

Computer Support Specialist Career Path Exploration

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Introduction

This article provides factual information for those interested in a career as a computer user support specialist and a computer network support specialist. For those trying to decide if this career is a good fit, specific information such as pay and benefits, career outlook, and responsibilities may be helpful. Details regarding these careers will be presented in the following order: responsibilities, how to become one, pay and benefits, job outlook, and an interview with a small business owner in these occupation areas.

Responsibilities of a Computer Support Specialist

According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2021), a computer network support specialist provides routine maintenance, test network systems, evaluate performance, and resolve network issues. A computer network support specialist configures network security settings and backs up network data (Occupational Information Network, para. 2, 2021). Computer user support specialists troubleshoot computer problems for customers. They are responsible for fielding telephone calls and assisting nontechnical computer users with hardware and software questions (Moncarz, 2001, p.17). Computer user support specialists are responsible for repairing and setting up computer equipment. They also provide training to non-technical customers to work with new equipment. A computer user support specialist can also be responsible for networking support services (Field Engineers, para. 2, 2021). The responsibilities assigned to a computer support specialist vary based on the employer.

How to Become a Computer Support Specialist

The education requirements of a computer support specialist can differ between employers; however, all employers require computer support specialist to have computer expertise (Mckay, para. 5, 2019). The U.S. Department of Labor (2021) denotes the education requirements of a computer support specialists for a large software company typically requires a bachelor's degree. Active listening skills play an important role for computer support specialists to understand peoples' needs and accurately resolve their computer problems. Strong critical thinking capabilities are needed to problem solve computer issues (Mckay, para. 6, 2019).

Pay and Benefits

According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2021), the median annual pay for a computer support specialist is \$55,510. Computer network support specialists earn a median annual wage of \$65,450. The median annual pay for computer user support specialists is \$52,690. According to Salary.com (2021), the average computer user support specialist earned \$43,313 annually. The average annual pay for a computer network support specialist is \$52,088 (Salary.com, 2021).

Job Outlook

The U.S. Department of Labor (2021) reported 882,300 computer support specialists in 2019 and projects that number to increase by 8% to 949,600 by 2029. In 2019, there were 195,100 computer network support specialists; by 2029 the number is expected to grow to 207,700 or about 6%. Computer user support specialist jobs are expected to increase by 8% over the same time period from 687,200 to 741,900. The Employment Development Department for the State of California (para. 12, 2021) predicts strong job prospects as information technology continues to be adopted in new fields including healthcare and electronic commerce.

Interview with Steven Culp at “Your Very Own Geek” which is a computer consulting and repair business located 33 E Main Street in Anderson, Indiana. Steven can be reached at steven@yourveryowngeek.com

Steven Culp, pictured in Figure 1, is the president of “Your Very Own Geek”. He was interviewed by Dr. Edward J. Lazaros on May 18, 2021. The interview along with Steven’s responses are listed in the following sections:

Figure 1: Steven standing in front of his computer consulting and repair business, which is called “Your Very Own Geek”.



1. What previous experience prepared you for this position?

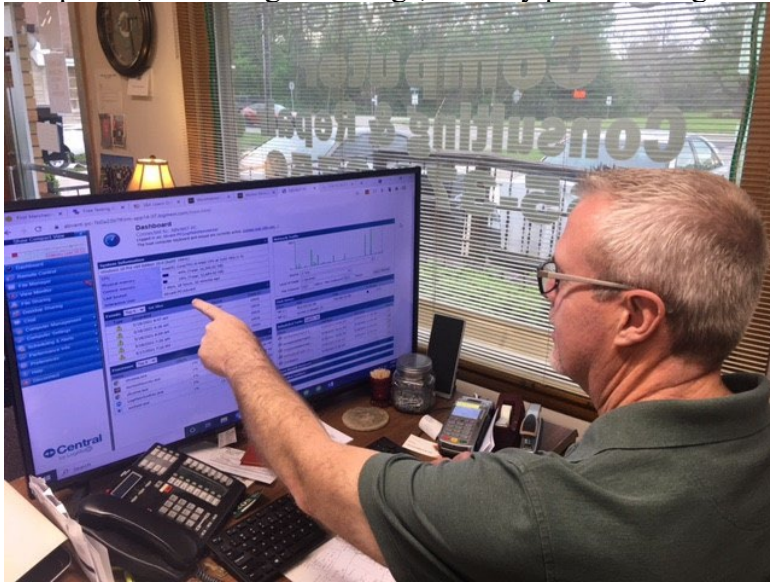
“I worked in the corporate world and managed North and South American networks for BMW. I then came back to local and regional business support for their computers” (Steven Culp, personal communication, May 18, 2021).

2. What does a typical work day look like for you?

“Answering phones, texts, e-mails and communicating with clients or potential clients. We engage in computer and cell phone repair. We take care of business networks and residential networks. We deal with security issues that we discover on the networks. We even get to work

with U.S. Homeland Security and other government agencies when we deal with security issues” (Steven Culp, personal communication, May 18, 2021).

Figure 2: Steven using network management software that is used for remote control of computers, reviewing event logs, security patch management, monitoring computer performance.



3. What is your favorite part about your daily work?

“I like the customer interaction. I like solving people’s problems and making them happy. I like that we always get to work with new technology, which is always changing” (Steven Culp, personal communication, May 18, 2021).

Figure 3: Steven speaking with a customer on the phone.



4. What are the main challenges you encounter with your daily work?

“Trying to keep up with the new technology is a challenge. We cover a broad expanse, and keeping up with all of it is a challenge. For example, malware, viruses, and adware are always coming out, and we want to stay ahead of them. Trying to educate customers on malware, viruses, and adware is also a challenge” (Steven Culp, personal communication, May 18, 2021).

Figure 4: Steven examining a damaged motherboard in a laptop computer that is going to be replaced.



Figure 5: A close-up picture of the damaged motherboard in a laptop computer.



5. What kinds of fun technology do you get to use?

“We deal with network scanners. They identify points of vulnerability on a network so that we can determine what type of security patching that we need to do. They can detect throughput problems so that we know where the bandwidth is going and how it is being distributed” (Steven Culp, personal communication, May 18, 2021).

6. What advice would you give someone who would like to get into this career?

“Start small! You can always grow your technological abilities as you go. Don’t go in thinking you have to be the best at everything. Get your feet into it and figure out what areas you like. Select jobs where you can get exposed to a lot of different things so that you can touch all of the technology” (Steven Culp, personal communication, May 18, 2021).

Figure 6: Steven in the showroom of refurbished computer equipment that is for sale.



Conclusion

Computer network support specialists help businesses maintain and upgrade their networks, conversely, computer user support specialists aid customers in diagnosing and resolving computer problems. With a projected increase between 2019 and 2029 these careers look like they may have a bright future.

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