Networking Checklist: Earning Certifications

Network certification in five (plus) steps
Ed Tittel, Contributor

If you're a networking professional looking to protect or boost your career, you're in luck: There are plenty of certifications to choose from. Once you've chosen a certification to pursue, you'll find these steps useful for getting that certification.

1. Understand certification requirements: Visit the Web site of the vendor or sponsor that offers the certification, and track down all relevant details. Usually, this means preparing for and passing a sequence of one or more exams. The following may also be among your deliverables: application forms, references, work history, written submissions and videotape.

2. Find third-party commentary and advice: General certification resources, as well as more focused publications and all kinds of exam preparation Web sites will not only tell you what exams you must take; they'll also recommend exam sequences, provide insight and information about exam content, offer study plans, and review related exam prep books, courses and online materials.

3. Establish exam sequence: Figure out the proper order in which to take your exams for credentials where multiple exams are involved (these include most senior- level Microsoft, Cisco, Novell, Oracle and other big-name certification programs).

4. Consider the following tips for each exam:
- Find and print exam objectives
- Purchase one or more study guides.
- Purchase one or more Exam Crams.
- Analyze related training.
- Purchase one or more practice exams.
- Review the exam objectives and develop a plan of study
- Test as you go
- Test for assessment, then for readiness
- Sign up for and take the exam
- Repeat until you pass!

5. Monitor your progress: Typically you'll find pass/fail notification information on the sponsor or vendor Web site. Keep an eye on the status to ensure it's progressing as expected. If their records don't match your accomplishments, the onus is on you to work with sponsors to set things straight. Keep the printed score you'll get at the testing center when you take an exam, just in case something goes awry.

IT certifications usually include a paper certificate. They may also offer access to other perks, depending on the sponsor. Keep track of your tests and follow up with the exam sponsor to ensure you get the proper results. Good luck. With this check-list in hand, you'll find yourself adding all kinds of certification titles in no time!

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