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At Apple, Cloud Experts Wanted

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[Apple Inc.](#) has been taking small but important steps toward a shift in the way its customers access their digital content beyond the downloadable software that has been vital to the company's success.

In recent weeks, Apple has been looking to recruit senior-level executives with backgrounds in Web-based software, according to people familiar with the matter. It has approached at least one prominent Internet entrepreneur since at least earlier this year about a possible position, according to these people, who say the details of the possible job were unclear. The company has also discussed its needs with recruiters, one of the people said.

The moves reflect an ambitious strategy shift to suit users who increasingly don't want their entertainment content tied to specific computers, phones or tablets. Apple helped pioneer the hardware model, enhancing the value of its iPods and iPads with its own operating systems and programs such as iTunes, as well as downloaded apps.

But rivals like [Google Inc.](#) and a whole host of start-ups are developing competing offerings—from document-creation software to video and music services—that run entirely online and are built with new Web-development technologies.

Apple has been moving in that direction with new consumer products like iCloud, which stores users' content remotely in the cloud and pushes it wirelessly to all their devices. The service, which went live in October, also allows consumers to access their contacts, calendar and mail on the Web.

"We are going to demote the PC and the Mac to just be a device," said Apple co-founder Steve Jobs in June. "We are going to move the digital hub, the center of your digital life, into the cloud." Apple is also considering building new apps that leverage the Web to reduce people's need to carry around numerous devices at once, according to one of the people familiar with the matter.

The company doesn't have specific Web-centric positions in mind, and it is looking broadly for talent to fill director-level positions and above, including senior executives if they find a candidate that is a good fit, this person said.

The company has already begun to staff up on Web talent at lower levels. Since 2010, Apple has hired dozens of engineers with backgrounds in Web software from companies like Quantcast Corp., a Web-based analytics service, and [Yahoo Inc.](#), according to the employees' profiles on professional-networking service LinkedIn Corp.

Yet Apple's track record on Internet products is spotty. MobileMe, a file and contact-management service, failed to get much traction and was discontinued and succeeded by iCloud. Ping, a social-networking service on top of iTunes that pulls information from the Internet, hasn't had the impact that some employees had hoped, according to other people familiar with the matter. In recent years, some highly sought-after Internet engineers have been more interested in going to Google or Facebook Inc., believing Web services would be a lower priority at Apple than areas such as the iPhone operating-system group, which is very highly regarded internally, these people say.

"People who go into app development are interested in going somewhere else," said Valerie Frederickson, a Silicon Valley recruiter who doesn't work with Apple. An Apple spokesman declined to comment.

But recruiter Rick Devine argues that Apple's strong culture and high stock price puts it "in the top tier of allure and attractiveness" for recruits, along with Google and Facebook. Mr. Devine, who is now managing partner for Devine Capital Partners in Redwood City, Calif., in 1998 helped recruit Tim Cook, who became Apple's chief executive less than two months before Mr. Jobs's death in October.

Mr. Devine also says the strength of Apple's internal recruiting division gives it an edge. But he adds: "All those companies will have a shot at getting people excited about the product." Competition is intense for talent that can build apps that can be accessed over the Internet, instead of being installed on devices. HTML5—a suite of technology standards for building Web apps—is the fastest-growing term found in job postings, according to job-search site Indeed Inc. which aggregates millions of job postings across industries. Apple's iOS operating system is currently third.

Apple—known for doing virtually all of its recruiting in-house—has relied a little more on recruiters in the past year or so, often to help research a market, according to people close to the company. Earlier this year, the company tapped Egon Zehnder International to help find a replacement for retail chief Ron Johnson, who left to become CEO of [J.C. Penney Co.](#) The company is known for keeping recruiting as close to the vest as other corporate functions, such as details of upcoming product announcements.

Turnover in Apple's top ranks is rare. All but one of its eight senior vice presidents have been at the company more than a decade; rank-and-file employees, loyal and made wealthy by the company's skyrocketing stock price over the past decade, generally stick around for years.

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