

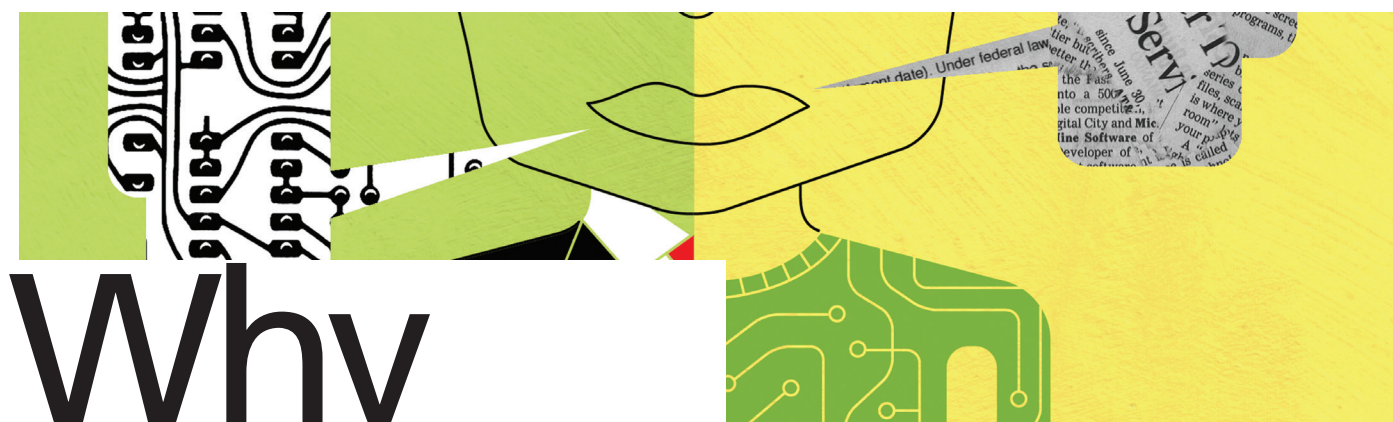
tech talk

INSIDE NEWS AND VIEWS ON TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION IN THE IT COMMUNITY



CASE STUDIES:
IT industry
professionals
make the case
for certification

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Why Certification Matters

Five IT managers cite their own experience to explain why, when it comes to pursuing job opportunities in the field of information technology, getting certified should be your first priority.

“What certification gives the individual and the vendor is a baseline measurement of the skill you attain. Certification provides a consistent measure that is designed to validate the skills you achieve.”

Chuck Cooper, Director
IBM Certification Program

A view from IBM

Why do so many employers insist on certification—and why is it so vital for your career? Just ask Chuck Cooper, program director for certification at IBM. “If you’re going to become proficient in a technology, you need to do one thing in all cases—build your skills and take some training,” he says. “What certification gives the individual and the vendor is a baseline measurement of the skill you attain. There’s a wide spectrum of what people take out of classes. Certification provides a consistent measure that is designed to validate the skills you achieve.”

Cooper emphasizes the fact that certification builds confidence on the part of prospective customers, sellers, and business partners. “In the academic world, a college degree is good. However, if I look at a company’s proposal and see certifications listed, then I have increased confidence that these are people who have the skills to deliver my solution,” he says. “Certification is a legitimate way for you to demonstrate currency of skills. It helps create a level playing field.”

Cooper notes that given today’s unsettled marketplace, certification takes on greater importance. “People out of work will look for every possible edge on their résumés,” he says. “I believe certifications are listed [on résumés] now more than in the past.”

“My students were beating out four-year college students for jobs. The big question was why. I started contacting companies and found out that certification carried a lot of weight.”

Terry Hand, CIS instructor
Ogeechee Technical College
Statesboro, Georgia

Word gets around in Georgia

Given all that we’ve heard about the value of a college education, how might an IT-certified two-year student fare in a head-to-head competition with a graduate armed with a four-year degree?

Very well, as it turns out. In fact, it happens all the time, according to Terry Hand, CIS instructor at Ogeechee Technical College in Statesboro, Georgia. Hand says the entire state took notice shortly after CompTIA certification courses were added to the curriculum. “My students were beating out four-year college students for jobs,” says Hand, whose school produced 70 certification graduates through the CompTIA A+, Network+ and Security+ programs in 2008. “There were people with four-year degrees in IT, yet I had two-year students who were defeating them for jobs. The big question was why. I started contacting companies and found out that certification carried a lot of weight.”

That wasn’t all. “We also noticed that people who did interview [and] who had certification were hired at a greater rate,” Hand says. Once the news spread, Ogeechee Technical College found itself deluged with applications. Certification classes have been overflowing, and the school has even had to turn applicants away. “We’ve never had to do that before,” says Hand, who has been with the school for six years.

Meanwhile, the college’s portfolio of partnerships has grown to include some of the state’s biggest employers, including CNN, Verizon, the Georgia Board of Education, and Walmart. Many of these firms didn’t even bother to interview prospective candidates who didn’t have certification, Hand reports.

Certification the standard at an international business hub

What does certification say about you? Michael Rhodes, principal of Media Tek Ltd., who provides computer training for multinational corporations on the idyllic North Atlantic island of Bermuda, has a compelling answer: “If you’re certified, you’re proving that you’re serious, determined, and willing to see something through to the finish. These certifications say something about you as a person—that you’re willing to achieve this to get a position.”

Rhodes says that incoming class participants range from the unemployed and those in dead-end jobs to industry veterans seeking a refresher course or a leg up on the competition. And though he offers a variety of certification courses, Rhodes says the entry-level CompTIA A+ for IT technicians and Network+ for network professionals serve as a solid foundation.

“Often what people do in the IT industry is jump straight into the Microsoft level or Cisco level,” says Rhodes. “If they haven’t done the CompTIA certification, I don’t think they have that base knowledge.”

Rhodes observes that CompTIA certification focuses on broad, on-the-job issues that are relevant whether a person goes on to work at a company’s helpdesk or make the rounds as an IT technician.

“The certification classes do a good job of providing not just theory, but real-world knowledge,” he says. “They prepare students for going immediately into the industry.”

“If they haven’t done the CompTIA certification, I don’t think they have that base knowledge.”

Michael Rhodes
Principal, Media Tek Ltd.

“Certification was very heavily emphasized for the whole organization. It was required to maintain employment and to move up the career ladder.”

Alex Fogel, Senior IT professional
Ricoh and Samsung

A certification strategy worth copying

Alex Fogel, who managed the Japanese copier giant Ricoh's test development bulletin board from 1988 through 2005, recalls that each of the company's 5,000 employees in a technical role was required to obtain the appropriate certification within 90 days of being hired.

“At Ricoh, we weren't going to spend months training them on the basics,” Fogel says. “We expected them to have that going in. Certification was very heavily emphasized for the whole organization. It was required to maintain employment and to move up the career ladder.”

“People walk into a Best Buy and see A+ certified technicians,” he says. “CompTIA is recognized. The layman is starting to see the value of the professional service. It's invaluable from a service marketing perspective.”

Speaking of IT certification as a professional credential (and proof of job-specific skills) on a résumé, Fogel says it often carries far greater weight than a college degree.

In Texas, certification is on a roll

At Goodwill Industries of San Antonio, Texas, Mark Milton has witnessed his share of career makeovers. Now, the service provided by Milton and his team is about to kick into overdrive.

As Director of People Services and Career Academy at the agency, Milton operates a career resource center that helps roughly 30,000 people annually. He recently partnered with CompTIA to roll out a technical certification program. The initiative resulted from community requests and a report from the Texas Workforce Commission projecting industry demands.

“Obviously, technology is taking off everywhere, but it's growing here in San Antonio,” says Milton. “That's one of our top three in-demand industries right now.”

He said that offering the recognized brand of a CompTIA A+ certification class was an easy decision for the nonprofit, given its intent to provide a more educated and qualified workforce.

“At the end of the day, it all boils down to certification being an internationally recognized credential. If you can put that on your résumé, you'll have a competitive advantage over another individual who doesn't have it.”

Mark Milton, Director of People
Services and Career Academy
Goodwill Industries of San Antonio, Texas

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