Your Guide to Nailing IT Interviews in 2016

In this e-guide:

Are you prepared for your next job interview? Especially when it comes to IT, interviewees tend to get caught off guard with difficult, unusual questions. But proactively preparing for those tough questions can set you far apart from the crowd and ultimately land you that dream job.

This e-guide digs deep into some of the most common, yet tough, examples of IT interviews to help you get ahead of your peers. Prep yourself for the most important 2016 system, cloud, Exchange and Windows administrator interview questions and start off the year with a bang.

Prepare for these system administrator interview questions

http://searchdatacenter.techtarget.com/tip/Prepare-for-these-system-administrator-interview-questions

The right answers to tough interview questions can set you apart from a crowded field of system administrator candidates.

System administrators provision, install, configure and maintain hardware and software within the enterprise data center. Many sys admins work with other IT professionals to improve and optimize infrastructure. Success requires a breadth of technical knowledge coupled with solid hands-on capability.

Acing these seven important system administrator interview questions, or variations thereof, will set you apart from other candidates.

What is your technical background?

Given the diverse scope of sys admin roles, formal education requirements vary. Most system administrator jobs require a solid foundation in computer science, such as a bachelor's degree in engineering. Some organizations

require entry-level certifications, such as CompTIA Server+, or certifications associated to a specific technology, such as Microsoft Certified Professional or VMware Certified Associate - Data Center Virtualization (VCA-DCV).

While there is flexibility with expected answers to this question, know where your gaps are and be prepared to discuss them. If you don't have a specific certification, do you have similar or equivalent experience? For example, if the role calls for VMware Certified Professional 5 - Data Center Virtualization and you currently have VCA-DCV, discuss your expertise and related projects that used a similar skillset.

Before the interview, verify that all of your certifications are current and that your contact information in the certification vendor's database is correct. Potential employers can reference certs with Microsoft, VMware, CompTIA and other organizations. Expired, old or conflicting information raises red flags.

Also use this interview question to show how you assess business value and capability. As you describe education and certifications, emphasize how each credential has helped you; show the strategic benefit of each educational investment.

What's your background in operating systems and services?

System administrators keep servers and endpoints configured, optimized and running, so the interview will inevitably turn to server hardware -- operating systems like Microsoft Windows Server 2012 R2, hypervisors like VMware vSphere -- and the scope of network services you have administered, such as Active Directory, domain name system, dynamic host configuration protocol, virtual private networks and so on.

Employers want to get a sense of your range and comfort with the core technologies in their IT infrastructure. Frame your response in the form of a typical day: Talk about the tasks you handle and any special projects, such as testing and installing OS patches or managing server upgrades to Windows Server 2012 R2.

Don't worry if your experience doesn't align precisely with every requirement, because secondary skills can be reinforced on the job.

How do you handle support for users and endpoint systems?

The role of sys admin often extends beyond the data center to the end users and their equipment.

Use this interview question as a chance to highlight your familiarity with help desk ticketing systems and remote desktop administration, particularly for larger businesses with a sizable user base.

Frame the discussion as a user productivity issue. They already know you can patch or upgrade Windows and install more memory, etc. Show that you understand the business value of user support and clear communication, using tools to resolve problems and restore functionality quickly. Name specific tools and note their benefits.

Highlight your background in managing a variety of other data center devices that control end-user access, including firewalls, routers and managed switches. Mention expertise on some systems management utilities like Splunk and Nagios.

How would you manage systems performance? What KPIs do you think we should track?

System administrators routinely monitor system availability and performance. Employers will ask a sys admin these two interview questions to gauge their ability to keep hardware running as expected and resource utilization within acceptable levels, schedule tasks like backups, note errors and examine key event logs, and so on.

Data center decisions require solid metrics. Focus your answer on the key performance indicators (KPIs) that serve your current role. These can range from granular server-level metrics like CPU, memory and disk utilization to the number of virtual workloads per host, power density and so on.

Note how each KPI is important to the business. Perhaps you're watching the number of VMs per host or server resources because you're trying to improve VM consolidation by recovering underutilized resources. If you don't know why you watch each KPI specifically, it can be a red flag.

Put a practical spin on your conversation by citing specific monitoring and management tools like SolarWinds, ManageEngine and Nagios. Compare them to those used by your potential employer -- it shows that you're comfortable transitioning from one tool set to another.

How do you handle backups and restoration in your current role?

System administrators manage physical and virtual backup operations onto various media, storage tiers or archival subsystems.

Familiarity with particular backup tools and understanding of sound backup and restoration practices is important, so talk about the ways that you use tools like CommVault Enterprise Backup Software or Symantec NetBackup. Restoration is often the weakest part of any data protection strategy, so emphasize the ways you verify or test backups to ensure recoverability. For example, one strategy is restoring replicated VMs to test servers to verify backup integrity.

Backups and restoration also affect data retention, legal discovery and security issues like data theft and regulatory compliance. Sought-after sys admins understand the ways backups address these important business issues. For example, if your background includes data retention management, discuss archival or data destruction practices in the interview.

What's the toughest problem that you've ever solved?

This is where an interview can really push a candidate. System administrators need to be expert troubleshooters, able to identify and resolve problems in hardware, software, networks, services and applications.

Some system administrator interviews include a short troubleshooting test of a common problem scenario. Highlight a recent experience to underscore your diagnostic process and expertise. In just one example, you can explain how you identify a problem, use system logs to narrow down the issue, test performance with common tools like PerfMon, use PowerShell to query or change configuration data, and other subsequent steps that led to a resolution.

Show a potential employer that you're able to apply reason and make use of available diagnostic tools to address problems and restore functionality quickly. Highlight ways you kept applications and services available during the process, such as migrating workloads off of troubled server hardware.

We're in the process of virtualizing the server fleet. How would you manage this process?

Don't be fooled by this type of interview question. Virtualization is certainly an important technology and sys admins should have a detailed knowledge of hypervisors, so highlight your expertise using common hypervisors, or managing mixed (physical and virtualized) as well as remote systems.

How to nail your cloud administrator interview

http://searchcloudcomputing.techtarget.com/tip/How-to-nail-your-cloud-administrator-interview

Job interviews can be stressful and challenging -- especially for a cloud administrator, where the focus shifts quickly from code development and integration to cloud troubleshooting and management. Knowing how to answer a few specific questions about the cloud administrator role and responsibilities can help you nail that big interview.

1. How much experience do you have with cloud administration?

Most interviews start with questions regarding past experience. The HR representative or IT manager has reviewed your resume and already knows if you have the necessary three to five years of hands-on experience for a cloud administrator role. Now is the time to discuss the scope of your experience. Talk about your past successful cloud projects or initiatives you've led, rather than the minutia of day-to-day firefighting.

If you don't have much cloud admin experience, discuss any prior system, server, Linux or other data center-related roles. Then, make those prior experiences relevant to the cloud admin role. For example, server administrator experience can provide a strong foundation in virtualization, system management and troubleshooting -- all of which are required of cloud experts.

Eventually, the conversation will turn to your education. Note your degrees and certifications, and ensure they are up to date. Employers usually check your credentials against each vendor's certified professional database. Cloud admins can complement an IT degree with certifications such as Server+, Network+ or Security+. Advanced, vendor-specific certifications include the Amazon Web Services Certified Solution Architect and the Microsoft Certified Solutions Associate (MCSA), among others.

2. What is your experience with cloud management?

Questions about cloud management experience cover relevant tools and platforms. Cloud admins need to know core cloud platforms like Linux and OpenStack, along with configuration management tools, such as SaltStack,

Ansible, Chef or Puppet. Admins also need knowledge of monitoring tools, such as Munin, Nagios, Zenoss or Zabbix. Additionally, it's important to have experience with scripting languages, such as Python, Perl, Bash or Shell. Employers denote the specific platforms and tools candidates should know.

Emphasize your experience with a few key tools. To impress the interviewer, give real-world examples of ways you've used these tools to creatively solve problems or improve user experiences.

3. What tools would you recommend for a DevOps environment?

Cloud is about developing and running workloads in a pooled compute environment that responds quickly to change. This spawned the rise of DevOps to merge software development, quality assurance and operations disciplines. DevOps accelerates software development through smaller and more frequent version iterations. Cloud admins likely are involved with the software development process and the tools associated with DevOps.

Cloud administrators are familiar with DevOps tools like Jenkins, Chef Server and Nexus. Some organizations also require direct coding expertise with languages, such as Java, C/C++, C#, Scala or Clojure. Highlight specific coding

projects you've worked on and note the languages and DevOps tools you know.
You can also mention tools you'd like to explore in the future. Be sure to
mention the business benefits, such as faster code development or easier
debugging, that those tools offer.

Mention your leadership and people skills during the DevOps conversation, as
well.

4. How have you approached public and hybrid cloud projects?

As hybrid cloud adoption grows, more organizations require public cloud
integration. When the interview turns to hybrid and public clouds, AWS will likely
be the focus. Discuss your experience using AWS and its management
services, such as Elastic Compute Cloud (EC2), Route 53, virtual private cloud
(VPC) and Simple Storage Service (S3). An interviewer might also ask about
your experience with Google or other major public cloud providers.

Don't worry if you haven't used the same public cloud provider as the potential
employer. The basic skills required by each are typically transferrable, and APIs
and other deployment details are easy to learn for experienced cloud
professionals.

List your success stories about merging workloads to public cloud. The interviewer doesn't want to hear about your struggles with a pesky API. Instead, discuss the value proposition and business benefits of public cloud.

5. How would you test or improve our cloud application performance?

Many cloud administrator interviews include senior IT staff, so expect some of the later questions to test your depth of knowledge. A potential employer wants to know if you have cloud monitoring and optimization expertise. Applications have to run at peak efficiency using minimum resources, so explain your approach to performance monitoring -- preferably referencing tools the interviewer uses -- to highlight your hands-on expertise.

Go beyond monitoring tools and talk about network issue resolution or optimization. Employers often look for network-related experience with IPsec, VPN, load balancing, routing protocols, Secure Shell (SSH) and more. When application performance issues are related to the network, discuss potential network changes.

If performance problems stem from an application's code, revisit your coding, scripting or DevOps experience to offer a potential solution. The performance

discussion is a good time to mention other skills and certifications, such as those for IT Service Management (ITSM).

🔖 Prep for these Exchange interview questions

http://searchexchange.techtarget.com/feature/Prep-for-an-Exchange-administrator-job-interview

Modern organizations rely on email for everyday operations; and Microsoft Exchange remains the platform of choice for corporate email. An Exchange administrator job takes great people skills and a range of technical expertise in security, data protection, database management, account support and more.

But before you head off to tackle an interview, it's best to be prepared for these Exchange interview questions a prospective employer could ask.

Tell me about your Exchange background. What kind of education or certifications do you have? What other IT roles have you held?

Once the interview gets rolling, the conversation usually starts with a review of educational background and experience. Many organizations look for an Exchange administrator with a bachelor's degree in computer science, information systems, engineering or other technical fields. They'll also look for

post-degree certifications such as Microsoft Certified System Engineer or Microsoft Certified IT Professional with a specialty in Enterprise Messaging. In addition, prospective employers expect six or more years of experience in IT (not necessarily with Exchange), which could include both Exchange Server and Windows Server system administration, and support for email clients such as Outlook along with other business application administration such as SQL Server.

Pay attention to versions. For example, if a potential employer is using Windows Server 2012 R2 and Exchange Server 2013, be sure that you have a background there -- or at least have a sound explanation as to why you don't. For example, if you've only had six months of experience with Exchange Server 2013, that might be fine if you also managed a successful migration from Exchange Server 2010.

The hardest part of answering these kinds of Exchange interview questions is getting noticed. Remember that you're competing with other IT professionals for this job and the interviewer has already read your resume, so simply reciting a list of bullet points is a sure way to lose yourself in a crowd of mediocrity. Instead, discuss your education as a pathway toward an objective. Where do you intend to be and how did your education and certifications get you there? Employers want to see candidates who are focused and goal oriented.

In addition, try to discuss your experience as it relates to your potential employer. What problems did your previous experience help employers solve,

for example, or what new capabilities did you enable? This perspective shows
that you understand there is a business value and benefit to the work you're
doing. So when the interviewer asks you why you're interested in this Exchange
administrator role, you can tell her how you're ready to step up, move your
career forward and provide more value to the business.

Familiarity is important when answering these Exchange interview questions, so
be ready to talk about what you see happening with the product such as
patches, updates and the new capabilities those updates will include, end-of-life
support plans or new vendor support offerings.

Prepare for these five Windows administrator interview questions

http://searchwindowsserver.techtarget.com/tip/Prepare-for-these-five-Windows-administrator-interview-questions

A Windows administrator is an IT professional responsible for installing, managing and maintaining systems and servers based on Microsoft Windows' family of operating systems. Many IT professionals take on an administrator role at some point in their career, but actually landing the job can be harder than it seems. The daily duties of a Windows administrator are plentiful and diverse, often going far beyond operating system tasks and varying dramatically from one organization to another to include troubleshooting, hardware upgrades, basic programming, business application management and even regulatory compliance duties. Before you press your suit and head off for the interview, take time to review the scope of responsibilities that the role demands, and consider just a few of the questions that you might face during the interview process.

Q. Tell me about your experience. What will you bring to this role?

This line of questioning is usually where the "real" interview starts once the initial introductions and pleasantries are finished. There are lots of ways to ask this question and start the discussion. A popular variation on this theme might

ask you to discuss your typical workday or workweek. But regardless of how a potential employer phrases this question, the purpose is always to gauge your scope of knowledge and expertise as it relates to the potential employer.

Avoid the temptation to simply recite your resume. Remember, if you're sitting in an interview, the employer has already read your resume and probably performed some due diligence to check some of your facts before ever inviting you to a meeting. The real purpose of this discussion is to learn what's not on your resume.

Know the job's requirements and focus on where you meet or exceed them. A typical Windows administrator position may require a formal two- or four-year technical degree and two to five years of experience in a recent Windows Server environment. When education is the topic, talk about your relevant certifications such as Microsoft Certified Solutions Expert (MCSE), your favorite college IT classes or your most successful IT projects that align with the employer's business. For example, if the employer is a software developer, you might discuss your favorite Java programming classes and senior project developing a Java-based web application. Show the employer that you understand what the business is doing.

As the talk turns to employment history, go beyond the names and dates on your resume and discuss details that align with the employer's requirements. A

typical Windows administrator usually performs a wide range of tasks including daily system monitoring, resource (server and storage) integrity checks, system process status, review system and application logs for errors or security alerts, install and configure software or services, and so on. Understand the scope of tasks that the employer is looking for and focus on those discussions.

For example, it probably won't help your case to talk about the drudgery of babysitting an error-ridden legacy business application that couldn't be virtualized. But, an employer using Windows Server 2012 R2 might like to know more about your involvement in past OS upgrades in your current data center, your move into Hyper-V and virtual machine management, your use of log analytics to research trends, your ongoing Active Directory management and countless other tasks that can be directly relevant to the employer and role. As another example, some roles require remote or off-site administrative work, so stress your expertise in remote systems management and support. Large data centers are often 24/7 operations, and it can be a huge plus to underscore your availability for flexible hours or on-call schedules.

Considering the diversity of many Windows administrator positions, chances are that your education and experience may not be an ideal match for every employer. Don't worry or apologize -- they wouldn't waste their time interviewing you if you weren't a potential candidate. Instead, offer up an alternative that shows relevant experience and potential for growth. For example, if an employer uses one management tool and you have used a different

management tool, the real issue is that you have expertise using management tools in the first place, so talk up your understanding of management practices and the productive Windows management tactics -- learning the mechanics of a new tool isn't an issue.

Q. What business applications have you been responsible for?

By itself, a Windows operating system doesn't provide any business services, so businesses rely on an array of business applications to perform actual work. Business applications can include Exchange Server, SQL Server, Internet Information Services (IIS) and SharePoint along with various network services like dynamic host configuration protocol (DHCP) or domain name system (DNS) servers and so on. Since many of these applications reside on top of Windows, the task of installing, supporting and maintaining these applications usually falls to Windows administrators.

Virtualized enterprises may consider hypervisors like VMware vSphere or Microsoft Hyper-V in the application management category, but at least it's an important part of the discussion of applications, like Exchange Server are successfully running as virtual machines. Virtualization adds a layer of complexity to business application management, and it's well worth adding to the discussion -- especially if the employer is considering a move to virtualize those same applications.

This is another line of questioning where you need to do a bit of homework to learn about specific applications that the employer is using (Exchange Server 2010 SP3, for example) and be able to discuss your involvement with application support, patching, troubleshooting, upgrading and so on. It's usually not critical that you know every application or version, but be able to demonstrate that you're capable of extending yourself far beyond the operating system, to support the business and its employees or users, by keeping important applications running.

Here's a helpful hint: Operating system and application support are often split among the members of an IT team that collaborate and share skills. This is where a lot of skill cross-training is accomplished, and can be a great place to discuss your skills as a team player and even a team leader which can be far more valuable to a potential employer than knowing a certain version of Microsoft Office.

Q. How do you manage Windows? Do you use SCCM?

Whether deploying, upgrading or optimizing a server, Windows administrators must be consummate managers able to manage users, configure computing resources, monitor workload performance, report system inventories, gauge future computing capacity, check the functional status of systems and applications, and perform a myriad of other duties.

Windows administrators rely on a suite of sophisticated tools such as Microsoft System Center Configuration Manager (SCCM) and PowerShell to perform these tasks, and user management is closely coupled to Active Directory. It's almost certain that a prospective employer will want to discuss your familiarity with Windows or systems management tools, especially if you have hands-on experience with the same tools used by the employer.

There are often multiple layers or purposes to each question or topic of discussion, and so many talented IT professionals miss this opportunity to stand out during an interview. This question isn't just about listing tool "X, Y and Z" that you already know. Being able to use a particular management tool doesn't make you a good manager any more than knowing where a steering wheel is makes you a good driver. Go farther; show a prospective employer how you have used Windows or systems management tools to improve productivity, increase computing capacity, save money or otherwise benefit the business.

Management is also moving to embrace process standardization and automation. Applying processes helps to ensure that procedures are applied faster and more consistently. Automation techniques, such as writing and implementing PowerShell scripts for common administrative tasks, can reduce errors and improve IT response times for user queries or helpdesk tickets, saving the company money. Taken together, processes and automation can allow Windows administrators to work more proactively to spot potential issues and resolve them earlier before users ever notice.

These are just some of the ideas that make management important to the business and its constituent users, and your ability to articulate this can be the difference between simply using tools and being a capable Windows administrator.

Q. What kind of troubleshooting have you done? What kind of technical challenges have you faced?

Every data center has its share of faults and failures -- it's an inevitable risk when sophisticated technologies drive a modern business. But today's businesses are often 24/7 endeavors that measure uptime in terms of revenue and user satisfaction. This means Windows administrators and other IT professionals must also be expert technicians able to isolate and overcome a wide range of hardware faults and software issues to keep the business running.

It's not important for a prospective candidate to have the answer to every possible question or scenario during an interview, though some interviews may include a technical quiz. Instead, focus on the tools and practices that you use to troubleshoot defective hardware or identify software configuration problems. Employers want to see that you "can" troubleshoot and know how to take action when problems arise. Windows administrators provide first tier support, so talk about the approaches you take when handling help desk tickets from users or responding to alerts generated by monitoring tools.

Windows administrators typically don't troubleshoot alone. They routinely reach out to other members of the IT team and often work closely with vendors' engineering staff to locate and correct problems. This is an important opportunity to push the discussion beyond just troubleshooting and highlight your research, collaboration and leadership abilities working in a team environment.

Employers increasingly expect IT to be a partner in the business, and IT professionals have the unique advantage of seeing how technology, especially chronic technical problems, can be addressed to improve computing performance, add computing capacity, enhance system uptime and save the company money. An employer might take particular notice of recent troubleshooting efforts that led to investigative work and creative, cost-saving resolutions.

Q. What other expertise or competencies can you bring to this role?

Potential employers want to understand how well you can fit the available role. Windows administrators have some of the broadest and most diverse roles in the IT industry. Every role is certainly based on Windows operating systems and some Windows-based business applications such as Exchange or SQL Server, but the role can also extend in countless different directions depending on the particular employer and their technical or business needs. This type of question might sound simple enough on the surface, but any candidate that responds by

simply rattling off a list of other certifications or reciting past experiences is really missing a chance to shine.

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