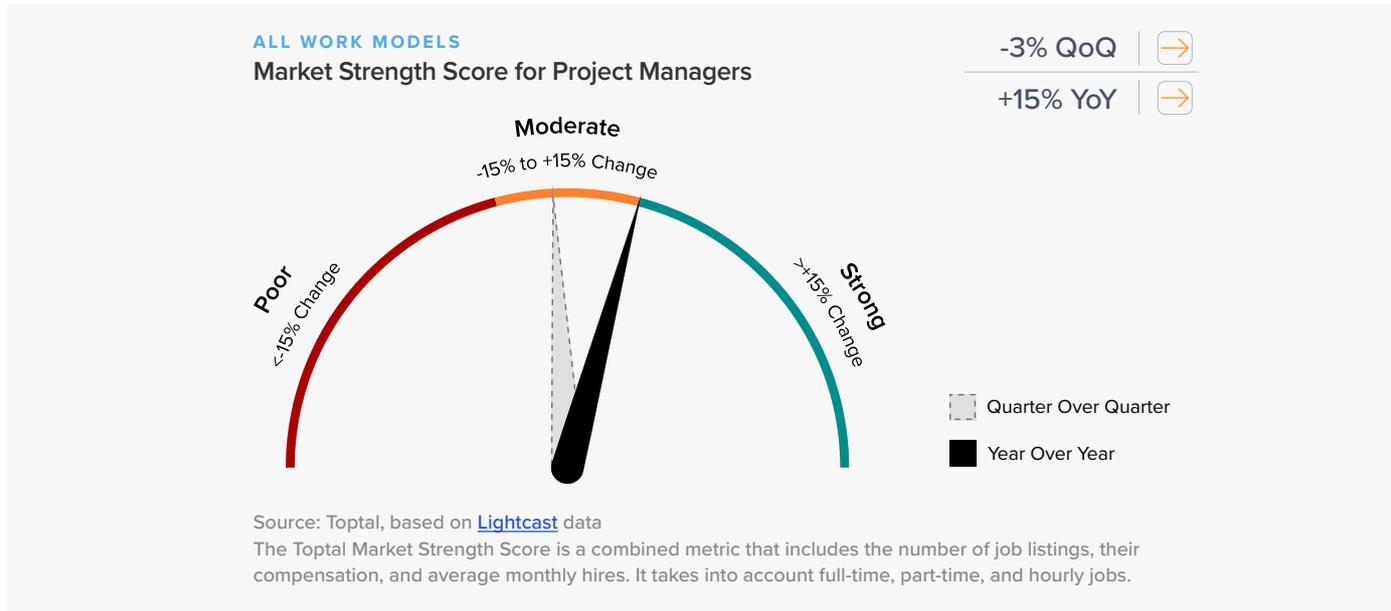


+30%

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

Project Manager Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. The graphic below shows demand and hiring for all experienced positions in project management, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The time periods and methodology for determining the score remain the same.



Market strength for all experienced project manager roles decreased 3% QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and rose 15% YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024), for scores of Moderate. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 9.5% increase for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

The trends for the remote and hybrid market and all work models were the same QoQ. But YoY, the 15% growth in overall market strength outpaced the 6% growth of the remote and hybrid segment.

The QoQ score for all work models was driven by a 6% decrease in stated demand and the same 1% decrease in hiring as the remote and hybrid market. The YoY score was moderated by a 1% increase in stated demand, versus the 18% decrease seen in the remote and hybrid segment.



Sergio Castro
Product and Project
Management
Matching Team
Lead, Toptal

Q4 Commentary

“

In Q4, demand for project managers was strong in both SMB and enterprise sectors, each with distinct priorities. SMBs sought technical project managers to drive innovation and adopt technologies like AI and blockchain, focusing on agility. Enterprises prioritized program management for digital transformations, highlighting operational efficiency. These trends emphasized the need for professionals with the technical and strategic skills to meet evolving market demands and deliver impactful results.

Q1 Preview

“

As we enter Q1, demand for project managers remains strong, especially for those skilled in Agile and technical project management. Large organizations seek project managers to lead digital transformations involving cloud tech and data migrations, with a focus on enterprise architecture and strategic business changes. In the SMB sector, Agile project managers are needed for AI-driven creative projects and technical solutions in e-commerce and SaaS. This demand underscores the vital role of project managers in guiding technological advancements and improving operational efficiency across industries.

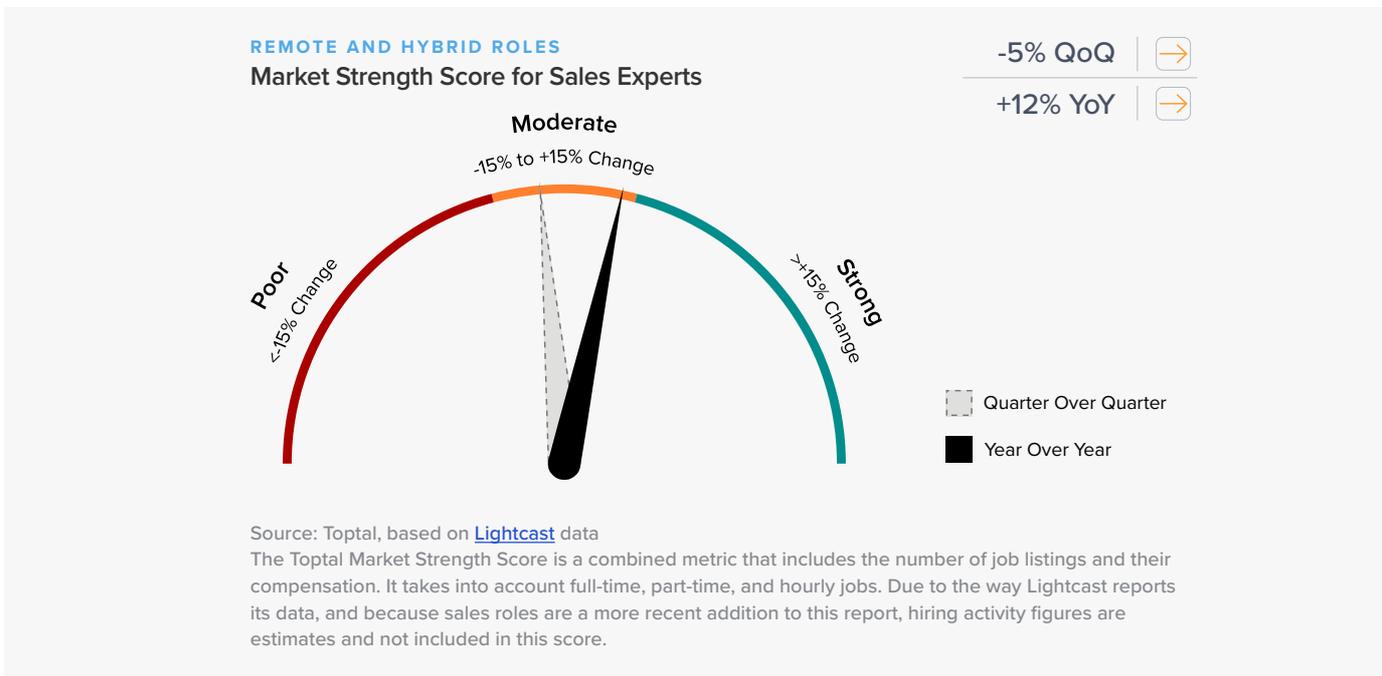
Sales Expert Trends

As discussed in the [Summary](#), Toptal has developed a unique scoring system, the Toptal Market Strength Score, to represent 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 (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024) changes in the number of new job postings and the median offered compensation in those postings. Due to the way Lightcast reports its data, and because sales roles are a more recent addition to the scope of this report, the hiring figures shared in this section are estimates, and they are not included in the Toptal Market Strength Scores.

First, we will 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

The graphic below shows demand and hiring for experienced remote and hybrid positions in sales in the fourth quarter of 2025 versus the third quarter of 2025 and the fourth quarter of 2024.

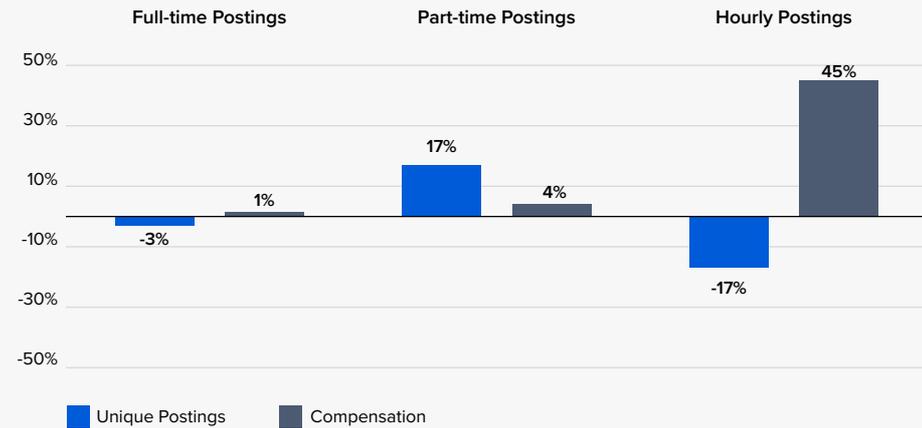


Market strength for experienced remote and hybrid sales expert roles decreased 5% QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and, when comparing Q4 2025 to Q4 2024, increased 12% YoY, for scores of Moderate. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 19.3% increase for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

Both QoQ and YoY scores were driven wholly by stated demand, as measured by job postings and compensation. Note that while stated demand provides an important market signal, it can overstate true demand due to ghost job postings, as discussed in the [Summary](#).

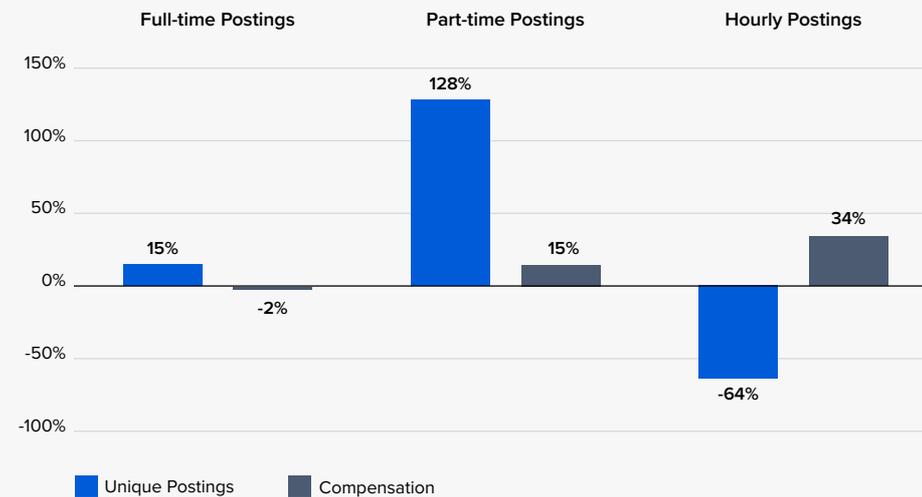
We now break down these trends in terms of changes in positions posted, compensation offered, and estimated hiring activity on both a QoQ and YoY basis.

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Sales Experts Quarter-Over-Quarter Trends, Q3 2025 vs. Q4 2025



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

Components of the Remote and Hybrid Score for Sales Experts Year-Over-Year Trends, Q4 2024 vs. Q4 2025



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

Full-time postings decreased by 3% QoQ and increased 15% YoY; compensation increased 1% QoQ but fell 2% YoY. Part-time postings increased by 17% QoQ and 128% YoY, while pay increased 4% QoQ and 15% YoY. Hourly postings fell by 17% QoQ and 64% YoY, while compensation rose by 45% QoQ and 34% YoY. The findings for hourly roles are based on limited data points and should be taken only as general directional indicators of the market.



-2%

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



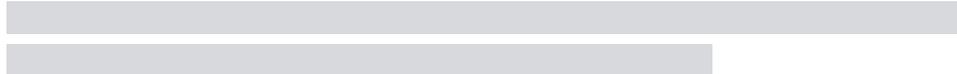
+2%

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

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

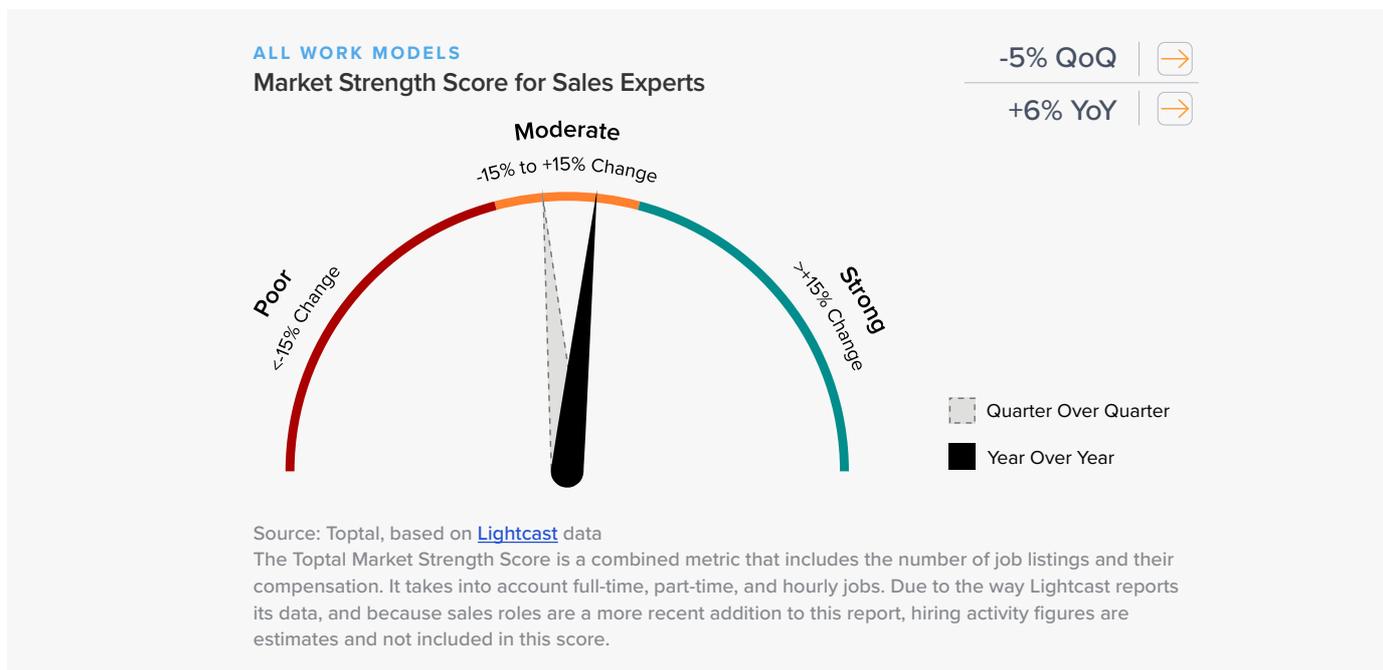
Hiring activity, which Lightcast only makes available for all time commitments combined, decreased by an estimated 2% QoQ, but increased by an estimated 2% YoY.

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 some differences. Senior-level full-time postings



Sales Expert Market Strength: All Work Models

The previous data and graphics applied specifically to remote and hybrid roles. The graphic below shows demand for all experienced positions in sales, including remote, hybrid, and in-office roles. The time periods and methodology for determining the score remain the same.



Market strength for all experienced sales expert roles decreased 5% QoQ (Q4 2025 versus Q3 2025) and increased 6% YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024), for scores of Moderate. Full-year data provides additional context, showing a 14.3% increase for the segment in 2025 compared to 2024.

The trends for all work models and the remote and hybrid market were the same QoQ. But YoY, the 6% growth in overall market strength underperformed compared to the 12% growth of the remote and hybrid segment.

QoQ and YoY scores were driven wholly by stated demand, as measured by job postings and offered compensation, as hiring activity was not included in the calculation.



Toby Dusina
Director, Sales
Development, Toptal

Q4 Commentary



Q4 reinforced the importance of system health across the revenue organization. Performance outcomes were less about individual heroics and more about how well data, process, and people were aligned from first engagement through close. The strongest teams treated year end not as a sprint, but as an opportunity to reset fundamentals and prepare for a more intentional start to the next growth cycle. As organizations prioritized system health, the most marketable sales professionals were those who functioned as go-to-market engineers, blending soft skills with deep technical fluency in AI prompt engineering and data analytics.

Q1 Preview



Q1 2026 is opening with renewed clarity and rising expectations. With new budgets in place and strategic priorities reset, sales teams are under pressure to generate early momentum without reverting to inefficient volume-based tactics.

Success in the early months of 2026 will likely favor teams that balance efficiency with momentum, combining focused execution with human judgment and trust-building that technology alone cannot replace. We are seeing surging demand for strategic sales advisors who can speak the language of the C-suite, focusing on risk governance and quantifiable ROI rather than just product features. To succeed in this market, sales professionals must move away from high-volume tactics toward radical relevancy, using their well-honed judgment to provide context and trust-building that technology cannot replace.

Key Takeaways

Significant insights from this report are summarized below.

- + **Demand for experienced remote and hybrid technology and professional services personnel is strong, increasing 19.8% YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024).** This is despite a slight QoQ decrease of 4%, reflecting an expected year-end slowdown. When comparing the full-year data for 2025 versus 2024, we see a smaller yet still notable increase of 10.9%.
- + **Demand for experienced remote and hybrid technology and professional services personnel slightly outperformed demand for in-office personnel for the same segment.**
 - Demand for all experienced technology and professional services roles, including in-office jobs, decreased by 4.7% QoQ (versus 4% for remote and hybrid roles alone) and increased 19.4% YoY (versus 19.8% for remote and hybrid roles). Looking at all of 2025 versus 2024, demand for all roles increased by 10.5% (versus 10.9% for remote and hybrid roles).
 - Though the gap between the scores is quite small (-4.7% versus -4% for QoQ, 19.4% versus 19.8% for YoY, and 10.5% versus 10.9% for 2025 versus 2024), the fact that remote and hybrid roles *alone* performed better than the combined work models means in-office roles had to underperform to bring down the overall average.
- + **Demand for highly skilled, senior-level technology and professional services personnel is stronger than demand for generalists or entry-level workers, regardless of work model.**
 - Despite growth in demand for experienced technology and professional services personnel, postings for all professions and levels of experience in the US and most other large economies fell by an average of nearly 10% YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024), with the exception of Canada, which increased by 2.4%. (QoQ trends were slightly more optimistic, however, with Canada, the United Kingdom, and the US all seeing single-digit percentage increases in job postings.)
- + **Volatility in the technology sector continues, with layoffs increasing 3% QoQ and more than doubling YoY.** The YoY (Q4 2025 versus Q4 2024) figure is explained by the fact that Q4 2024 was an outlier and had the fewest layoffs of any quarter in the past two years by a significant margin. Looking at the full year, we see the absolute number of workers laid off in 2025 was almost 20% lower than in 2024. This turbulence is driven by multiple factors, discussed below.

+ The widespread adoption of AI is a major driver of the trends seen in this report.

- 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 surged 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.
- 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 AI initiatives.

New to the Q4 2025 report is Toptal's US Job Market Forecast for Q1 2026. The projection is built on a statistical model with predictive value for key Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) indicators. As of Q4 2025, the model gives the following directional signals:

- + Job growth for all US roles is projected to decline moderately in Q1 2026.** BLS data shows that job growth fell at a rate of about 11% per year for the last several years. Our model suggests job growth in Q1 is likely to continue on this trajectory.
- + Job growth for US professional services roles is projected to decline slightly in Q1 2026.** BLS data shows that professional services job growth fell at a rate of about 11% per year for the last several years. Our model suggests job growth for this segment will decline in Q1, but at a smaller magnitude than the BLS average.
- + Job growth for US information services (technology) roles is projected to increase slightly in Q1 2026.** BLS data shows that information services job growth fell at a rate of about 21% per year for the last several years. In a departure from the BLS trends, and despite predicted declines in all professional services jobs combined, the outlook for technology-specific roles is quite different: According to our model, job growth for this segment will be slightly positive in Q1 2026. The BLS, too, projects that employment in computer and information technology occupations is expected to [grow much faster](#) than the average for all occupations through 2034.

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

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 50,000 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.

[Redacted text block]

Talent Market and Vertical Demand Data Analysis

This analysis uses data from Lightcast, which aggregates job postings from approximately 50,000 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 |



The World's Top Talent, On Demand.®

Toptal is the world's largest fully remote workforce, powered by more than 20,000 professionals in tech, design, finance, marketing, and more.

Since 2010, more than 30,000 clients, from Fortune 500 companies to innovative startups, have trusted us to provide world-class on-demand talent, teams, and end-to-end solutions.

For more information, please visit: toptal.com

30,000+
clients served

85,000+
engagements

140+
countries