

Why Certify?

Every company, irrespective of its size, has to manage some kind of information. For example, companies need to store accounting entries, sales data, employee information, customers and suppliers' contacts, etc. How do these companies manage information? Some manage it manually while others use digital means like computers. The technology used to manage any kind of information is called Information Technology.

The phrase 'Information Technology' does not refer to one kind of software or package. It is a generic term used for all kinds of software and hardware technologies used in managing information digitally. The main objective of Information Technology is to provide the right information to the right person at the right time. Information Technology does not change due to economic conditions. It has become as much a part of organizational structure as the accounting, marketing, and sales departments.

To paraphrase a discussion heard outside a major company headquarters.,

"Business is going to be a war of information rather than of marketing tactics or sales plans. The one who manages information better will win."

There has been a huge debate in the computer field over the value of a college education versus specialized training. This debate is more prevalent in this field than most others because of the number of people who are self taught or have simply acquired extensive experience from job-related or personal duties. However, in our careers in the computer field, most of us are faced at one time or another with a decision. Do we further our education? And if so, what is the best way to do that? What's important is the fact that the computer industry is moving so fast that the technology changes totally every two or three years. Excellent people making incredible salaries find themselves having difficulty getting jobs because their skills are no longer needed ... or are so outdated that nobody does that anymore. So how does one keep up with the pace of IT related changes?

Invest in Yourself !

One self-investment that does provide a tangible and relatively immediate return is technical certification. More than half (51 percent) of the millions of IT and technical professionals invest in themselves in this manner every year. The majority of technical certificants pay for or at least share the costs of technical certification with their employers. They have real skin in the game-are making a very real investment in themselves. So it is natural that with such an investment made, these professionals expect more than a feel-good result from their certifications-they expect an economic return.

According to the respondents to Certification Magazine's most recent survey, the current technical-certification market is both large and active. Technical certificants hold more certifications now than last year-an increase of some 29 percent over 2000-this in the face of a sluggish technology industry. According to the study results, the average certificant currently holds nearly four (3.86 on average) different technical certifications. Not only do these IT professionals have multiple certifications now, they plan to aggressively pursue even more in the future. Seventy-nine percent of the professionals surveyed said they plan to pursue additional certifications in the coming year.

A comparison is in order. Most IT certified professionals have been in the IT industry for 8.38 years. Since their first certification, they have attained, on average, one new certification per year. They have a history of education, as 65

percent have college degrees, with 18 percent having graduate and professional degrees. The 35 percent who are not college graduates have taken classes at technical colleges and institutes. The largest number (34 percent of study respondents) of these technical certificants work jobs in networking-network engineering, network management and network administration. The vast majority of certificants studied were primarily on the Windows platform (73 percent), with 18 percent citing Linux/UNIX as their primary platform.

These IT professionals, on average, have been at their current company for the past four years (4.18 years) and have been in the same job position for a little longer than three years (3.1 years). Their companies tend to be large-averaging 560 employees. Eighty-seven percent of the study respondents were W-2 employees, and 13 percent were 1099 contractors. The average salary of the certificants studied was \$55,577.

Certifications and Job Promotion

Of the certificants studied, 37 percent received a promotion within the first year of attaining their primary certification. While promotion does not necessarily mean an increase in salary, it is an indicator of long-range economic benefits to be realized on the job. Of course, there does not have to be a causal relationship between attaining a certification and receiving a promotion. Of those certificants who did get promotions, most (83 percent) felt their certifications played a major role in the advancement.

It has been said that one cannot eat a title. Especially in these times of economic sensitivity, IT professionals are expecting certifications to make the cash register ring. How are such economic expectations being fulfilled? According to the study findings, certificant expectations are being met quite well.

Certification and Raises

On average, more than half (53 percent) of the certificants studied reported they had received a raise within the first year of attaining their primary certification. Of those certificants who received a raise in salary, 74 percent said their primary certification had a significant impact on their salary increase. Thirty-nine percent of the certificants studied said they received a definite, certification-related raise within the first year of attaining their primary certification.

The average certificant studied reported a 10.2 percent salary increase within the first year of attaining the primary certification. While this constitutes a healthy raise, some certifications delivered noteworthy increases for certificants. Microsoft certifications were the top three certifications generating salary in-creases. Microsoft's MCSE (24.1 percent raise), MCSA (17.6 percent raise) and MCSA (14.6 percent raise) generated the most dramatic percent raises for certificants.