

Good at maths? Then IT is the career to follow

The skills shortage in IT is so bad that SA has to import talent

WORKPLACE STAFF

THE dismaying 2009 matric results and the low number of students qualifying in maths can only exacerbate the shortage of information technology (IT) skills facing the corporate sector.

The 2009 matric pass rate showed a drop to 60.7%. Of those who wrote mathematics, one of the "gateway subjects" to a career, only 45.9% achieved more than 40%.

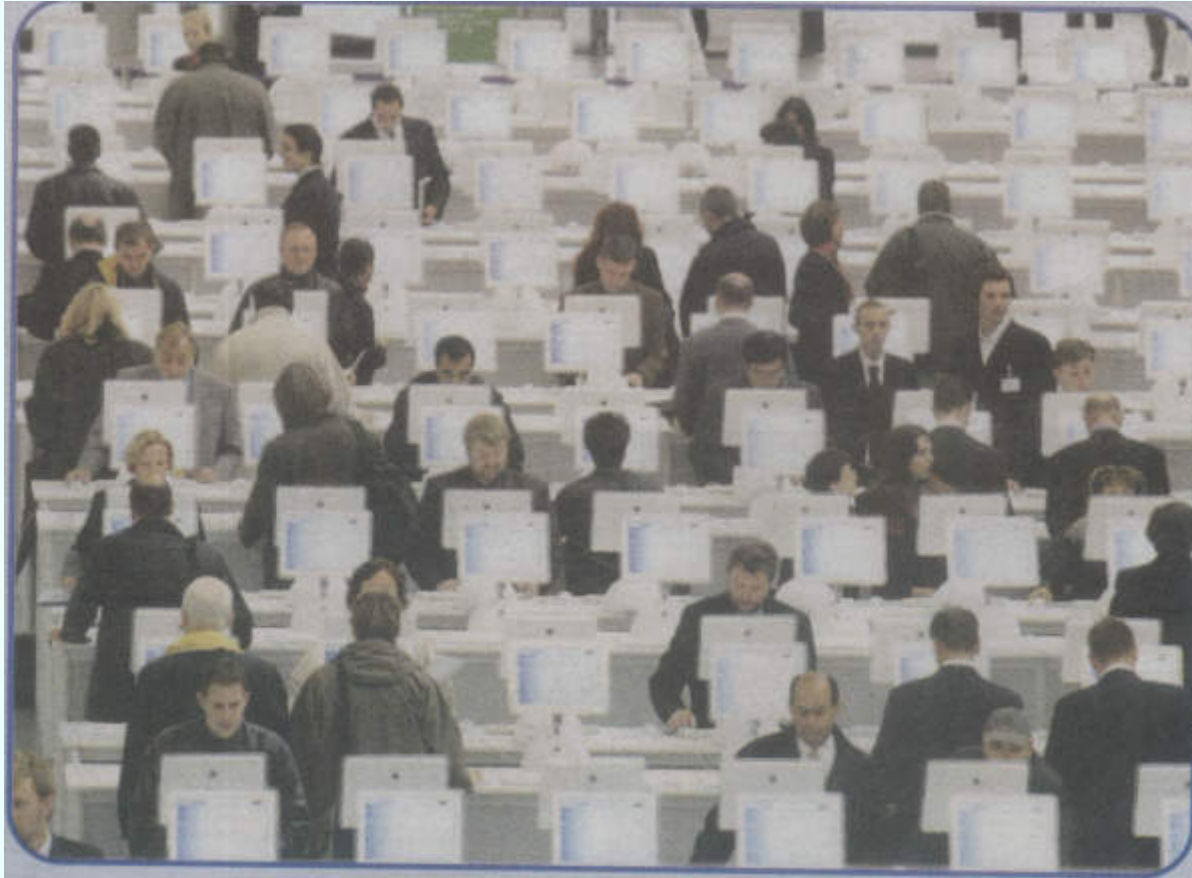
"With the official unemployment rate at 24.5%, according to Statistics SA, many school leavers are going to battle to find jobs," says Sandra Burmeister, CEO of the Landelahn Recruitment Group.

"However, if you are one of the few who achieved a good maths mark, information technology could be the career for you, since the sector is facing a dire shortage of skills, and is currently importing talent from countries such as India.

"Computer literacy along with data input or call-centre training will give you access to the workplace. Acquiring basic functional skills, such as general secretarial or administrative skills can also be a good starting point.

"Courses for basic functional skills are usually shorter and cheaper than university programmes, and they will make you marketable as a candidate. Be sure you go to an accredited institution," says Burmeister.

IT is a good subject because it opens up career opportunities.



If you did well in maths in matric there are jobs out there for you

And it isn't always necessary to approach companies with a formidable list of qualifications, since most IT companies put an emphasis on on-the-job training and mentorship, as well as on short courses and vendor certification.

"Bear in mind that it's not only IT companies that are looking for IT skills," says Burmeister. "IT is

a business enabler, so these skills are in demand everywhere, particularly in the financial sector."

Broadly speaking, IT falls into three areas: operations, development and strategy.

Operations provides a good starting point when embarking on a career in IT. Certifications (A+, N+) will stand you in good

stead, as will an understanding of the ITIL and Cobit frameworks. This could be the entry point for jobs such as desktop support, security and network administration.

For systems development you would need programming languages (Java, C+), database management and probably a BCom in knowledge management

or informatics. This could set you up for a career as a developer, business analyst, database administrator or systems architect.

To manage IT at a strategic level, you would need hands-on working experience in a range of areas such as project management, systems architecture and business intelligence, as well as a thorough understanding of ITIL and Cobit frameworks, possibly supported by a MBA.

These would provide access to a career in disaster recovery, business architecture and risk management, and pave the way to a chief information officer (CIO) position.

"The CIO role is changing from one of technology custodian to business leader," says Burmeister.

"CIOs are increasingly expected to focus on their role of deploying technology as a business enabler, rather than just a back-office administration system.

"Because of the critical and growing role of IT in business, we are today seeing some CIOs moving up to take the top CEO spot, formerly the territory mainly of those who had risen up through the accounting ranks.

"Whether you are just starting out, or progressing up the career ladder, it's critical that you take responsibility for your own career development. Your company will always develop your skills within relevance to its own business.

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