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# 2005 TECHNICAL SUPPORT SALARY SURVEY

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PRODUCED BY THE ASSOCIATION OF SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS

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# The 2005 ASP Tech Support Salary Survey

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the ASP's yearly tech support salary survey. During most of this time, long-time readers may have noticed that we've been extremely conservative about making changes to our methodology. The wording of our job descriptions hasn't changed, we've added no new titles, and even the appearance of the questionnaire has been largely frozen (though we have migrated from paper surveys to the Web).

The reason we don't "improve" the survey is simple: Even minor tweaks can have an unpredictable effect on survey results. In fact, we've found that our fixed-baseline survey methodology provides remarkably sensitive *trending data* for the support industry as a whole. We can look back over almost a whole decade and spot patterns of salary gains and losses that reflect true apples-to-apples comparisons, not just random fluctuations from changes in methodology. As a result, the year-to-year comparisons we provide are often more useful to support managers than specific salary numbers. The individual salaries that a company pays tend to reflect local conditions, unique skill requirements, and other variables, but the company's annual budget decisions about *relative* salary adjustments are usually based on trends in the overall market for support jobs.

And this year's trend data is full of gloomy news. For the second consecutive year, almost all the support salaries in our survey universe show no gains at all—in effect, there has been an industry-wide salary freeze. Moreover, this salary freeze seems to have little to do with economic conditions (IT budgets have largely recovered from the 2002-2003 recession) or tight services margins (fee-based support and professional services continue to be more profitable and faster-growing than almost any other source of software company revenues). The pay freeze even seems to have reached top-level executive salaries, which remained flat in 2004 after declining 9.1% in 2003.

This loss of momentum in support salaries is especially painful to see in the managerial, professional, and senior-level jobs that require the most experience and judgment. Clearly, the software industry as a whole will have problems with recruiting and retaining talent if its best support people find themselves in dead-end jobs. Last year we noted that "if the support industry can't afford career and pay growth for its senior people, that's an ominous sign." This year, the signs are even more troubling.

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To help identify benchmarks for support pay, the Association of Support Professionals compiles this annual support compensation survey. In addition to industry-wide compensation statistics (page 3), we offer a look at some of the variables—such as company size, number of support employees, application price, and geography—that have an impact on these general numbers.\* A key part of our survey methodology is a set of standardized job titles and capsule job descriptions that have remained constant for the eight-year history of this survey. Here's how our questionnaire describes the categories we use, along with a few observations about this year's data:

★ **SENIOR SUPPORT EXECUTIVE (vice president or director level)**

*"Coordinates activities and budgets of multiple support groups or sites. Meets regularly with senior corporate management and key customers."*

Fifty-six percent of the companies in this year's survey have *both* a "senior support executive" who coordinates several support groups and at least one "department manager" who oversees an individual support center. Overall pay for senior support executives (median \$100,000) is unchanged from last year. Increasingly, the top support executive has become a key spokesperson for customer relationships, and this role often puts support executive pay on a par with other top executives; currently, a quarter of the senior executives in our sample earn between \$130,000 and \$200,000.

\* One caution: Statistical reliability suffers when there are too few responses in a breakout category. We've indicated the number of responses (the "count") in every segment as a rough guide to the accuracy of each data point.

<b>Tech Support Salaries</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>Senior Support Executive</b>	135	<b>\$130,000</b>	<b>\$85,000</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>
<b>Department Manager</b>	162	<b>\$85,000</b>	<b>\$54,000</b>	<b>\$70,000</b>
<b>Analyst/Project Manager</b>	106	<b>\$73,000</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>	<b>\$60,000</b>
<b>Senior Support Technician</b>	154	<b>\$62,500</b>	<b>\$41,450</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>
Least skilled	89	\$55,000	\$35,000	\$40,000
Most skilled	100	\$74,000	\$45,000	\$60,000
<b>Field Support Technician</b>	68	<b>\$62,000</b>	<b>\$40,000</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>
Least skilled	38	\$54,500	\$35,000	\$40,000
Most skilled	42	\$75,513	\$50,000	\$60,000
<b>Support Technician</b>	150	<b>\$50,000</b>	<b>\$35,000</b>	<b>\$40,000</b>
Least skilled	95	\$40,000	\$30,000	\$33,000
Most skilled	95	\$60,000	\$39,000	\$48,000
<b>Customer Service Rep</b>	82	<b>\$40,000</b>	<b>\$27,750</b>	<b>\$32,000</b>
Least skilled	54	\$35,000	\$25,000	\$28,000
Most skilled	56	\$52,500	\$31,500	\$38,500

Source: 2005 ASP Tech Support Salary Survey. Note: "Count" is the number of responses in each salary category or sub-category. "High" salary is the median for the top 50% of all salaries in each category; "Low" salary is the median for the bottom 50%.

★ **DEPARTMENT MANAGER**

*"Manages day-to-day activity of a single support center staff."*

Most support organizations have at least one inside manager who oversees ongoing operations, including tactical areas such as productivity, recruiting, and customer satisfaction. Usually, support department managers supervise fairly small groups of technicians, and many spend part of their time on the phone during periods of heavy call volume. Department managers also saw zero salary growth last year (\$70,000 median), the third year in a row with no raises.

★ **ANALYST/PROJECT MANAGER**

*"Manages major business activity; usually has no direct reports."*

In addition to department managers, many support organizations have specialists who manage such areas as performance analysis, staff scheduling, Web site implementation, and automation systems. Currently, analysts and project managers earn \$60,000 in median pay—the third consecutive year at that pay level.

★ **SENIOR SUPPORT TECHNICIAN**

*"Answers escalated calls; may function as a group or team leader."*

Most support organizations have developed career paths that reward experience, in-depth product knowledge, certification, or a part-time management and training role. Often, the primary job of the "senior" technician is to provide answers to questions that first-level support reps or outsourcers can't answer. Median pay for senior technicians is now \$50,000, again unchanged over three consecutive years. (Previously, senior technician pay had been rising steadily by 4%-6% per year.) The best-paid 25% senior support technicians earn more than \$62,500; the bottom 25% earn less than \$41,450.

★ **FIELD SUPPORT TECHNICIAN**

*"Provides on-site service, primarily for enterprise products."*

Support for products priced below \$10,000 is typically provided over the telephone, but many high-end software companies also provide on-site services, usually as part of installation or fee-based maintenance plans. In the past, field technicians were the industry's highest paid support reps; in the past few years, however, their salary profile has become more closely aligned with the "senior support technician" category. Pay trends for this relatively small group have been erratic: Field support technicians lost 14% in 2004, gained 27.5% in 2003 and 6.4% in 2002, and lost 3.1% in 2001.

★ **SUPPORT TECHNICIAN**

*"Provides first-level solutions, primarily over the phone."*

At most software companies, the task of handling unescalated telephone calls is an entry-level job with relatively high turnover. Although pay levels have been flat for the past two years (\$40,000 median), there has been a steady year-to-year trend (roughly 3%-5% per year) toward higher pay since 1998. Only 25% of support technicians earn more than \$50,000, but experienced techs often move up to senior support jobs and even become analysts and managers.

★ **CUSTOMER SERVICE REP**

*"Answers routine service questions; routes calls to technicians."*

Customer service reps typically handle first-level customer contacts that don't require diagnostic skills or training, such as collecting background information and filling orders. Many companies now pay customer service reps on an hourly basis; the current industry median salary, \$32,000, is equal to a little more than \$15.00/hour.

**VARIABLES: REVENUES, ORGANIZATION SIZE, PRODUCT PRICE, LOCATION**

- **Annual revenues:** Although company size is not usually the best yardstick to use in setting support salaries, our data shows at least some correlation between annual revenues and median pay for most of our categories. For executives, managers, and higher-skilled employees, salaries generally show major gains above \$10 million in revenues. For less-skilled jobs, however, the differences tend to be more modest:

		<b>Annual Company Revenues</b>			
		<b>&lt;\$1 MM</b>	<b>\$1-\$10 MM</b>	<b>\$10-\$99 MM</b>	<b>\$100+ MM</b>
Senior Support Executive	*		\$90,000	\$109,000	\$122,000
Count:		6	50	45	34
Department Manager	*		\$65,000	\$75,000	\$75,000
Count:		9	64	51	32
Analyst/Project Manager	*		\$60,000	\$65,000	\$70,000
Count:		9	45	25	21
Senior Support Technician	*		\$48,000	\$55,000	\$54,000
Count:		6	58	55	28
Field Support Technician	*		\$49,000	\$60,000	\$50,000
Count:		1	34	17	13
Support Technician	*		\$39,675	\$40,000	\$42,500
Count:		6	60	52	24
Customer Service Rep	*		\$31,500	\$30,000	\$33,000
Count:		2	36	24	16

Salaries are medians. "Count" is the number of responses in each salary category or sub-category. Asterisk (\*) indicates insufficient data (fewer than 10 responses).

- **Organization size:** A more important variable for support compensation is the size of a firm's support department. Large support organizations (those with 30 or more employees) pay higher salaries in higher-skilled categories, compared to their mid-sized (10-29 employees) and small (1-9 employees) counterparts. For lower-skilled support technicians and customer service reps, however, the pay differential between large and small support organizations is relatively insignificant. In a few cases, median pay even declines slightly as groups get bigger.

This pay pattern almost certainly is the result of greater job specialization in larger organizations. Support reps in small groups tend to handle a variety of tasks, skilled and unskilled, so their pay puts a kind of average value on their mix of tasks. Large groups are more likely to pay for specific job roles—more for advanced skills and less for entry-level skills.

	Support Organization Size (employees)		
	1 - 9	10 - 29	30+
Senior Support Executive	\$90,000	\$96,500	\$127,500
Count:	33	56	46
Department Manager	\$65,000	\$65,000	\$77,500
Count:	48	63	50
Analyst/Project Manager	\$55,000	\$58,000	\$67,000
Count:	27	40	39
Senior Support Technician	\$50,000	\$48,500	\$54,100
Count:	46	60	47
Field Support Technician	\$50,000	\$47,000	\$55,000
Count:	23	26	19
Support Technician	\$40,000	\$39,175	\$41,000
Count:	45	62	42
Customer Service Rep	\$30,000	\$31,000	\$32,500
Count:	23	33	26

Salaries are medians. "Count" is the number of responses in each salary category or sub-category.

- **Product price:** Companies that sell high-end software (priced above \$10,000) usually provide support as part of maintenance contracts and other fee-based programs, so they tend to recruit better-paid support technicians and even pay a small premium for customer service reps:

	Price of Company's Best-Selling Product		
	<\$999	\$1,000-\$9,995	\$10,000+
Senior Support Executive	\$112,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
Count:	20	22	71
Department Manager	\$65,000	\$61,500	\$74,250
Count:	31	30	76
Analyst/Project Manager	\$52,000	\$56,000	\$65,000
Count:	21	20	51
Senior Support Technician	\$45,000	\$48,000	\$52,500
Count:	25	32	73
Field Support Technician	*	\$47,500	\$50,000
Count:	3	14	37
Support Technician	\$35,000	\$38,750	\$40,000
Count:	25	34	70
Customer Service Rep	\$28,000	\$32,000	\$33,000
Count:	14	15	39

Salaries are medians. "Count" is the number of responses in each salary category or sub-category. Asterisk (\*) indicates insufficient data (fewer than 10 responses)

- **Location:** Support pay is also affected by local cost-of-living differences, especially between rural and metro areas. Two states with high concentrations of technology companies—California and Massachusetts—have labor costs that are typically 15%-25% higher than national averages:

	<b>Location of Primary Support Center</b>	
	<b>Calif.</b>	<b>Mass.</b>
Senior Support Executive	\$130,000	\$125,000
Count:	19	19
Department Manager	\$80,750	\$82,000
Count:	20	19
Analyst/Project Manager	\$70,000	\$77,500
Count:	16	12
Senior Support Technician	\$57,500	\$58,500
Count:	20	22
Field Support Technician	*	*
Count:	6	9
Support Technician	\$47,500	\$43,000
Count:	18	21
Customer Service Rep	*	\$37,500
Count:	9	12

Salaries are medians. "Count" is the number of responses in each salary category or sub-category. Asterisk (\*) indicates insufficient data (fewer than 10 responses).

## THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF SUPPORT

This survey, our tenth annual report on tech support salaries in the software industry, reflects survey data supplied by 196 software support organizations with a total of more than 16,000 support employees. Some key characteristics of our sample universe:

★ **Company size:** 18% of our respondents report annual sales of \$100 million or more, 32% have sales of \$10-\$99 million, 43% have sales of \$1-\$10 million, and 7% are below \$1 million.

★ **Organization size:** Although 25 companies in our survey have more than 100 support employees, the absolute size of most software support organizations is fairly small: Median organization size is currently 15 employees; 27% have 30 or more support employees, 39% have 10-29 employees, and 34% have 1-9 employees,

★ **Product price:** Many of the software companies in our sample serve high-end vertical or enterprise markets. The median price for our respondents' best-selling products is \$10,000; 54% support products that sell for more than \$10,000, another 24% support products in the \$1,000-\$9,995 range, and 22% support products that sell for less than \$999.

### Year-to-Year Comparison: For Most Support Job Categories, an Industry-Wide Pay Freeze

	2003	2004	Change
Senior Support Executive	\$100,000	\$100,000	+0.0%
Department Manager	\$70,000	\$70,000	+0.0%
Analyst/Project Manager	\$60,000	\$60,000	+0.0%
Senior Support Technician	\$50,000	\$50,000	+0.0%
Field Support Technician	\$58,000	\$50,000	-14.0%
Support Technician	\$40,000	\$40,000	+0.0%
Customer Service Rep	\$30,000	\$32,000	+6.7%