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Hottest jobs barricaded by grueling interviews

By MIKE SWIFT
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Maybe you've had the nightmare. You show up late for the job interview, or perhaps you forgot to prepare at all. Then they pop off the kind of question that has you sitting there mute, an intellectual deer in the headlights:

Why are manhole covers round? How would you figure out the number of kilo-watt hours required to boil a container of water? For a random-ordered bucket of numbers 1 through 3,000 with one number missing, how would you detect which number is missing?

For thousands of high-tech job seekers, it's no bad dream. Those questions are actual queries fielded by candidates who recently applied for jobs at Cisco Systems, Google and Facebook, respectively, according to Glassdoor.com, the Sausalito, Calif.-based website that collects feedback on salaries, interviews and company culture from more than 95,000 companies.

In a recently updated analysis on the hiring process at big tech companies, Glassdoor found that while employees at Google and Facebook rate both companies as good places to work - and not just because of the free food - they, along with Yahoo, also had the highest share of job candidates rating the hiring process as negative. Google and Amazon candidates fielded the most knee-buckling interview questions.

"Companies that are growing very, very quickly often have a difficult time controlling the hiring experience," said Robert Hohman, the CEO and founder of Glassdoor. "I think we see that at Google and Facebook in particular. They are growing so fast, and sometimes they have managers who are new to the company culture doing hiring on their behalf, and the experience can sometimes tilt toward the negative."

Glassdoor's data is contributed voluntarily, so it's not a random, scientific survey. But the company's data is equally weighted to candidates who got job offers and those who didn't, and is based on at least 70 ratings for each company.

Candidates at Apple and IBM were the most likely to rate the hiring process as positive, with 60 percent of Apple candidates giving a thumbs-up response, compared to just 32 percent at Facebook, the company with the lowest share of positive ratings and, after Google, the second-highest share of negative ratings.

But, Hohman said, "if you compare this to the company reviews of Facebook (by employees), it is a very highly rated company. Mark Zuckerberg has a 96 percent CEO approval rating. It's one of those things where if you can get in, it's a great place to work, and the same with Google," where CEO Eric Schmidt also has a 96 percent approval rating.

Facebook stands out in two other ways. With about 1,700 employees, it is by far the smallest, and the only privately held, company on the Glassdoor list.

In a prepared statement, Facebook said the company "is working to make the interview process as positive as we can for potential employees," and is "excited about the quality and volume of people who continue to apply to work at Facebook every day." Google did not respond to a request for comment.

Glassdoor launched the interview rating feature last year, in response to the recession. "We went out and talked to job-seekers, and to be honest, they were frightened," Hohman said. "What job-seekers said was the only thing that could help them deal with that situation was information."

The interview process wasn't a breeze at any of the dozen tech companies in the Glassdoor analysis, a group that also includes Hewlett-Packard, Intel, Oracle, Microsoft and Dell. Job candidates at all 12 tech companies rated the

interview experience as more difficult than the average rating for the 17,000 companies for which Glassdoor collects data.

No matter how difficult the interview questions or process might be, there is a silver lining for some tech job-seekers. Demand is intense for software engineers right now, with Google, Facebook and some other companies hiring rapidly, recruiters say.

"For young and ambitious coders now, the question is: Where are you going to go - Google, Apple, Facebook or a start-up?" said Robert Greene, a San Mateo, Calif.-based recruiter who works with Facebook and other companies to place software engineers. "If they are coming from the top schools, and they are really bright, they can pretty much write their own ticket right now."

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

Questions for job applicants at tech companies:

-Apple electrical engineer: "Approximately how many garbage men are there in California?"

-Facebook senior software engineer: "Given an array of integers, find the maximum number that can be reached by summing the best possible consecutive subsequence of the array."

-Yahoo senior product manager: "Estimate the volume of water on the Earth."

-Hewlett-Packard software engineer: "Describe an orange."

-Microsoft senior engineer: "Find the anagrams in a dictionary."

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