

# letter to editor Rik Farrow

Hey Rik,

I was wondering if you could help me with some work advice. I am a software engineer for a major financial firm based in NYC. As you know, there was a huge jump in off-shoring development to India and other countries. I hear some really bad forecasts as far as software development in the US is concerned. I love the whole process of developing software. I love creating something from nothing. It's just a grown-up's version of building with Lego blocks which I *loved* to do as a kid.

What do you think will happen with the US software industry? What can I do to circumvent negative results? What would be a good graduate degree to pursue?

Thanks,

Isaac  
*compuder@aol.com*

*Rik responds:*

Hi Isaac:

What I have seen in the US is that a lot of the most senior people have lost their jobs, and many have managed to get hired at about half of what they were making before.

In other words, having an advanced degree is not something that will help you in today's market—if anything, it will hurt you.

That is not to say that things will not change in the future. There is always a place for people who become experts in niche areas. If you have a passion for a particular technology niche, such as advanced networking, databases, data “farming,” to name a few, then getting an advanced degree that focused on that niche would be a good step for the future of your career.

As for the US programmer market, the US, and the world, is currently in a slump for two reasons. First, the dot-bomb has shifted people's perceptions of technologists from gods to dogs, and we are suffering because of that. Over time, the pendulum will swing back—our society cannot function without its computers, and the software they use is more complex and demanding than ever.

The second is the outsourcing of computer jobs (not just programming, but help desk and system/network management). Modern communications means that the people doing this work can be located anywhere. The downside of this is that real communication between software developers and program managers will get even worse (it has never been very good). Soon enough, people will realize that they get what they pay for—cut-rate prices for cut-rate programming. And, on top of that, they spend an enormous amount of money that goes into the pockets of middlemen who do nothing to increase the quality of the end product.

That's what I currently think.

Regards,

Rik

[Editor's note: Rik's assessment is defensible. Do you have a different one? Please send it to *login@usenix.org*.—RK]