



Upwork's In-Demand Skills 2026: Demand for Top AI Skills More Than Doubles as AI Is Embedded Into Everyday Work

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Hiring data shows AI becoming part of everyday work, while demand for human expertise remains strong

PALO ALTO, Calif., Feb. 04, 2026 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- [Upwork Inc.](#) (Nasdaq: UPWK), the world's human and AI-powered work marketplace, today released its annual [In-Demand Skills report](#), finding that as demand for top AI-enabled skills more than doubled year-over-year, hiring for human expertise remains strong across work categories.

Now in its sixth year, the report finds that demand for the most in-demand skills on the Upwork Marketplace has remained consistently strong year over year, even in categories often assumed to be most vulnerable to automation, including coding, creative, marketing, and customer support. At the same time, the top skills explicitly tied to applying AI within existing roles grew 109% year over year. Growth is showing up across workflows, from AI video generation and editing (+329%) and AI integration (+178%), to AI data annotation and labeling (+154%) and AI chatbot development (+71%).

"Our [Human+Agent Productivity Index](#) found that human-AI collaboration boosts project completion by up to 70%, even on simple tasks," said Dr. Teng Liu, economist at Upwork. "That's exactly what we are seeing in our latest hiring data too: AI isn't replacing people; it's sharpening where human expertise matters most, with businesses continuing to invest in creativity, judgment, and problem-solving alongside AI."

Key findings from the report include:

- **Demand for in-demand skills remains stable.** The most sought-after skills including full stack development, general virtual assistance, data analytics, and graphic design on the Upwork Marketplace, have remained consistently strong year over year, signaling that even as AI tools expand, businesses continue to hire human talent at scale.
- **Growth is concentrated in applying AI within existing work.** Skills that explicitly reference AI grew 109% year over year. Demand is surging across familiar creative and technical workflows, including AI video generation and editing (+329%), AI integration (+178%), and AI image generation and editing (+95%), alongside rising need for specialist work like data annotation and labeling (+154%) and AI chatbot development (+71%). Together, this shows businesses are embedding AI into established disciplines while still relying on skilled professionals for domain expertise.
- **Human capabilities continue to command a premium.** Nearly half of business leaders say they would pay a premium to work with independent talent who are creative and innovative, highlighting the continued importance of human expertise alongside AI fluency.¹
- **AI is reshaping the type of talent companies need.** 77% of business leaders say AI is increasing their need for specialized, fractional talent rather than traditional full-time roles.²

"What this signals is a redefinition of professional advantage," said Dr. Gabby Burlacu, senior research manager at Upwork. "Our data shows rapidly growing demand for people who merge technical skill sets with more foundational ones. Professionals who can direct and refine AI outputs to enhance their work will stand out and find success."

Here are the most in-demand skills across a subset of key categories of work on the Upwork Marketplace. Read the full report for a more comprehensive list: <http://www.upwork.com/research/in-demand-skills-2026>

Top 3 Fastest-Growing Skills by Category for 2026:

Coding & Web Development

1. AI Integration (+178%)
2. AI Chatbot Development (+71%)
3. Firmware Development (+14%)

Customer Service & Admin Support

1. Ecommerce Management (+130%)
2. Medical Virtual Assistance (+44%)
3. Supply Chain & Logistics Project Management (+37%)

Data Science & Analytics

1. AI Data Annotation & Labeling (+154%)
2. Knowledge Representation (+31%)

3. Generative AI Modeling (+21%)

Design & Creative

1. AI Video Generation & Editing (+329%)
2. AI Image Generation & Editing (+95%)
3. Logo Design (+44%)

Sales & Marketing

1. Social Media Strategy (+36%)
2. Display Advertising (+26%)
3. Brand Strategy (+26%)

Top 10 Most In-Demand Skills by Category for 2026:

Coding & Web Development

1. Full Stack Development
2. Web Design
3. Front-End Development
4. Mobile App Development
5. Back-End Development
6. Ecommerce Website Development
7. UX/UI Design
8. Scripting & Automation
9. Manual Testing
10. CMS Development

Customer Service & Admin Support

1. General Virtual Assistance
2. Data Entry
3. Digital Project Management
4. General Research Services
5. Executive Virtual Assistance
6. Market Research
7. Medical Virtual Assistance
8. Ecommerce Management
9. Other Virtual Assistance
10. Manual Transcription

Data Science & Analytics

1. Data Analytics
2. Data Extraction
3. Machine Learning
4. Data Visualization
5. Data Mining
6. Data Processing
7. Data Engineering
8. AI Data Annotation & Labeling
9. Deep Learning
10. Experimentation & Testing

Design & Creative

1. Graphic Design
2. Video Editing
3. Presentation Design
4. Video Production
5. Image Editing
6. Product & Industrial Design
7. 3D Animation

8. Logo Design
9. Illustration
10. Brand Identity Design

Sales & Marketing

1. Social Media Marketing
2. SEO
3. Sales & Business Development
4. Lead Generation
5. Search Engine Marketing
6. Marketing Strategy
7. Email Marketing
8. Marketing Automation
9. Telemarketing
10. Campaign Management

Methodology

o Skills data was sourced from the Upwork Marketplace and is based on freelancer earnings across six work categories from January 1, 2025, to December 31, 2025, with demand originating in the United States. To ensure a strong signal of demand, only completed jobs are analyzed. Top skills represent the fastest growing skills within the categories presented, and each skill had a minimum of \$100,000 aggregate freelancer earnings in that category during the period. Year-over-year growth was estimated by comparing freelancer earnings in 2025 to freelancer earnings over the same period in 2024. To compare the growth of AI and non-AI skills, skills that explicitly reference AI were grouped together and analyzed for year-over-year growth.

About Upwork Inc.

Upwork Inc.'s (Nasdaq: UPWK) family of companies connects businesses with global, AI-enabled talent across every contingent work type including freelance, fractional, and payrolled. This portfolio includes the Upwork Marketplace, which connects businesses with on-demand access to highly skilled talent across the globe, and Lifted, which provides a purpose-built solution for enterprise organizations to source, contract, manage, and pay talent across the full spectrum of contingent work. From Fortune 100 enterprises to entrepreneurs, businesses rely on Upwork Inc. to find and hire expert talent, leverage AI-powered work solutions, and drive business transformation. With access to professionals spanning more than 10,000 skills across AI & machine learning, software development, sales & marketing, customer support, finance & accounting, and more, the Upwork family of companies enables businesses of all sizes to scale, innovate, and transform their workforces for the age of AI and beyond.

Since its founding, Upwork Inc. has facilitated more than \$30 billion in total transactions and services as it fulfills its purpose to create opportunity in every era of work. Learn more about the Upwork Marketplace at upwork.com and follow on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [TikTok](#), and [X](#); and learn more about Lifted at go-lifted.com and follow on [LinkedIn](#).

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¹ Upwork Research Institute Business Leader Pulse Survey, December 2025.

² Upwork survey of 349 business leaders, conducted October 2025.