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## Searching questions

During the Internet boom of the mid-1990s, information technology (IT) researchers could practically write their own ticket. Then the bubble burst, and many IT experts found themselves scanning the 'help wanted' adverts. Although the halcyon days are history, demand for IT experts may once more be on the rise, this time from search-engine companies such as Yahoo and Google.

Last month, both firms made aggressive moves to attract top talent from computer giants IBM, Apple and Microsoft, and there are signs of more to come. Yahoo recruited Prabhakar Raghavan, who helped IBM develop a search technology called 'Clever', and another senior IBM technology researcher Andrew Tomkins. It also took on Apple's Larry Tessler in a bid to help the company become more user friendly. Google, meanwhile, attracted Kai-Fu Lee from Microsoft to help it build a laboratory in China.

Such moves don't come without some retribution. Microsoft warned Lee that he may be in violation of a 'no-compete' clause in his contract, because he has key knowledge about Microsoft technology that is still in

the works. And the former IBM employees now at Yahoo have said they need to tread carefully around intellectual-property laws.

Although these moves are notable for their high-profile nature, questions remain over whether IT jobs as a whole will recover, or whether this is just a quick flurry of activity limited to a few senior positions at a few companies. Will Apple, Microsoft and IBM fight back by hiring more search-engine scientists? Will Google and Yahoo expand their teams further, creating even more opportunities for IT experts? And will smaller search companies enter into the hiring fray?

Whatever the outcome, researchers looking for employment in the field should temper their optimism with caution, lest their bubble burst again.



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