

OCTOBER 2025



Workforce Optics

INSIGHTS, NUMBERS & KNOWLEDGE FOR A COMPETITIVE WORKFORCE

Welcome! In this issue of *Workforce Optics*, we pair employment data and trends from across the marketplace with insights from Staffmark leaders and experts. Let Staffmark's experience with workforce changes, challenges, and transformations help you put the numbers in perspective.

When the Jobs Report Is on Snooze...

The BLS is on pause thanks to the government shutdown. No fresh jobs report, no official numbers at the start of October. For anyone unsettled by the silence, here's an important reminder from Sherry Donovan, Staffmark's SVP of Strategic Partnerships, whose two decades in the talent industry have spanned plenty of shutdowns and data blackouts:



“The BLS report looks in the rearview mirror. In a fast-moving market, leaders need real-time insights to make the right calls and that means looking beyond the BLS.”

According to Donovan, this is a good time for businesses to refamiliarize themselves with data sources that provide more timely, specific, and localized insights, such as:

EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH

Tools like Lightcast pull millions of job market data points to show what's happening in real time, from job postings, wage trends, and even talent flows (who's coming, who's going). That's why **Staffmark provides it to our clients at no cost**. The ADP® National Employment Report is another reliable source, offering private-sector insights, even when BLS is paused.

COMPETITOR JOB ADS

Want to know who's hiring, what they're paying, or which benefits are trending? The data is hiding in plain sight in job postings, including:

- **Wage research** – Pay transparency laws mean pay data, which is critical for attraction and retention, is easier than ever to find.
- **Competitor research** – Postings often reveal the true competition. For example, an employer may assume they are competing with another distribution center for forklift driver when, in reality, postings show a nearby manufacturer is attracting them with a \$1 more per hour.

REAL-TIME EMPLOYEE SENTIMENT DATA

Employees are broadcasting workplace realities more candidly than any survey. Platforms like Glassdoor, LinkedIn, and TikTok are filled with reviews, “quit videos,” and trend **chatter that shape employer reputation**. This matters because:

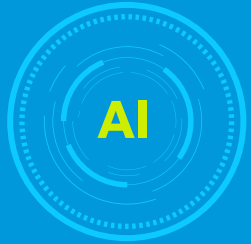
- **Candidates scroll reviews before they apply.**
- **Competitor intel hides here too.** Workers may flee a rival with poor culture but bring excellent training with them.

So while official data takes a nap, there are still plenty of ways to track turnover, wages, hiring trends, and reputation.



EMPLOYMENT NEWS OF NOTE

Businesses Are Showing AI Skills the Money



800%

INCREASE IN
GENERATIVE AI
SINCE 2022

A new **Lightcast** report, *Beyond the Buzz: Developing the AI Skills Employers Actually Need*, shows job postings requiring **AI skills command a 28% salary premium**—nearly \$18,000 more per year—based on analysis of 1.3 billion postings. AI adoption is also spreading far beyond tech. As of 2024, 51% of AI-related job postings were in non-tech fields, with generative AI roles up 800% since 2022. **Lightcast's research highlights which AI skills matter most across industries**, offering a roadmap for educators and employers to design targeted training strategies.

COVID Didn't Push Older Workers Out for Good

According to the **Center for Retirement Research at Boston College**, **employment among workers aged 55+ has bounced back to pre-pandemic levels**. But the comeback isn't the same for everyone: Black and Hispanic older workers are clocking in at higher rates than before COVID while White and college-educated workers are pulling back slightly. The findings show that older Americans weren't permanently sidelined by the pandemic. However, the way different groups rejoined the workforce is rewriting the story of retirement and work.

Sources: [Lightcast](#), "*Beyond the Buzz*" July 2025, [CRR at Boston College](#)

Support for Workplace Flexibility Slips Sharply

According to Gartner's *Return-to-Office and Hybrid Work Trends and Benchmarks*, organizations are cooling on location-based flexibility. Today, **nearly one-third (32%) plan to scale back on where employees can work**, up sharply from just 18% in October 2024. At the same time, fewer leaders are losing sleep over attrition tied to stricter on-site requirements with concern dropping to 51% from 63% over the same period.

Despite the opportunity to pull back on hybrid perks, CHROs should step back and ask whether the organization's work model is truly fit for the future. Pulling people back into the office might boost collaboration or spark innovation, but **it could also chip away at culture and productivity if handled poorly**. The real opportunity lies in balancing flexibility with the business outcomes leaders want most.



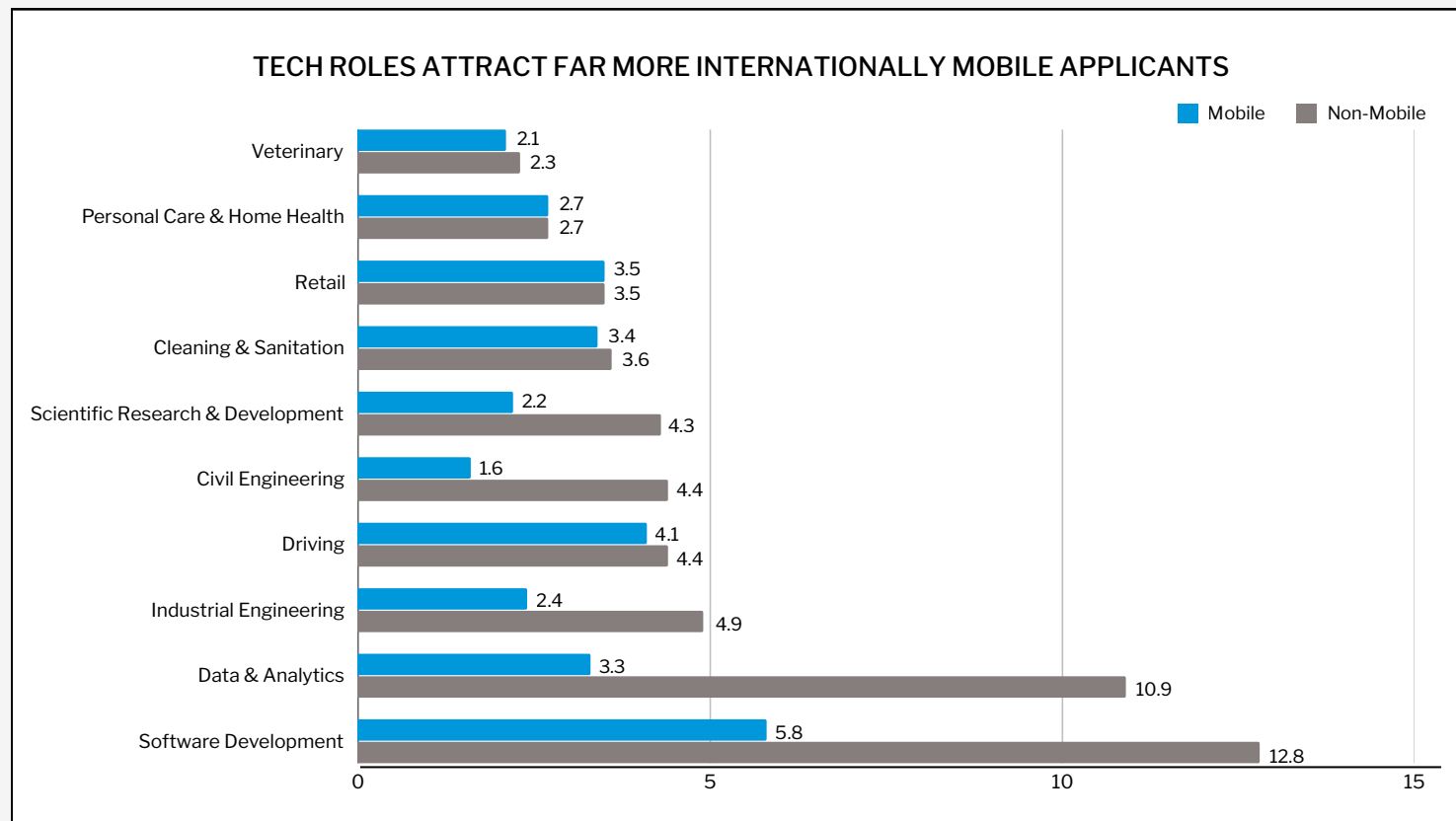
Source: [Gartner's Return-to-Office and Hybrid Work Trends and Benchmarks](#)

U.S. Still a Magnet for Global Tech Talent

Even with a tech hiring slowdown and shifts in the H-1B visa program, the U.S. remains a top destination for internationally mobile workers chasing careers in STEM, according to [Indeed Hiring Lab's Global Mobility Series](#).

These globally experienced job seekers ([workers with at least one stint outside the U.S.](#)) make up just over 5% of America's talent pool. But in STEM fields, their impact is outsized. In Q2 2025, they drove nearly 37% of applications in data & analytics, 32% in software development, and more than a quarter in engineering. Both data & analytics and software development roles posted the fastest year-over-year growth in mobile applicants, signaling the U.S.'s enduring pull for global talent.

What's more, mobile applicants hustle harder. A typical internationally mobile candidate for software development applied to nearly 13 jobs, more than [double the rate](#) of their U.S.-only peers. Indeed's research also shows [these workers are more likely to hold advanced degrees](#), equipping them for specialized roles that thrive on cross-border expertise.



Source: [Indeed Hiring Lab's Global Mobility Series](#)

Despite slower hiring trends, [internationally mobile workers' strong focus on U.S. STEM roles](#) reinforces the country's standing as a center for technological innovation.

Fragile Lift for Manufacturing: Production Up, Orders Down



U.S. manufacturing contracted for the seventh straight month in September, with the ISM® Manufacturing PMI® ticking up to 49.1%. A rebound in production lifted the index, but **falling new orders and lean inventories raise questions about whether the momentum can hold.**

Even as the overall economy remains in expansion for the 65th consecutive month, manufacturing continues to lag. Nearly **two-thirds of sector GDP is still in contraction**, and the share in deep contraction jumped to 28% in September from just 4% in August. This sharp, one-month shift underscores how uneven the sector's recovery remains.

Industry performance remains uneven. Petroleum & Coal Products, Primary Metals, and Textiles posted growth, while key areas like chemicals, electronics, and transportation equipment moved further into decline. Prices are still elevated, and supply chains remain tight, though slower deliveries hint at improving demand.

September's report points to a **manufacturing sector stuck between areas of resilience and persistent weakness** with stability hinging on whether demand can firm up in the months ahead.

MANUFACTURING AT A GLANCE

September 2025

Index	Series Index Sept	Series Index Aug	% Point Change	Direction	Rate of Change	Trend* (Months)
Manufacturing PMI®	49.1	48.7	+0.4	Contracting	Slower	7
New Orders	48.9	51.4	-2.5	Contracting	From Growing	1
Production	51.0	47.8	+3.2	Growing	From Contracting	1
Employment	45.3	43.8	+1.5	Contracting	Slower	8
Supplier Deliveries	52.6	51.3	+1.3	Slowing	Faster	2
Inventories	47.7	49.4	-1.7	Contracting	Faster	5
Customers' Inventories	43.7	44.6	-0.9	Too Low	Faster	12
Prices	61.9	63.7	-1.8	Increasing	Slower	12
Backlog of Orders	46.2	44.7	+1.5	Contracting	Slower	36
New Export Orders	43.0	47.6	-4.6	Contracting	Faster	7
Imports	44.7	46.0	-1.3	Contracting	Faster	6
OVERALL ECONOMY				Growing	Faster	65

Sources: [Manufacturing ISM® Report On Business®](#) & [Institute of Supply Management 10/01/2025 Newswire Release](#)

About Staffmark Group

STAFFMARKGROUP.COM

Staffmark Group (SMG) is one of the largest staffing companies in the United States and is a portfolio company of RGF Staffing and Recruit Group, renowned for pioneering brands like Indeed and Glassdoor. Harnessing our global strength and innovation, we power your business with the people, flexibility, and data insights you need to succeed in your market.

From the bustling floors of manufacturing facilities to the dynamic environments of technical and professional firms, we offer the widest range of specialized workforce solutions. The expertise of our specialty brands, Advantage Technical, Digital People, Hunter Hamilton, Advantage xPO, Employee Management Services and Staffmark, ensures the talent and customized solutions to propel your business forward.



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