

Finding Good Perl Developers

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Why you still can, and how to go about it

It's an often heard lament. "We're switching to Java for new features, because we just can't find good Perl developers any more." Either that or some variant on "Perl's dead, and I don't have time to wait for this Perl 6 thing..."

The thing is? It's not true. There are a heck of a lot of cracking Perl programmers out there: the art is in finding them, and creating a job description that attracts their attention. Perl most emphatically isn't dead, and you don't have to wait for Perl 6 to take advantage of it.

So how come I can't find any?

Any number of reasons. But in general, it boils down to one of two: either you're looking in the wrong place, or you don't know what to ask for to find one.



The first is easy: the good Perl guys can be found in a couple of places: **jobs.perl.org** and your local **Perl Mongers** group.

Let's start with the former: jobs.perl.org. Pretty much, it is what you'd expect from the name: it's a... in fact, it's *the* Perl jobs site. It may not look much, but if you want a Perl programmer, it's the place they'll look.

Next? Your local Perl Mongers group: in a nutshell, it's where the local Perl folks meet, whether physically or virtually, to chat. It's not unlikely, if you already have some good Perl guys, that one or more of them are members already, so ask. If not, try searching on **pm.org** for your nearest group. Odds are, they'll have a contact, a website and maybe a mailing list or two - some (like London.pm) have a jobs list, some don't.

Your first step should be to drop the group's organizer a note saying that you're looking to hire, and asking how they normally handle job adverts. If you have a budget for that kind of things, offer to sponsor one of their meetings, whether room hire or bar tab, and maybe get one of your existing Perl developers to offer a talk on what it is you do.

There's nothing to stop you advertising elsewhere, but, on the whole, these two are where you'll get the good results.

I advertised on jobs.perl.org, and I didn't get anyone!

Say this to a serious Perl programmer, and he'll say "I bet you wrote it 'PERL', didn't you?" See, Perl is not an acronym. It never was, despite the allure of 'Practical Extraction and Reporting Language' and all the other retrofitted inventions. The language is called 'Perl', capital P, small e, r, l.

Calling the language 'PERL' is a sure sign that whoever wrote your job ad isn't a serious Perl programmer, and, more to the point, it sends the message that your company's Perl culture isn't that developed. It sounds like a really trivial thing, but to your target audience it's a warning flag.



Perl's alive!

Here are some developments in Perl over the past few years you should check out

Perl 5.10, 5.12

Bringing Perl up-to-date, and on a regular release schedule

DBIx::Class

Feature-rich ORM

Moose

Perl OO done right

Catalyst

Powerful application framework

Plack

Lightweight web framework

POE

Powerful event handling

So how *should* I write a job ad?

For starters, talk to your developers and their team leads. After all, they know what the job entails, and its people like them you're trying to appeal to.

There are some key terms that you need to be careful using. The acronym "LAMP" gets used a lot in Perl job ads - it stands for 'Linux/Apache/MySQL/Perl'. Be aware that to a Perl programmer it sounds dated - the hidden implication is that your application stack is still stuck in the late '90s, when the term was invented. Now of course, this may be true, but given the choice between that and a job where you get to use the latest Perl features, which would you pick?

Likewise, *please* don't call it 'Perl scripting'. Perl has advanced a long way since the early 90s, and there's a reason this article talks about Perl 'programmers'. The common labels Perl has, of being dead, 'line noise', and a language to write bad programs in, are simply a function of its low barrier to entry. Anyone can write a Perl script, but you're looking for people who can program. That skill is actually language-independent, and the new trends in Perl make it just as viable an application development environment as any other.

Other languages? If you have to mention them, keep them well down the bullet list in the job description. As a community, Perl programmers are a little wary of seeing their

beloved language replaced with Java or Ruby.

On the good side: if your guys are using any of the things in the sidebar on the left, make sure you mention them. Likewise, the term 'modern' or 'enlightened' Perl is another sign that your app stack isn't stuck before the dot com crash - or at least if it is, you're making an effort to catch up.

My guys have never heard of some of these...

Whoops. You really do need some good Perl programmers, then! Check out some of the Perl features and modules Enlightened Perl is promoting, because they can really help you. If you're hiring because you're planning on a rewrite of an existing Perl application, or it needs maintenance, you need decent help. Moreover, if you hire the right people... hey, it's still Perl, and your existing team can learn about the modern features of the language.

What if I'm an agency?

Sad to say, as far as agencies go, a lot of job-seeking programmers don't like them. This isn't exclusive to Perl programmers, not by a long shot. To a programmer, an agency is just an interface layer that hides the company who's hiring from view, and, worse, it's seen as not being a transparent interface, modifying the communication in both directions based on its understanding of the situation. Having said that, of course, agencies are an unavoidable part of the way hiring is done nowadays. The tips above apply just as much to an agency. In fact, doubly so, because, as an agency looking for programmers in Perl, you have to overcome that prejudice.

This sounds like too much trouble.

We'll switch to another language...

Trust me, it isn't. And you don't want to do that. In all seriousness, there are a lot of really good Perl programmers out there. If you take a little time to craft your job advert properly, and look in the right place, they will come. Not only that, they'll come bringing with them the latest exciting Perl technology to revitalize your project. Perl has a developer community: you need to make the same kind of effort to engage with it on its terms, and to sell your development organization to it, that you would any other kind of group, and by doing so you'll reap the reward.



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