

What do South Africans have against ICT?

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After speaking to various friends, family members and clients about the subject, it seems that very few South Africans consider careers in software development or information and communication technologies (ICT) when leaving school.



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There are a number of reasons for this, but first let's look at why a career in software should be given some consideration by this country's youth.

Employers of choice

In 2014, Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For revealed that four of the top ten companies were software or technology-related organisations. In fact, the top two were both software companies. Of course, this isn't an indicator of the attractiveness of all software companies, but the 'Google-philosophy' and Silicon Valley culture is certainly more prevalent in tech companies.

Skills in demand

On the local front, according to [Career Junction's Index](#) (July 2015), the ICT industry sees the highest job vacancy levels in the country. The demand for people to fill ICT roles is more than double that of the engineering industry, which has the third-highest demand level on the Index.

In addition, according to [Buzz South Africa](#), the highest-paying job (on average) in SA in 2015 is that of a software engineer. This particular statistic is difficult to measure and differs from survey to survey, however, simply because of the demand for these skills, software engineers and developers will usually be in the top ten of any salary survey. Finally, in the biggest worldwide developer survey - [StackOverflow's 2015 Developer Survey](#) - around 70 percent of participants said that they were self-taught or trained on the job, indicating new levels of sustained value to employees presented by this field.

So, if ICT companies are usually good companies to work for, it's relatively easy to find a job, an expensive and lengthy qualification is often not required and the pay is above average, why don't South Africans want to follow this path?

Growing up without a computer

At present, the biggest reason is our backgrounds. A large percentage of this country's population grew up without computers. However, this is changing - smart device ownership is increasing and hopefully we'll see future generations take a greater interest in the software element of these devices. To add to this, renewed focus and commitment by public and private sector organisations to work towards improving South Africa's STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) schooling performance is expected to yield positive results, which will also play a large part in making the ICT field more accessible for young people.

The 'cool factor'

There is also a perceived lack of 'cool factor' around the industry. However, software development is one of the few white-collar industries where employees can have the instant gratification of building something from scratch. With software being a part of everything nowadays - from apps on phones and devices, social media, as well as the process which runs a DSTV Explora or the SatNav in a car - software developers' work is often showcased in the public eye. What could be cooler than that?

Playing on the world ICT stage

In comparison, the ICT industry is the largest private sector employer in India. India has a population of more than one billion people, and has embraced an industry that barely existed there twenty years ago. This has made the nation one of the most powerful ICT forces globally, and demand for the country's ICT services has driven significant economic development. African countries such as Kenya and Nigeria are also following suit.

In South Africa, the ICT market continues to expand, and the need for software professionals is clearly present. However, we currently just don't have people with the right skills to be able to meet this demand and play on the world ICT stage. If India can use this industry to boost their economy, why can't we, and why don't we?

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