



It's Not You.

It's the Job Description.

What 129,340 listings reveal about today's broken job market and how to apply with more clarity and less chaos.

Somewhere along the way, job descriptions lost the plot.

They're no longer tools for clarity. They're overloaded, confusing, and unrealistic because companies continually inflate expectations without defining what actually matters.

And when a job listing tries to be everything, even qualified professionals start to question whether they're enough. That disconnect leads to confusion, misalignment, and wasted time.

It shows up in patterns like:

- Roles that span five job families
- Entry-level titles with mid-level asks
- Vague soft skills
- Misleading remote filters

But these aren't outliers.

They're standard.

And they leave professionals second-guessing their fit, customizing resumes to chaos, and applying to jobs that were never clear in the first place.

The result? Rejection. Frustration. And self-doubt that builds over time.

Not because they aren't capable, but because the ask was never clear to begin with.

This is how impostor syndrome takes hold. It feels personal—like you missed something, like you're not good enough. But, despite the feeling, it's not a lack of ability. The system keeps moving the target.

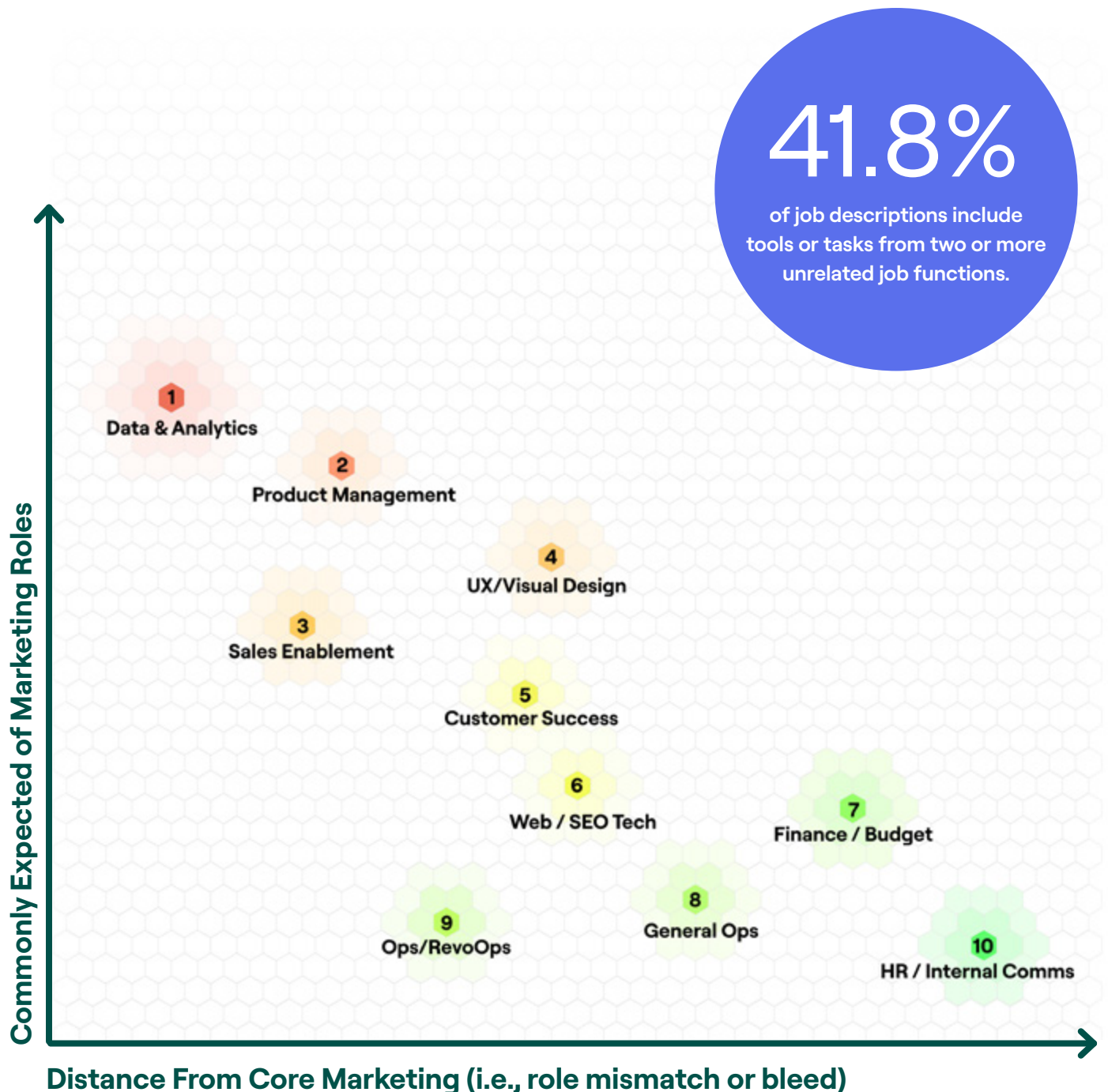
It's not you. It's the job description.

Companies should do better, but change is slow. So professionals need a better way to read between the lines and make the best decisions about what's actually worth applying to.

We analyzed **129,340** job descriptions across 118 roles and 21 industries, pulled from popular U.S. job boards like LinkedIn, Indeed, and Built In. Each one was evaluated for scope, contradictions, complexity, and clarity to show just how off-base job descriptions have become, and to help you make sense of them anyway.

One job, five departments, one salary:

What's happening to job descriptions?



Do they actually expect one person to do this job?

These are what the internet has dubbed “unicorn jobs.”

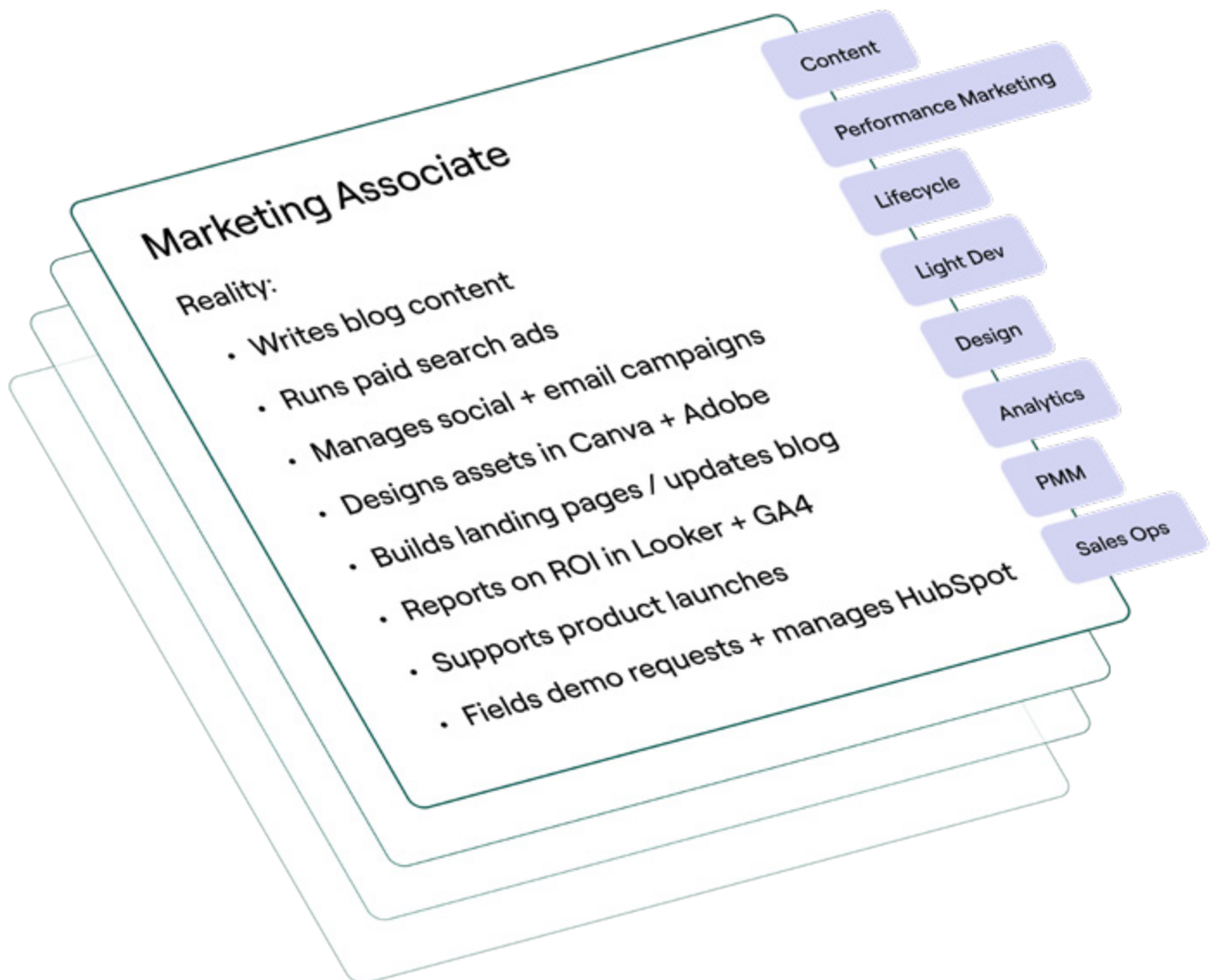
Unicorn jobs are roles that ask one person to carry out the work of three across teams. Software engineering and customer support. Marketing and IT. Strategy and execution. All stacked into a single listing, and all for one salary.

This isn't a flex. It's failure of scoping. And our analysis shows this isn't the exception. It's the norm. And it's professionals who pay the price.

You niche down to become an expert, then get told you're not a fit.

You stay broad and flexible, then get stretched across too many roles, for too little pay.

It creates a frustrating bind: specialize and risk being screened out. Generalize and risk burnout. All while the listing still expects someone to do it all.



Stacked responsibilities and mismatched compensation

Think of job families as broader functional areas: marketing, engineering, sales, and operations. That's not a stretch within one function; it's three jobs disguised as one.

Unicorn jobs like these aren't "growth opportunities," no matter the clever spin

companies want to take. They're signs of poor scoping or internal cost-cutting at the expense of whoever gets brought on.

And while some companies are covert about their multi-functional roles, others say it outright with clever taglines.

For example, one marketing job reached across five job families—including software development and sales.

The company labeled it junior. And it paid just \$62,000 in the U.S.



“Wear many hats” is a warning, not a culture perk

1 in every 9 job descriptions includes “wear many hats” or similar phrases, like “jack of all trades” or “multifunctional position.”

“The ideal candidate is scrappy, adaptable, and comfortable wearing many hats in a lean team.”

“You’ll be expected to wear many hats—from strategy to execution—depending on the project.”

“This role requires a hands-on generalist who thrives when wearing multiple hats.”

But “wear many hats” isn’t signaling flexibility.

It’s ambiguity and under-resourcing.

It’s branded burnout with an accessory.

A clever label for roles that lack focus, support, and realistic scope.

But for professionals trying to apply, it creates a catch-22: Focus too narrowly, and you risk looking underqualified.

Try to cover it all, and you risk looking scattered.

And while that tension shows up everywhere, it hits some roles much harder than others.

Roles wearing many hats

	JD count with phrase	Total JDs	% with Phrase
Operations Manager	928	2,430	38.19%
Office Manager	841	2,355	35.71%
Marketing Generalist	713	2,133	33.43%
Startup Associate	654	2,114	30.94%
Executive Assistant	602	2,020	29.80%
Customer Experience Lead	558	2,022	27.60%
People Operations Coordinator	501	1,996	25.10%

Jobs most likely to blur function and scope

Some roles show up again and again, stacked with responsibilities that don't match the title or stay within a single job family.

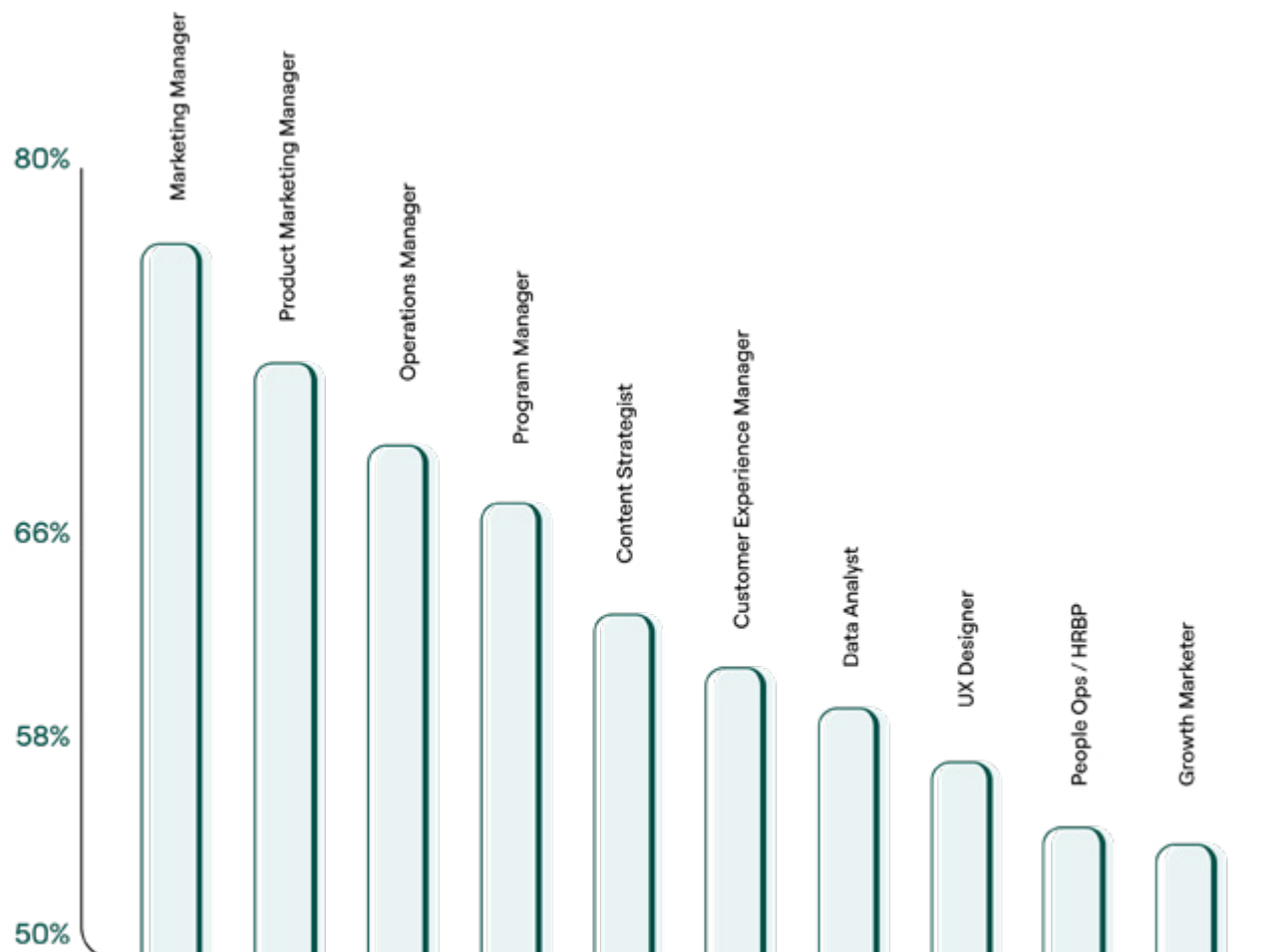
Marketing, product, and ops roles top the list.

To identify which roles qualify as unicorn jobs, we looked for listings that met at least three of the following:

- Three or more responsibility categories
- Two or more unrelated job families
- Five or more tools and/or platforms required
- Ownership of strategy without a manager title

Roles most likely to be 'Unicorn Jobs'

(Ranked by % of listings matching unicorn criteria)



Broad scope and no clarity?

That's not just messy, it's misleading. When you have to guess what a job even is, you're not underqualified. You're dealing with a broken job description.

If the job isn't defined clearly, the best thing you can do is read between the lines and decide if it's still worth your time.

How to respond when one role does the work of three teams

So what can you do when you come across an overstuffed, multi-functional position? You're not underqualified for not being a product-minded marketer who writes SQL and leads customer success. That's not one hire. It's three.

The problem isn't you. It's the scope. Ask yourself: "Do I want all these hats?"

Not could you do the job as described...but should you?

If the listing reads like three roles in one, it probably is. So the questions become:

What's actually at the center of this?

Do I want what the job actually is?

Should I apply?

Treat the job ad like a Venn diagram, not a checklist

If you decide the job is for you, you don't need to meet every qualification it's looking for. Find repetition, shared themes, or what the responsibilities center around. That's the role.

The rest?

Padding or proof they don't actually know what they need.

Tailor your resume to the center of gravity
Once you find repetition, shared themes, and responsibilities, focus your resume there.

Use language that reflects what you actually bring to the role. Don't inflate your skills to match a confusing post, and don't undersell because they bundled three jobs into one.

For example, if the core is project management and stakeholder communication, you'd say something like:

"Led cross-functional project delivery from scoping to launch, collaborating with product, engineering, and marketing to ensure stakeholder alignment."

Of course, not every confusing job description is trying to merge positions. Sometimes, even single-function jobs come with excessive expectations.

This is where the scope isn't split across teams; it's bloated within one role.

Overwritten, overstuffed, over it

59.38%

of job descriptions
list 10 or more
responsibilities.

32.71%

list 15 or more
responsibilities in
a listing.

47

the **highest** amount
of responsibilities in
a single listing.

This isn't a unicorn job. Here, the scope isn't split across departments. It's bloated within one.

One title. One function. Dozens of tasks, crammed into a responsibilities section that, in theory, should help professionals understand the actual work.

The responsibilities section of a job ad is supposed to clarify:

What success looks like

How time will be spent

Where the role sits within a team or org

But more than half of job postings don't do any of that.

Overload doesn't provide clarity. It creates confusion. And it's not just hard to read. It's hard to apply. Because when everything's a priority, nothing is.

You're left sorting through 20+ bullet points, trying to figure out what the job actually prioritizes so you can decide how to position yourself, or whether to apply at all.

You have to work twice as hard to see through the noise.

And often, it doesn't stop there.

Leadership expectations without the leadership package

Think like a leader. Act like a leader. Execute like a leader. But don't expect to be treated—or paid—like one.

19.7% of U.S. job postings for IC roles paying under \$80,000 ask candidates to lead cross-functional teams, own strategic initiatives, or serve as the primary point of contact across departments.

These roles pile on leadership-level responsibilities, without the compensation or title to match.

You're being asked to lead without the title, the support, or the salary. That's not high expectations. That's low investment. It's enough to make you want to close the tab. But if the role still feels worth considering, there are ways to move forward with clarity, not compromise.

How to apply when the role is bloated and unclear

If you spotted the red flags, but the role still seems worth it, how do you apply anyway? This isn't about tailoring to a perfect match; there's likely too much to match. It's about bringing clarity where there isn't any.

Lead with what's real

When a job description focuses on too many responsibilities, lead with what you actually do, not everything they asked for. Skip the inflation. Skip the underselling. Start from the version of the role that

actually makes sense, and show how you're already doing that work.

Call out what matters

Use your summary, cover letter, or intro note to surface what you see in the listing. Does the scope sound like a senior role? Say so. Does it look like strategy and execution are mashed together? Call that out, and anchor your experience to one or both.

For example:

"What stood out most to me is the focus on project delivery. That's where I've had the most impact—moving work forward across multiple teams and keeping details aligned."

You're not guessing. You're grounding.

Ask the right questions

Especially for more senior roles, clarity is part of the strategy. Don't wait for an offer to find out what the job actually is.

In your recruiter screen or first interview, ask:

What are the top 2–3 priorities for this role in the first 90 days?
Where does this role sit within the team?
How do you define success here?

These aren't curveballs. They're filters. And they'll help you decide whether the job is actually a match, or just looked good on paper.

While good questions help you cut through the noise, sometimes, the mismatch starts with the title itself.

Entry-level in name only

Some roles aren't over-scoped; they're mislabeled and rebranding mid-level talent. Plainly? The title says "entry-level," but the responsibilities don't.

Nearly half (48.7%) of entry-level listings require at least two years of experience. 26.3% require three or more.

Entry-level once meant just starting out. A first step. Not a full resume. But that's not what most listings reflect today.

Only 11.2% of jobs labeled "entry-level," "early career," or "junior" require no experience. And most of those are internships, apprenticeships, or support roles with structured onboarding.

That mismatch doesn't stop at experience requirements. It shows up in the language and responsibilities, too

Entry-level language with mid-level expectations

9.8% of listings labeled entry-level use mid-level language in the same post. 31.5% of those listings also include managerial responsibilities.

Title: Junior Product Manager

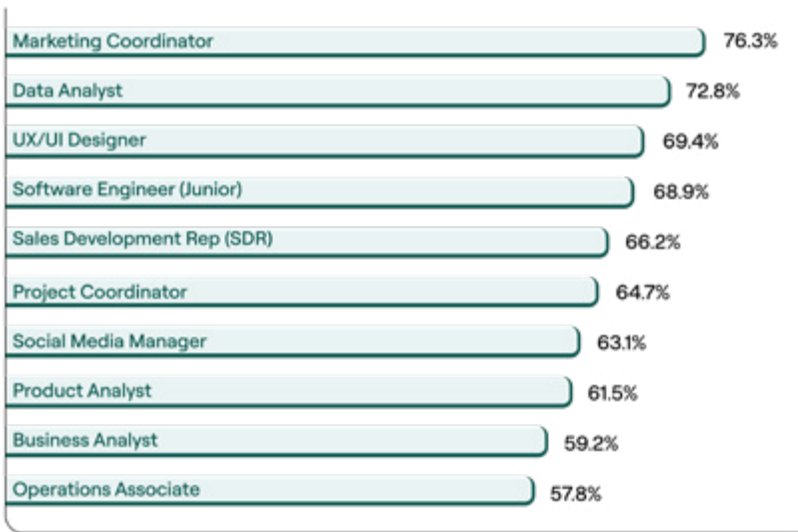
"As a mid-level contributor, you'll work closely with senior stakeholders and define roadmap strategy."

For professionals with existing experience, these blurred lines make it more challenging to advocate for their level. They're expected to lead and operate independently, but are handed a title that limits negotiation and pay. And for those without experience? They're blocked before they start. And the same titles keep showing up at the center of it.

Titles most likely to inflate entry-level experience

A role labeled as entry-level shouldn't require years of experience. And yet, across 129,000+ job descriptions, these are the ten titles most likely to ask for it anyway:

Titles like these say one thing and ask for another. But you don't have to play along.



% of Entry-Level JDs requiring 2+ years experience

What to do when the title doesn't match your level

For professionals with real experience, it's not uncommon to find roles labeled "entry-level" that read more like mid.

If the scope fits but the title doesn't, here's how to apply with clarity without minimizing what you bring to the table.

Don't screen out based on title (unless it matters to you)

A title mismatch doesn't always mean the role is a bad fit.

Job titles vary wildly across companies and industries, and some "entry-level" jobs carry real scope.

But if a title could affect your credibility, future negotiations, or internal leveling, it's fair to weigh that before you apply.

Ask yourself:
Will this title support my long-term path?
Or will it undercut how others see my level?

Use your resume as a reframe
You don't need to mirror entry-level language just because the listing does.

Focus on aligning your experience with the actual scope of the role. Use verbs and framing that reflect the level of ownership you've held.

For example:

Instead of "assisted with reporting," write "led monthly reporting for marketing leadership."

Instead of "supported cross-functional work," you "drove alignment across product and operations during a roadmap pivot."

These shifts show the impact you've had, regardless of what the job title was.

Tailor expectations, but hold your ground
If a job is marketed as entry-level and you choose to apply, your expectations should match the scope, not the label.

That doesn't mean lowering your standards. It means going in with clarity.

Use the interview to ask:

How does your team define success in this role?

What's the difference between junior, mid-level, and senior on your team?

How are titles structured here, and how often do they change?

What's the path forward from this role?

Some roles are under-titled for budget reasons or hiring flexibility. You don't have to accept that framing for yourself. But you do control whether you engage and how you manage expectations if you do.

From inflated responsibilities to misleading titles, the disconnect between what's listed in job postings and the jobs themselves runs deep. And it doesn't stop at what you'll be doing. It shows up in where you're expected to do it, too.

Remote, with fine print

Eat lunch in your own kitchen.

Be physically present for the people around you, rather than spending hours at a place that offers cold brew and calls it culture.

For people who prioritize that kind of autonomy, remote work isn't just a perk.

It's a filter. A requirement. A non-negotiable. But the truth of remote work isn't in the filter. It's in the fine print.

From hybrid schedules and required travel to timezone restrictions or mandated office attendance, they aren't exclusively remote.

Only 24.9% of roles tagged as remote are actually remote, without any in-person conditions.

And in thousands of listings, it goes beyond misleading. It's a full contradiction. Thousands of job listings contradict themselves

Some roles don't just stretch the definition of remote, they contradict it outright.

7,439 job descriptions use the word "remote" in the title or job board filter but later include location requirements like mandatory office attendance, specific regions, or hybrid expectations.

"This is a remote position, but candidates must be based in the Greater Boston area and able to come into the office 2-3 times per week as needed.

Sometimes the contradiction is obvious.

Other times it's hidden behind phrases like:

"Hybrid flexibility"

"Team meets in person"

"Must be based near headquarters"

"Quarterly travel required"

These aren't just small details.

They shift what the role actually is and how it fits into your life.

Read the fine print. And before you apply, make sure their version of "remote" matches yours—especially if you find yourself in one of the industries where this is most prominent.

49.6%

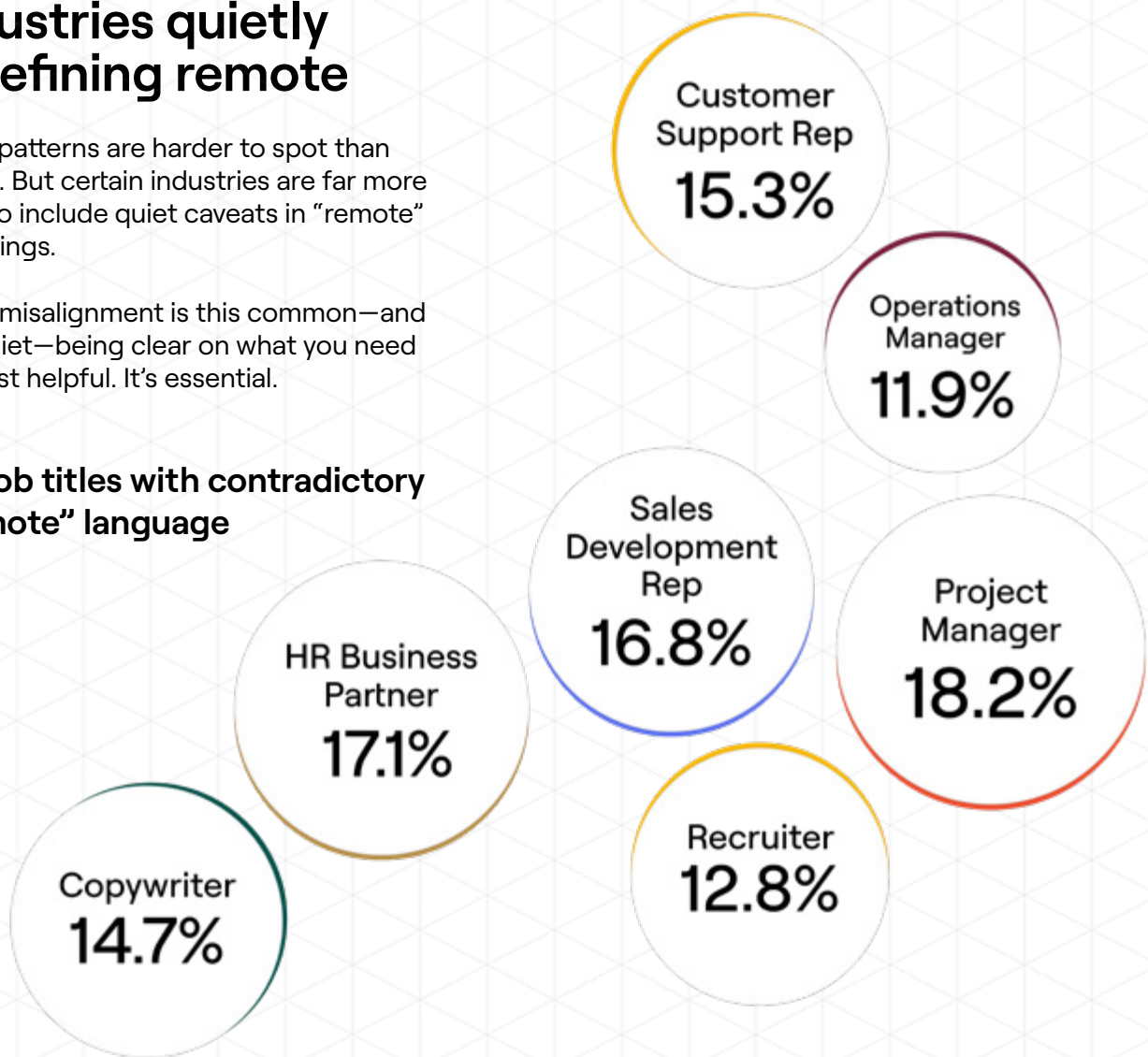
of remote job descriptions
include location requirements

Industries quietly redefining remote

Some patterns are harder to spot than others. But certain industries are far more likely to include quiet caveats in “remote” job listings.

When misalignment is this common—and this quiet—being clear on what you need isn’t just helpful. It’s essential.

Top job titles with contradictory “Remote” language



How to protect your time in a mismarked market

When remote isn’t clearly defined, deciding if an opportunity is worth your time is up to you. Here’s how to vet roles before you invest in something that doesn’t align with how you work best.

Get clear on your location non-negotiables
Flexibility means different things to different people.

Decide what you’re willing to compromise on and what you’re not before the job sets the terms for you.

Are you only willing to work from home?
Is weekly or monthly hybrid a feasible option?
Will you relocate to work in a specific timezone or location?

Then, stand firmly behind your choice.

Scan for contradictions before you apply

Once you know where you're willing to budge (and where you're not), read the entire job description.

Don't stop at the title or the filter. If a job is labeled "remote," scan for phrasing that quietly shifts the terms:

Must be located near headquarters

Hybrid flexibility

Travel required

Team meets in person

None of these automatically disqualify a role. But together, they reshape what remote really means.

Ask directly

If the language feels vague but the role seems promising, apply anyway. But don't get too far in the process without getting clarity.

Ask:

"What does remote mean?"

"Are there location expectations?"

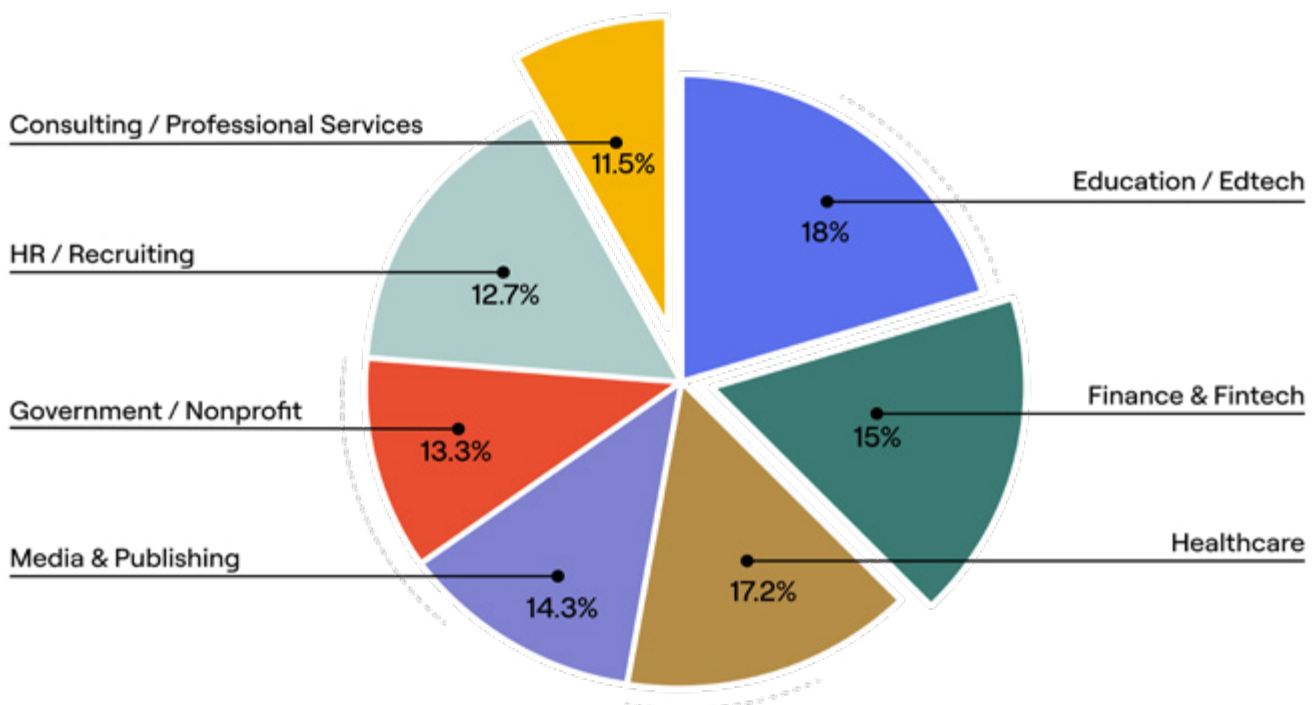
"Is occasional travel quarterly or weekly?"

If they can't define what remote means, they're not just unclear, they're showing you how they operate.

Ask early. The right teams won't dodge the question.

Clarity around where you'll work is just one piece. What's less visible (but just as common) is the lack of clarity around how.

Share of contradictory "Remote" roles by industry



Soft skills as buzzwords, no substance

“Problem-solving.”

“Detail oriented.”

“Self starter.”

You’ve seen these words in job descriptions. But what do they actually mean?

Over 90% of job descriptions list three or more soft skills—traits like communication, collaboration, and problem-solving.

But 78.5% include soft skills without any explanation or context.

No examples. No link to actual responsibilities. Just a list of traits, dropped in without clarity.

And while soft skills are essential to how work gets done, this leaves professionals unsure of how to respond.

Do you list all of these skills?
Do you explain them?
Are they just looking for someone who vibes on Zoom?

The result? Expectations that are hard to tailor to—and even harder to meet—because they’re never clearly defined in the first place.

Expectation without definition

Soft skills are the backbone of how we interact with others, make decisions, and move through teams.

But the way they show up in job descriptions? Entirely subjective. But they don’t show up in the responsibilities section.

Instead, they’re treated like personality traits:

“Adaptable.”

“Team player.”

“Thrives in fast-paced environments.”

Without clear context or examples, these traits aren’t measurable. They’re not tied to performance.

They’re just words.

Here’s what those traits might look like if they were written to focus on performance:

Strong communicator → Lead weekly team syncs and cross-functional status updates with stakeholders across product and engineering.

Adaptable → Navigate shifting project priorities and adjust timelines in response to changing business needs.

Team player → Collaborate with CX and marketing to align on messaging and handoff points ahead of launch.

When soft skills are tied to the work, they become observable.
Actionable. Real.

Without that? Professionals are expected to demonstrate qualities that are never defined, and judged on traits that mean different things to different people.

Some traits are so common, they feel required. But still, no one defines them.

They're listed often, and almost never clearly defined or connected to the actual role.

You can't control how often they show up or how they're written. But you can control how you frame them.

Which soft skills show up most

Soft skills show up in nearly every listing. Here are the most frequently repeated.

Top soft skills across 129k job descriptions

Communication	78.1%
Collaboration	64.4%
Problem-Solving	58.3%
Adaptability.....	52.9%
Time Management.....	47.1%
Leadership	40.6%
Critical Thinking	36.2%
Emotional Intelligence	32.4%
Self-Starter	30.0%
Attention to Detail	27.3%

The smart framing of soft skills

Soft skills aren't going anywhere. But when they're treated like vibes instead of tied to the work, it's up to professionals to reframe them.

That starts by shifting the focus from who you are to what you actually do.

Connect soft skills to impact

Soft skills matter when they lead to results.

On your resume, pair them with outcomes and impact to show how you used them.

The trait isn't the point. The impact is. Choose what matters, then show how it works

Pick three or four soft skills that match the role and reflect how you actually work.

Then use your cover letter, professional summary, and resume bullet points to show what they helped you accomplish.

Not "collaborative," but "rallied marketing and CX around a single launch calendar." Avoid the buzzword dump. Avoid overloading your skills section.

If they see them all, they'll remember none.

Cross-functional communication

→ Led cross-functional alignment on a feature launch that improved retention 12%.

Problem solving

→ Identified delays in handoff between design and development, introduced a shared workflow that cut production time by 20%.

A way forward in a messy system

You've seen how job descriptions get it wrong—in scope, titles, location, and the skills they actually require.

But this isn't just a breakdown of everything that's misaligned.

It's a way to move forward with more clarity. The goal isn't to match every bullet point or chase a perfect listing. It's to learn how to spot what matters and ignore what doesn't.

To ask better questions. To apply with your experience in focus, not their confusion.

Because when job descriptions keep

shifting the bar, your job is to stop chasing and start interpreting.

Not every role will be clear. Not every listing will make sense. But with the right lens, you don't need perfect information to make a smart move.

The system needs fixing.

Until it is, you deserve clear ways to work around it.

Start here.