

27 TIPS TO Getting Started IN IT

We all have a friend or two making a killing in IT. How many friends have you caught up with on Facebook with big houses and nice cars thanks to their Network and Security Admin jobs?

Have you ever thought you could have a career like that, if you just knew where to start? If you have, then PrepLogic's 27 Tips to Getting Started in IT is for you. We've put together a really useful list of 27 things you can do to get started in IT.

1. Determine Your Personal Interests

You want to be happy in your career, right? There are many specialties to choose from in IT. Which one would suit you? Figure out your own interests first, and then work towards fulfilling those interests professionally.

2. Set a Career Goal

Once you know what you want, consider how you'd like to achieve it. Do you have an interest in management, or would you prefer to work in the field? Perhaps you'd like to be an entrepreneur or a freelance technician. Determine an "end game" for your career, and develop a strategy to hit that goal.

3. Get Involved in the Web Community

Forums, blogs and social networking sites are a great way to find out about IT firsthand. You can soak in a lot of information from articles and message boards on sites like **Slashdot**, **Computerworld**, **Sadikhov**, **Itnews**, and **Infoworld**. These sites can provide you with info about your career, or give you new ideas about potential opportunities.

4. Target Entry Level Jobs

Before you can work your way up, you have to know where to start. There are many names for entry-level positions in IT, but here are some of the most common:

- Desktop Support Technician
- IT Technician
- In-store technician
- At-home technician
- End User Support Technician
- Help Desk

When you're starting out, expect to see the terms technician, support and help a lot, because these are the roles you will fill. By knowing the entry-level positions, you'll know what the requirements you'll need to meet are.

5. Learn Stuff!

The most important element of an IT career is having the skill to perform your job. Those skills are learned through experience and training. For most people, training comes first. You'll want to undergo a training program that teaches you the skills that you'll need for the entry level positions you want. Some of the most important skills you'll need to learn include:

- Hardware and Software
- Networking
- Routing and Switching

6. Find a Training Source and Stick to it

Learning new skills can be a chore for many IT beginners. We suggest making the learning process as simple and uncomplicated as possible. One way to do that is to find a source for training, and then stick to it. Too often, beginning IT techs will make matters difficult by going on a search for training every time a new skill must be learned. A better idea is to find a reputable, reliable source for training and hit them up when it's time to start a new program.

7. Build a Foundation of Skills in Hardware and Software

When you're getting started, we recommend building a foundation of entry-level skills that will be applicable to many jobs. Having a strong command and understanding of contemporary hardware and software is essential. But what skills do you need? A great resource is the Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA). You can use the requirements for their A+ certifications as a checklist for the hardware and software skills you need. Some of them include:

- CPUs/Processors
- ROM and RAM
- Drives/System Devices
- Power Supply
- Operating Systems
- Security
- Troubleshooting

8. Build a Foundation of Skills in Networking

Another commonly required talent is networking. In any size organization, the transfer of information between users and systems is crucial. There's always a demand for a skilled tactician who can offer reliable and effective networking skills. According to CompTIA's requirements for the Network+ certification, here are some of the basics you must know:

- Topologies
- OSI Model
- Ethernet Basics
- TCP/IP
- IP Addressing
- DHCP
- Encryption/Authentication
- Wireless
- Remote Connections

9. Build a Foundation of Skills in Routing/Switching

Connecting your network to the outside world is just as important as internal networking; maybe more so. To get your start in IT, have a plan in place to acquire skills in routing, switching and other external networking concepts. Cisco offers the CCNA (Cisco Certified Network Associate) certification to validate your skills in this area. Training programs for the CCNA include vital concepts you need to know, including:

- WAN Concepts/Configuration
- Shared Networking
- IP Routing Concepts
- Static IP Routing/Dynamic Routing
- LAN Devices
- Ethernet Switch Configuration
- Router Security
- Network Address Translation
- Virtual Private Networks

10. Mix the Right Formula of Education, Experience and Credentials

To be an attractive candidate for most IT positions, you must possess the right mix of education, experience and credentials. Fall short in any of those areas, and you're less likely to get a job. Few companies want to hire academic-only candidates with no real world experience or IT certifications. Likewise, a technician with years of experience who hasn't bothered to acquire any professional certifications will have more career trouble than one who is certified.

At this point in your career, you can compensate for your lack of experience with IT certifications. Certifications show more relevance and timeliness than most academic IT training and they illustrate your commitment to your profession. They also show that you possess the skills that your potential employer wants.

11. Build Your Online Presence Carefully

Using resources like LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter to get ahead professionally is a smart idea. But there still isn't a lot of research on the long term results of online social and professional networking. Be cautious when using these resources. Don't let them backfire on you. Make sure you're discreet about things you want to keep personal and don't let info that can harm you become public. Plus, we recommend limiting your accounts. Choose one service and focus your attention on it, rather than trying to maintain multiple accounts. An out of date profile can be just as damaging as an embarrassing party photo.

12. Never Be Finished with Your Education

Having multiple certifications is key in being valuable to employers, but having the latest and most-up-to-date certifications is just as important. This is a dynamic and constantly changing field. To be successful in IT, you need to know the cutting edge technologies. Continuing to learn and expand your resume not only makes you marketable when searching for a job, but staying current makes you more capable and valuable to your employer.

13. Create a Resume, Keep it Updated

The key to an effective resume is to meet your needs by meeting your employer's needs. When a potential employer first looks at your resume it has to show who you are and what you can do quickly. They're looking at hundreds (maybe thousands of resumes), and the first step is to weed out the bad ones. A resume that's clear, concise and up to date allows your employer to see your experience/credentials at first glance. That makes the employer's job easier, and makes it more likely you make the cut for the next round.

14. Create Your Own Network, Gain Referrals

They say the trick to getting ahead in the business world isn't what you know, it's who you know. Well, that's not entirely true. In this field, you need to know your stuff. But knowing the right people can help you get your foot in the door, or get your resume moved to the top of the pile.

Build relationships with everyone you meet, whether in a business or social setting. Attend trade shows, strike up conversations at parties, and don't be afraid to ask friends to introduce you to people who might be helpful. Get your name out there any way you can.

15. Chart a Course of Achievements

As you're starting out on your career path, you're going to need a game plan. Once you've determined your ultimate goal, set shorter-term checkpoints along the way. Your starting target might be to get your first certifications, and your second might be to find that entry-level job. Breaking your journey down into smaller chunks not only makes your goal seem less overwhelming, but it also serves as a roadmap to keep you on track as you progress.

16. Get Access to Technology

Hands-on training is essential to your education. To reinforce and truly make sense of everything you learn, it's important to have access to the technology you'll be learning about in order to practice and become more comfortable with your new skills. For example, computers with various operating systems would be useful in studying for your A+ certification, and a Cisco router or switch would be helpful in preparing for your CCNA.

17. Make the Most Out of the Least - Find Technology Cheap

While getting access to the technology you'll be using is important, you don't have to spend a fortune to do so. Older PCs can be picked up for a bargain at garage sales and flea markets. Check out online marketplaces such as eBay and Craigslist for good deals on all sorts of used equipment, from computers to routers to servers.

18. Get Professional Career Advice

Many colleges and universities offer career counseling to their students. If you're not a student, there are still avenues available for you. Professional career development counselors specialize in helping others find and advance their jobs. Check your phone book or local job fairs for listings of career counselors in your area. The National Career Development Association (ncda.org), whose members hold master's degrees in counseling or related fields, offers a list of local accredited counselors who can help you along your path.

19. Think One Step Ahead

Always be preparing to take the next step. Plan ahead, and take your future goals into consideration. Get the training that will help you now, as well as help take you to the next level in your career aspirations. Keep your eyes out for opportunities that will help you progress to where you want to be in the future.

20. Make Vertical Moves

Similarly, make sure the moves you make are actually productive. Whether it's switching employers or moving to a new department within the same company, your goal is to climb the career ladder, not to move horizontally and stay on the same level. Don't waste time and energy on a move that isn't a step up.

21. Get an Internship

Sometimes it feels like a catch-22: it's hard to find a job without experience, but how are you supposed to get experience without a job? The answer may lie in an internship. While they're generally unpaid, companies are often willing to take on inexperienced workers in exchange for hands-on experience and, hopefully, job recommendations later on. School career counselors are often able to help find internships for students, and job hunting sites like **Monster** and **CareerBuilder**, as well as **Craigslist**, have an option to search for internships.

22. Join a Professional Society

A professional society provides you with built-in networking opportunities. Groups like the Association of Information Technology Professionals (AITP) and the American Society for Information Science & Technology (ASIS&T) have chapters across the United States, including student-specific chapters at many universities. Professional societies generally hold regular chapter meetings, which are a great place to get tips and advice, find out about the latest trends and help grow your personal and professional network.

23. Read Job Listings and Postings for Ideas - Give Them What They Ask For

You know you need education and training to get a good career in IT. But what certifications should you get as you prepare for your job hunt? Check the job listings. If you notice a trend, then you know where to begin. Are there more job openings for MCSEs? Do more employers in your area want someone with their CCNA certification? Employers are telling you what they want through their job postings. Listen to what they're asking for and deliver it.

24. Improve Your Interview Skills

When it comes to interviews, practice makes perfect. Have a friend do a mock-interview with you. Not only will the practice make you feel more comfortable, but with help you'll be able to target areas that need work.

A web search can provide you with lists of commonly asked interview questions. Plus, don't forget to learn all you can about the company you're interviewing with, and be prepared with your own questions.

25. Improve Your Soft Skills

People skills are an essential part of your job. It goes without saying that you need working knowledge of technology for a successful career in IT. After all, the basic role of your job will be working with hardware and software. However, it's important to remember that a good deal of your duties will involve working with other people, whether they're other IT professionals, customers or co-workers in other departments. In fact, even vendors realize the importance of these soft skills. CompTIA has recently included them in the domain of their A+ certification.

26. Find a Mentor

One of the best ways to gain experience and get your feet wet in the IT field is by working with someone who has already been there. Many large companies offer formal mentoring programs in which an entry-level worker is paired with an industry veteran to teach them the ropes. But if you're still looking for that first job, or your company doesn't offer such a program, there are other ways of finding mentors. Keep in touch with former bosses or supervisors from internships with whom you have built a relationship. Professional societies also offer an opportunity to meet more experienced workers and cultivate a mentor-mentee relationship.

27. Get Certified

Certifications are an essential key to getting work in the IT field. Not only do they compensate for lack of working experience, but they prove to hiring managers that you're skilled in the areas they're looking for. Training for certifications can be done on your own time, and can be done in months or even weeks instead of the years you would spend in a traditional classroom setting. An IT certification may look like a simple piece of paper, but in reality it can be the key that opens the door to your new career.

MORE HELP FOR YOUR CAREER

You probably have more questions about your own career. Give PrepLogic a call for the answers. Our training specialists have helped thousands of people become well-paid, successful IT professionals and we can help you too. Call PrepLogic at 1-800-418-6789 today for more information about training, certifications, careers and special offers. Thanks for reading our **27 Tips to Getting Started in IT**

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