Uncovering young people's hidden digital skills

Sample application and interview questions

In our recent survey of 4,000 young people, we found that participants had a wide range of surprising and highly transferrable digital skills. From designing new apps and setting up online stores to creating viral videos and award winning podcasts, the wealth of digital skills and experience is impressive, however these are not always the sorts of things that employers find out about during a traditional recruitment process using standard application and interview questions.

So how can you uncover these digital skills in your young applicants?

Here's a list of questions you can include in your application forms and interviews which can help you to uncover the hidden digital skills your young applicants might have, and some real examples from our survey of some of the amazing digital skills on offer.

The skills you're looking for	What our survey respondents told us
Communications skills	
Q: Have you ever created your own blog, Vlog (video blog) or podcast?	
Thanks to social media and a constantly increasing range of online content platforms, many young people are producing their own engaging content using many different types of media. Bloggers, podcasters and video makers could be great candidates for your communications and marketing positions, and their work is readily available online for you to have a look at.	*"I'm a three time award nominated podcaster."* *"I've achieved 150,000 reads of one of my books online."*
Marketing skills	
Q: What social media platforms do you use? How do you make your content attractive and interesting to attract new followers and subscribers?	
The responses from our Youth Survey showed that young people often have thousands of followers on social media. A young person who has perfected their 'personal brand' on social media may be the best person to help grow the online brand of your business.	*"My YouTube channel has now grown to over 9300 subscribers, and I'm looking forward to seeing it grow even further and start earning me money."*

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Commercial awareness and sales skills

Q: Have you ever sold anything online?

A surprising number of young people sell things online and even set up their own online shops, demonstrating an entrepreneurial spirit and commercial awareness. A good knowledge of online marketplaces could be useful to many small businesses as more transactions move online.

"I've set up my own online shop."

"I own my own online business."

"I'm a top Amazon reviewer."

Organisation and planning skills

Q: Have you ever organised an event or activity online? How did you plan the logistics?

From Facebook events to websites such as Eventbrite and Meetup, young people are used to bringing people together using online tools. If your organisation runs events or needs people who are good at planning logistics, young people often have experience of making complex plans online.

"I'm an event organiser and I had a meetup with 500 Tumblr users."

"I organised and took part in back-packing around Europe."

Research skills

Q: When you research an issue or prepare for something online, what resources do you use? Where would you start?

Asking this question will reveal the thought process that young people go through when researching something, and the internet is increasingly the place that they will start. Navigating the infinite amount of information available on the internet is a skill in itself, and many young people are increasing undertaking online learning as well, using online tools as an essential resource for studying.

"I'm a parent so I study online."

"I'm studying digital tech through the Open University."

Niche software skills

Q: What software and apps do you like to use, and what do you use them for? How did you learn to use them? Was it hard?

A surprising amount of young people in our survey had taught themselves how to use many different types of software. By asking this question, you may be surprised by the extent and flexibility of their digital skills and how these can easily be applied to your company and add value to a job. Adding a question to your application form on which software young people have taught themselves to use is a great way to uncover skills.

"I taught myself how to use video and photo editing software."

"I achieved the highest scores in Microsoft Certification throughout the country."

"I've learnt to create models with software like Maya, 3DS Max and Unreal Engine."

Computing, programming and design skills

Q: Have you ever designed an app, a piece of software or a device?

In addition to learning to use existing software and devices, some young people have a very impressive set of skills for designing and creating new resources, and are often self-taught. From designing apps, games and coding to building computers and robotics, young people are increasingly taking the lead in designing new tech to solve problems and improve what's already on offer.

"A game that I wrote won second in a competition."

"I built my own PC."

"I wrote my own app and got it published."

Looking to find the unexpected?

Q: What achievements are you most proud of?

All the examples above were answers to the question in our survey, 'What are you most proud of?' – clearly, young people are using their digital skills to achieve amazing things and are very important to them. Asking this question at interview, even if the role isn't specifically IT-based, can help to unearth the hidden digital skills that your business needs and other skills that young people can bring to your business to add value to the day-to-day tasks they will be undertaking.

This resource was also published as a blog on the Future Proof website in April 2017. Read the full article here: *Do outdated interview questions mean you're missing out on the next generation's hidden digital skills?*