AMAZON, GOOGLE POISED FOR RACE TO HIRE HIGH-TECH TALENT

In the fight for tech talent, Amazon seeks more engineers who know Java, while Google is going after Python users

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Amazon.com Inc. and Alphabet Inc.'s Google are planning to recruit thousands of employees in New York City, pitting the two behemoths against one another and other businesses for already-scarce talent in the area.

Amazon will bring more than 25,000 jobs to New York and another 25,000 to Northern Virginia, it announced Tuesday. Google, meanwhile, plans to double its workforce in New York City to more than 14,000 workers over the next ten years, its chief financial officer said Monday at The Wall Street Journal's WSJ Tech D.Live conference.

The competition for talent will be stiff, recruiters say. But the two companies each have some distinct requirements that set them apart from other employers—and from each other, according to an analysis that labor-analytics firm Burning Glass Technologies conducted for the Journal. For example, the companies favor different coding languages and technical approaches for software projects.

Amazon declined to comment on its specific hiring plans in New York. A Google spokesperson didn't respond to requests for comment.

Burning Glass analyzed jobs each company posted over the past 12 months. Of the more than 42,000 jobs Amazon listed, the highest concentration was in three occupations—software-development engineers, software-development managers and so-called solutions architects. Among the 14,000 jobs Google posted over the same period, the three most in-demand roles were for software development engineers, program managers and marketing managers.

Amazon wants more software engineers who are well-versed in the coding languages Microsoft C# and Java. It also is seeking pros who have experience using a technical approach called object-oriented analysis and design and—not surprisingly—Amazon Web Services, the company's unit that hosts other firms' data in the cloud.

Google, on the other hand, wants more people with Linux and JavaScript knowledge. Both companies covet employees skilled in the programming language Python, which is often used for big-data projects. But 62 percent of Google's job postings for software engineers ask for that skill, compared with 36 percent for Amazon. Nationally, only 19 percent of employers' job ads ask for Python.

More than a fifth of Amazon and Google software engineer job postings sought machine-learning skills, compared with less than 3 percent nationally. And 63 percent of both firms' ads sought engineers who know the C++ language, often used for building applications and operating systems, compared with 13 percent nationwide.

Amazon originally said it would locate a second headquarters in a single location for 50,000 workers. But the company now plans to split its second hub between New York City and a Northern Virginia suburb of Washington, D.C., to ensure it has the best access to technology talent across multiple regions.

"These two locations will allow us to attract world-class talent that will help us to continue inventing for customers for years to come," Amazon's founder and chief executive Jeff Bezos said in a statement.

Amazon's New York office will be in the Queens neighborhood of Long Island City. In Virginia, it chose the Crystal City area of Arlington, just outside Washington, D.C. Burning Glass found that these metro areas have an above-average share of workers who are software developers. By that measure, the nation's capital has an edge, most likely because of the many military and government contractors in the region.

But New York is likely to have a higher number of prospective hires, Burning Glass found, using total jobs postings for software engineers in the city as a proxy. Only the Bay Area beats New York in terms of numbers of software engineers, the analysis found.

Expanding in New York suggests Amazon and Google are more concerned about having access to thousands of potential employees rather than fostering an urban tech scene that might be more important to newer, smaller companies, said Tom Stringer, head of the site selection and business incentives practice at consulting firm BDO USA.

Smaller cities such as Austin, TX, have been successful in creating a tech culture that entrepreneurs gravitate toward, he said. In those places, younger companies can make business connections at cafés, the gym or a local university. "It's really the only way these smaller companies can compete for talent," he said.

"With bigger companies, it's about growing to scale," he said. "The attraction to New York is the volume of people with diverse skill sets."

Even so, the companies may need to lure workers to New York City if they find their reputations and high salaries aren't enough to attract those already living there. Convincing people to move for a job is challenging, and getting experienced workers, particularly midcareer professionals with families, to give New York City a try might be tough.

"People don't like to relocate. They live in a place for a reason," said Bhushan Sethi, workforce strategy leader at PricewaterhouseCoopers. "New York City is a wonderful place, but the infrastructure, housing, and cost isn't for everyone."