

Reading the Senior Network Engineer: A Content Analysis of Two Job Advertisements

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A job advertisement does three things at once: it describes work, filters applicants, and sells an employer. Because those purposes compete for the same few hundred words, how an ad is organized, and which words it spends on each purpose, say as much about the job as the requirements list does. Two current advertisements for a Senior Network Engineer, the title I hold and the level at which I would next apply, show how much that organization reveals. The first, from the federal IT contractor Computer World Services (CWS, 2026), supports Defense Health Agency (DHA) hospital networks; the second, from the database company MongoDB (2026), covers the firm's own corporate network. The question the pair raises is how two employers hiring for the same title distribute their text among company branding, duties, and skills, and how much of each ad's soft-skill demand is explicit rather than implied. Both ads spend more words on the employer and its terms than on the candidate's skills, both describe duties through verbs and skills through noun phrases, and most of the soft skills each job requires must be inferred from the duties rather than read from the requirements, a pattern that both confirms and complicates the findings of Lipovac and Babac (2021).

The Two Advertisements

The CWS ad seeks a "highly qualified Subject Matter Expert (SME)" to sustain local, wireless, and wide-area networks for military hospitals across the continental United States, acting as "the lead technical authority for CONUS network operations" (CWS, 2026). It is 527 words long, requires an active Secret clearance, an active CISSP, and a CCNP or willingness to obtain one, and its duties include firewall, VPN, IDS/IPS, and Zero Trust support. The MongoDB ad, at 1,187 words, is more than twice as long. It seeks a Senior Network Engineer to "take ownership of key areas of MongoDB's global network infrastructure," lead a Palo Alto

Prisma Access rollout, administer RADIUS authentication, and "partner with InfoSec to harden network security" (MongoDB, 2026). It asks for six or more years of experience, lists certifications only as preferred, and ends with a published salary range.

Method

Content analysis is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 24). Lipovac and Babac (2021) applied it to 16,000 Indeed postings by separating each ad into title, company, description, and salary, classifying words by type, and sorting skill terms into the four fields of the KODE competence model. I followed the same logic at the scale of two documents, using the seven-step process from class. My categories were the ad's functional sections (company branding, duties, requirements, logistics, legal boilerplate, and compensation), hard skills, explicit soft skills, and implied soft skills. I coded manually first, then ran both texts through a word-frequency and part-of-speech pass equivalent to Voyant Tools' Summary and Terms views. A soft skill was coded as explicit only when the ad named it as a requirement, and as implied when it appeared only inside a duty, following the Purdue Online Writing Lab's (OWL, n.d.-b) advice that phrases such as "self-starter" or "fast-paced environment" describe working conditions that demand particular skills without naming them.

Findings

Neither employer spends even a quarter of its text on what the candidate must know (Table 1). The CWS ad devotes 23% of its words to requirements and 15% to duties, but 37% to equal-opportunity, accommodation, and AI-screening disclosures and another 13% to describing the company and contract. MongoDB devotes 22% to requirements and 21% to duties, but 19% to an "About MongoDB" section and a further 11% to benefits and salary, which function as

recruitment marketing. This is the pattern Lipovac and Babac (2021) warn about when they note that employers "tend to focus on company branding instead of skills they require from candidates" (p. 519), though in the CWS case the crowding comes less from branding than from legal text.

Table 1

Distribution of Words by Function in the Two Advertisements

Ad section	CWS words (%)	MongoDB words (%)	Function
Company / branding (incl. benefits)	70 (13%)	350 (29%)	Selling the employer
Duties (incl. success measures)	81 (15%)	346 (29%)	Describing the work
Requirements	123 (23%)	267 (22%)	Filtering candidates
Logistics (location, travel)	51 (10%)	64 (5%)	Conditions
Legal / boilerplate	197 (37%)	89 (8%)	Compliance
Role introduction	—	68 (6%)	Framing
Total	527	1,187	

Note. Percentages are of each ad's total word count. MongoDB's branding includes its benefits and salary paragraphs.

Word types tell the same story. Lipovac and Babac (2021) found that nouns made up 38.5% of the words in U.S. ads, verbs 8.9%, and adjectives 8.8% (p. 519), and, drawing on Seljan (as cited in Lipovac & Babac, 2021, p. 519), they observed that "verbs are usually used for describing duties" while noun phrases carry the skills. Both ads follow that grammar. Nouns and proper nouns account for 52% of the CWS ad and 46% of MongoDB's, verbs for 10% of each, and adjectives for 11% and 10%. The shares are not strictly comparable, since the article removed stop words before counting, but the ordering is identical. The noun share is higher here partly for that reason and partly because a senior technical ad is dense with product names

(SolarWinds, Ansible, BGP, OSPF; Palo Alto, Meraki). The verb pattern is absolute. All ten CWS duty bullets and all nine MongoDB "What You'll Do" bullets open with an imperative verb (serve, lead, provide, guide, interface, develop, perform, ensure, support, mentor; own, lead, administer, partner, design, serve, build, act, mentor), whereas every requirement bullet in both ads opens with a noun phrase ("Bachelor's degree," "Extensive experience," "Hands-on experience," "Scripting skills"). The organization therefore encodes a division of labor: verbs tell the candidate what they will do, nouns tell them what they must already be.

Frequency counts sharpen the contrast between the employers. After removing stop words, the most frequent term in both ads is *network* (11 occurrences in CWS, 39 in MongoDB), followed in CWS by *experience*, *support*, and *DoD*, and in MongoDB by the company's own name (21 occurrences), *experience*, *access*, *infrastructure*, and *global*. The OWL (n.d.-a) notes that the qualifications section "usually gives the basic qualifications for the position"; the vocabulary here reveals what kind of basic each employer means. CWS's high-frequency words are institutional (*DoD*, *government*, *clearance*, *certification*), signaling that the gate is credentials and eligibility. MongoDB's are architectural (*global*, *infrastructure*, *access*, *design*), signaling that the gate is demonstrated scope. The title carries the same difference: CWS elevates it to "Subject Matter Expert" and "lead technical authority" (CWS, 2026), so senior means escalation and accountability, whereas MongoDB frames senior as "ownership" with a timeline, expecting a "senior technical owner" within twelve months (MongoDB, 2026).

Soft skills are where manual coding matters most. Counting only explicit requirements, MongoDB lists one soft skill outright, "excellent communication skills, with the ability to explain complex technical topics to a wide range of audiences," plus judgment, "the judgment to prioritize and communicate risk and strategy to stakeholders" (MongoDB, 2026). CWS lists

none. Coding the duties changes the picture. CWS asks the engineer to "interface with Government, CSPs, GSPs, and external stakeholders," to "mentor and lead network engineering staff," and to "lead resolution of complex network issues across all OSI layers" (CWS, 2026). Each is a task, but none can be performed without communication, leadership, and structured problem solving, so all three were coded as implied soft skills. The strongest implied skill in both ads is time management. MongoDB names the condition directly in a duty, "balance long-term network architecture work with day-to-day operational support," and adds that the engineer must "work across multiple time zones" and hit staged milestones at three, six, and twelve months (MongoDB, 2026). CWS never uses the phrase, but a single SME who is "primary CONUS and global" point of contact for escalation while also guiding "modernization initiatives" is being asked to hold operations and projects at once (CWS, 2026). Lipovac and Babac (2021) found time management among the essential competencies by counting words; in these two ads the skill is present in the workload and nearly absent from the vocabulary, which is the gap the OWL (n.d.-b) teaches candidates to read for. Rios et al. (2020), analyzing 142,000 postings, found communication, collaboration, and problem solving to be the most-demanded skills across occupations; the coding here surfaced the same three, but two of them only as implications.

Phrasing also carries culture. MongoDB calls itself "built for change," lists affinity groups and parental leave, and treats the candidate as a future owner. CWS describes no culture of its own; the culture is the customer's, and the phrase "some hybrid work may be approved by the government customer" tells the reader who sets working conditions (CWS, 2026). The candidate who fits MongoDB is comfortable being visible and measured; the one who fits CWS is comfortable with authority, procedure, and compliance.

Relating the Findings to Lipovac and Babac

These findings agree with Lipovac and Babac (2021) on three points and diverge on one. They agree that ads foreground the employer, that verbs carry duties and noun phrases carry skills, and that verbs and adjectives each sit near 9 to 11% of the text. They diverge on the visibility of soft skills. The article found social and communicative skills to be the largest category in three of its four regions and concluded that demand for social and personal skills is growing faster than demand for professional ones (Lipovac & Babac, 2021, p. 521). Read at the level of explicit requirements, these ads would suggest the opposite: a senior network role is gated by clearances, certifications, and named platforms. The divergence is best explained by field and level. Lipovac and Babac sampled all occupations, where social skills are the common denominator; a senior infrastructure ad has a long list of specific hard skills competing for the same space. Graham and Lu (2023) begin from the observation that many cybersecurity employers "deemphasize the importance of soft skills" (p. 937), yet their semantic analysis of 17,929 postings found teamwork and knowledge management among the most sought-after competencies. Ozyurt and Ayaz (2024) similarly found business and customer-service competence among the top three skills in 9,407 cybersecurity ads, alongside systems engineering. The soft-skill demand Lipovac and Babac measured is therefore present in senior network engineering but expressed through duties, which is why manual coding of implication recovers it while a word count does not. Succi and Canovi (2020) show why this matters: employers rate soft skills more highly than graduates realize, so a candidate who reads only the requirements list will under-prepare for the interview.

Fit With My Own Skill Set

As a senior network engineer with [X] years in enterprise routing, switching, and firewall administration, I meet the hard-skill core of both ads: routing protocols, LAN/WAN design, VPN, and vendor firewall platforms. The CWS ad exposes a credential gap rather than a skill gap. It requires an active CISSP and a Secret clearance, and I currently hold [certifications] and [clearance status]; the cybersecurity degree I am completing addresses the knowledge domains the CISSP tests, so that ad describes a position I could hold within [timeframe] rather than today. MongoDB exposes the opposite gap. Its requirements are ones I largely satisfy, but its implied skills, explaining risk to non-technical stakeholders, mentoring, and balancing project and operational work across time zones, are the ones I would need to document with examples rather than certificates. The analysis also changes how I would write to each employer: to CWS I would lead with eligibility and compliance vocabulary, because that is what its nouns reward; to MongoDB I would lead with a project I owned end to end, because its verbs reward ownership.

Conclusion

Two ads with the same title described two different senior engineers, and the difference showed less in the requirements than in the proportions and grammar of the text. Both spent more words on themselves than on the candidate, both used verbs for duties and nouns for skills, and both buried the soft skills that decide success inside descriptions of the work. Counting made those patterns visible but alone would have understated the soft-skill demand; coding implication is what reconciled these ads with Lipovac and Babac (2021) and the cybersecurity literature. A job ad rewards being read twice: once for what it lists, and once for what its duties quietly assume.

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