

Two-thirds of IT administrators have considered switching careers due to job stress

We experience stress every day; sometimes it's slight, sometimes it's intense. If we did not experience some form of stress, life would be boring, mundane and lacking the challenges that keep us going.

Although some stress is good, too much stress can prove detrimental to our health, our relationships and our general well-being. Little wonder, stress is often referred to by experts as the 'silent killer'.

Some experts also argue that technology has, in part, contributed to higher stress levels because, whilst easing the burden in so many areas, technology has made multi-tasking the norm – and we are expected to do more because technology allows us to do more.

This comes at a price – increased stress levels, higher demands on our time, greater pressures to meet deadlines, reach targets and so on.

As part of **National Stress Awareness Month** in the US, GFI a leading provider of security solutions to the SMB (small and medium businesses) market, recently surveyed US and UK IT administrators to gauge their stress levels at work and how it affects them. Of the 204 SMBs in the U.S. and 201 SMBs in the U.K. respondents, over two-thirds of IT administrators have considered switching careers due to job stress. The survey also revealed their opinions on their main stressors, as well as how their stress level compares to friends and family, and how it affects their personal and professional lives.

This independent blind survey of organizations with between 10 and 500 employees was conducted by **Opinion Matters** on behalf of GFI Software.

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In summary, GFI's research revealed that:

- » Nearly 70% (UK: 69%) of all IT administrators surveyed consider their job stressful
- » 67% of IT administrators (UK: 69%) consider switching careers on either an occasional (43% – UK: 38%) or regular (25% – UK: 31%) basis due to job stress
- » 72% of respondents (UK: 66%) consider themselves either just as stressed as, or the most stressed, compared to others in their social circle
- » While less than half (47% – UK: 56%) of IT admins at companies with between 10 and 49 employees say their jobs are stressful, that number skyrockets to 83% (UK: 84%) when those at companies with between 50 and 99 employees are polled, representing the most stressed group in the respondent base
- » The top three sources of stress for IT admins are: management (28% – UK: 36%), tight deadlines (20% – UK: 15%) and the users they support (18% – UK: 21%)
- » IT admins in the US Northeast are the most stressed (74%). Midwesterners are the least stressed, with nearly two-thirds (64%) still saying their job is stressful
- » IT admins in Yorkshire are the most stressed in the UK (85%). Admins in Northern Ireland are the least stressed (25%).

Get off my back!

When it comes to the major stressors, dealing with people within the organization is an issue for IT admins. Dealing with management tops the list and users do not come far behind. It is not the workload or the environment they are working in, but the people they have to work with – management demanding greater efficiencies and cost-cutting, plus users waste admins' time on frivolous complaints, inexistent problems, and showing a complete lack of common sense and basic computer knowledge.

Also, the larger the organization is, the greater the level of stress; over 80% of US and UK admins with companies of between 50 and 99 employees said their jobs are stressful – almost double that for admins working in companies with fewer than 49 employees.

In addition to the stressors themselves, IT admins also noted that they routinely put in many overtime hours beyond the traditional 40-hour work week. More than one in three (36% – UK: 34%) say they work eight hours (UK: 10 hours) or more of overtime during an average week.

Over 82% of the respondents feel as though their job has impacted their personal life in some way. According to the survey results, admins said they have lost sleep over work (42% – UK: 31%), missed out on social functions (40% – UK: 42%), missed time with their kids (39% – UK: 36%), and cancelled commitments to friends and family due to work (35% – UK: 32%). In the UK, one in five said work has strained or ended a relationship with a close friend or loved-one.

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Furthermore, many respondents say their job has even affected their health, with nearly one in four (22% – UK: 16%) saying they don't feel great physically and 20% (UK: 29%) saying they have experienced stress-related health issues such as high blood pressure.

End users do the strangest things

IT admins derive much of their stress from support calls from users. This is because many of the calls they field are due to an apparent lack of the most basic computer knowledge. Respondents indicated that they had received IT support calls from users who did not realize their computers needed a power source in order to work, users who spilled liquids on their machines, and users who have knowingly downloaded the same piece of malware numerous times. Here are a few:

- » An overwhelming amount of IT administrators said they have received complaints or support calls from users who did not know that a computer does not work without power
- » One admin put it best with a tongue-in-cheek response that read, “[Users] drink and eat in front of the computer and they feed the keyboard with water.” Coffee, water and soda were the most often cited offending liquids
- » One of the biggest problems IT admins see when it comes to security is that users frequently subvert the purpose of passwords by not securing them
- » There were quite a few IT admins who said their users have KNOWINGLY downloaded malware, through a number of different methods. One user clicked on a link in an email that they knew was a virus “just to see what would happen”
- » Many of the respondents said that their users had deleted important files or data to make room on their hard drive, which in most cases already had plenty of space remaining.

If you would like to read about a few more shocking experiences recounted by the respondents check out our blog post [here](#).

The surveys of 204 U.S.- and 201 U.K.-based IT decision makers at organizations with between five and 500 employees were fielded by noted polling expert Opinion Matters, between April 2-9, 2012.

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