

An Analysis of the FBI's Cybersecurity Employment Ad

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Job Advertising as a process takes a lot of effort and research to get both a concise and informative message to possible employees. As I move from college to professional life this process becomes all too clear to see and as such I sought to learn how to analyze job advertisements for the field I would like to pursue, cybersecurity. In today's digital economy, cybersecurity has become one of the most essential fields for protecting organizations from threats that can jeopardize data, reputation, and public trust. Again, as someone trying to get into the field of cybersecurity I analyzed multiple job advertisements in the field but decided to focus on a job listing from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, or FBI, for a special agent with cybersecurity and general technology experience. My goal with this analysis was to understand what skills and qualifications employers in this field, specifically a federal employer like the FBI, would prioritize, how these expectations align with findings from Ivona Lipovac and Marina Bagić Babac's content analysis of job advertisements, and how my own skillset reflects the needs of this profession. By performing a qualitative content analysis of this job advertisement, I found that employers in cybersecurity emphasize more prominently soft skills over hard skills, and balance having skills with working in a professional work environment.

The FBI's job advertisement seeks to find applicants with cybersecurity backgrounds to "use your cybersecurity background to become an FBI special agent." Unlike conventional cybersecurity analyst roles, I found this position to merge information security experience with law enforcement responsibility. The ad highlighted the opportunity to "upskill and become an expert" by applying previous technical knowledge to "protect the nation from cyberattacks, terrorism, fraud, and evolving threats." Analyzing the ad further I found that key responsibilities included investigating federal crimes, conducting actual cybersecurity operations, maintaining communication with other federal agencies, and staying physically fit for operations outside the

office. Candidates for this job must be U.S citizens, be capable of obtaining a Top Secret/SCI clearance, and possess at least a bachelor's degree in a technical field such as computer science, data science, information technology, and perhaps in my case, cybersecurity. Being a FBI special agent in cybersecurity gives a salary range of about \$99,461 to \$128,329 and includes quality of life benefits. I found the ad to appeal to candidates who value challenge and continuous learning while also wanting to serve their country. I came to this conclusion based on the language used that was both assertive and motivational, featuring phrases like "build on your experience," "protect our nation," and "set yourself apart." I found the language really complemented a tone that defined the role's duties but also proved it to be a mission driven employer seeking employees who can prove themselves technically but also move forward professionally.

To really interpret the FBI's ad I decided to use a qualitative text analysis, which allows researchers to identify themes, patterns, and meanings within a text. (Krippendorff, 2013) I also took into account both Ivona Lipovac and Marina Bagić Babac's approach to analysis and ManMohan S. Sodhi and Byung-Gak Son's description of analysis by breaking up the ad into three categories based on specifically analyzing the language used. The three categories include: technical skills and hard qualifications, soft skills and professional behavioral traits, and organizational branding and work culture. (Sodhi & Son, 2009) My process included close reading of the text to locate recurring verbs, adjectives, and rhetorical devices that reflect the employer's priorities. For example, I took note of terms like "investigate," "collaborate," and "protect" that denote certain action oriented values indicative of a federal organization like the FBI. I also took note of phrases used like "commitment to professional growth" which suggests a supportive culture in which the employers help promote professional growth and promotion. I found that through categorizing these words helped me understand not only the surface content,

which include skills and requirements, but also the underlying messages about what kind of person the FBI wants to recruit. (Sodhi & Son, 2009) (Lipovac & Babac, 2021) Furthermore I opted to use the program known as Voyant Tools which allowed me to visualize certain frequently used words and phrases that takes findings and creates data automatically for me.

After applying my methodology to analyzing the job ad and external applications like Voyant Tools I found multiple areas that outline both hard and soft skills for the job but also highlighted the FBI's workplace environment and employer-employee relationship. I found the ad clearly emphasizes technical expertise as a foundation for FBI agent candidacy. It calls for applicants with degrees in computer science, engineering, or related fields such as cybersecurity, and references the ability to "uncover crucial information" and "apply technical knowledge" in high stakes contexts relating to crime and national security. These phrases are important because they suggest a preference for analytical problem solving and the ability to perform investigations. I found that these requirements are indicative of how the federal government hires candidates, especially those with college degrees, as said by Lipovac & Babac; "The United States Federal Government is the biggest employer in the USA since six out of ten most represented employers are from the public sector and are funded by the USA government. Similar trends found in the UK are repeated in the US, where universities are among the most common employers."

(Lipovac & Babac, 2021) For cybersecurity specifically this means applicants must integrate knowledge specific to the field like threat detection, vulnerability analysis, and handling digital evidence. In terms of soft skills I found that although technical proficiency is central, I also found certain general, personal soft skills to also be important for the position. Terms like "think critically," "adapt quickly," and "collaborate with elite professionals" indicate the agency's need for teamwork, communication, and emotional composure and intelligence. These soft skills are

again indicative of what data presents about what soft skills are needed for jobs like the FBI being as evidenced by Jolanta Łacka-Badura in her book *Recruitment Advertising as an Instrument of Employer Branding : A Linguistic Perspective*; “systemic integrity refers to the essential organisational integrity and identity of an organisation, its ‘unit wholeness’ implying collective and functionally cooperative behaviour (teamwork).” (Łacka-Badura, 2015) Lastly, as specified in Lipovac and Babac’s findings, the FBI ad heavily integrates employer branding into its ad language. Particularly I found the phrases “set yourself apart” and references to “professional growth” and “supportive work environment” frame the agency as not only an employer but as a professional and communal work environment. The fact the ad even mentions soft skills with hard skills at all is important because it mirrors what Lipovac and Babac found in their report that “it is safe to conclude that there is a growing demand for social and personal skills than for professional and decision-making skills.” (Lipovac & Babac, 2021)

Ivona Lipovac and Marina Bagić Babac’s content analysis found that many modern job ads often advertise a mix of technical and interpersonal skills, often finding that soft skills are the real determining factor for what separates employees in a largely technical market. (Lipovac & Babac, 2021) Reading through the ad it is clear that although hard technical skills are a must for working as an agent I also found that the ad also incentivizes soft skills like communication and emotional composure as a result of the nature of work with the FBI. The ad also puts forward frequent remarks about the cooperative work environment and as such I believe it does this purposely to entice those with good soft communication and social skills and keep employees who shy away from these skills away, a good way of weeding out what they wouldn’t need. This is obviously reminiscent of what Lipovac and Babac found in their study in which many employers use soft skills to differentiate applicants to hire, for the job of cybersecurity this is

important as many get into the field and can prove themselves technically. Even though many can work through their job with technical skills, jobs want people who can work these skills but also work proficiently in a social environment, the all around good employees, and the FBI is no different from my analysis. (Lipovac & Babac, 2021)

Analyzing this posting really made me reflect deeply on my own readiness for a cybersecurity role as important as this one, a job that blends technical, investigative, and interpersonal demands. I believe that I have developed a strong foundation in technical knowledge such as network defence through being proficient in applications like Wireshark, ethical hacking through applications like Metasploit, and general communication knowledge through my past in programs like JROTC which required public speaking. Two of these skills align directly for candidates who can “apply technical knowledge” to real world situations. I believe that through college coursework in python programming gives me an edge, though not mentioned in the ad, in technical skills. But besides my experience in public speaking I realize that I don’t have the interpersonal skills that really set me apart and as evidenced by Lipovac & Babac this is something that can determine if one is hired or not. Through this realization and analysis of the ad I have found that job ads serve more than lists of qualifications but are also texts that emphasize the dichotomy between actual technical job performance and one’s reaction to their work environment. Analyzing the ad with Lipovac & Babac’s findings in mind made it clear that through this job one must not only have technical skills but also be proficient in communication, adaptability, and ethical integrity as is the nature of a law enforcement job. Because of my findings I believe that in my own career I must hone my skills technically but also work on improving as a communicator. As cybersecurity threats and crime become more complex, I find that the most successful professionals, who eventually find themselves as FBI

agents, will be those who combine their deep technical knowledge with empathy, clarity, and morality.

To conclude, analyzing the FBI's special agent job application using the content found in Lipovac & Babac's content analysis, amongst others, I found that the FBI integrates both candidates with real technical skill with soft interpersonal skills and is evidence of a growing trend amongst employers relating to soft skills being more indicative of good performance than technical hard ones. I found that analyzing this text really made me realize my faults as a cybersecurity prospect and has gotten me to think about what I must do to build those soft skills employers are really looking for.

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