

# Recertification in the IT Industry

In a rapidly developing IT market, an earned certification may quickly become dated. Recertification is a process to periodically verify that the knowledge and skills originally certified remain valid. Let's take a look at why recertification is important for your program and its customers, some common objections to recertification, and a few options for how to set up a recertification program to best meet those needs and minimize those objections.

To establish a solid recertification policy and program, you'll want to start with an understanding of why the original certification exists. What value does it provide to its various stakeholders? In IT, certification sponsors typically launch certifications to solidify and publicize a core of IT professionals who are highly skilled in using the sponsor's product(s) to meet challenging and important business needs. Partners and other certification holders want the certification to distinguish themselves from "ordinary" users so they get better jobs, and often they appreciate how preparing for certifications can help structure their learning and their professional development. Your recertification program is more likely to be well received if it aligns with these purposes.

Unfortunately, some recertification programs get a bad reputation. They may be perceived as nothing more than "money grabbing" on the part of the certification sponsor, or they may seem too burdensome, or even unfair. The best strategy to maintain the reputation of a recertification program is to ensure the value of recertifying and that the stakeholders remain aware of its value. Tactics will center around recertification period, method, and price, and fostering an engaged community of your certification holders.

The recertification period for a given certification should take into account how rapidly the technology is changing relative to the task for which the technology is used. This will vary with the level of the certification. For example, if your product has evolved primarily by adding advanced features, holders of lower-level certifications may not need to recertify as often as more advanced users. You may need to guard your recertification policy against marketing impulses. Evaluate carefully whether a change in product really requires recertification. If the way the technology is used in a given job has not changed substantially, then the original certification should still hold.

In addition, the method of recertification can help ensure your stakeholders are confident of the value of their recertification. See the table below to compare different methods.

Recertification Method	+	–
Retake same exam (or new version of same exam)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obvious relationship with original certification</li> <li>• Simplest to administer</li> <li>• If exams are versioned, can clearly indicate “vintage” of certification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be most expensive for candidates</li> <li>• If revision pace is slow, may not provide obvious value</li> </ul>
Take evaluation on updates/new features only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obvious relationship with original exam</li> <li>• Simpler, less burdensome for candidates</li> <li>• May cost less</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less appropriate if original skills may degrade or be lost</li> </ul>
Micro-evaluations spread over time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obvious relationship to original exam</li> <li>• Simpler, less burdensome for candidates</li> <li>• May be integrated into continuous education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be challenging to administer</li> </ul>
Non-exam recertification activities (points system)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoids redundancy with original exam</li> <li>• Can be integrated into continuous education</li> <li>• Can “credit” on-the-job activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship with original exam may not be obvious</li> <li>• Policies and administration can be complex</li> <li>• May not revalidate skills depending on what qualifies for “points”</li> </ul>

When pricing recertification, take into account the recertification period and the method, aiming to align cost with the value of recertifying to the party paying for it. Candidates who pay full price to take exactly the same set of questions every year may be skeptical that such “recertifying” provides much value. Thoughtfully structure your program and its costs so the skills verified through recertification, and the methods used to verify those skills, contribute in a meaningful, cost-effective way to the certification-holder’s career.

Finally, consider additional policies and structures that increase the value of maintaining certifications through the recertification process. For example, certified-only events and online communities can foster certification-holder pride. Identify certification holders as experts, passively through badging and actively by featuring them in your company's social media and other communications. Certification holders who experience continued value from their certification are well on their way towards becoming advocates for keeping their credential current.

Carefully considering the period, method, and cost of recertification, and fostering an engaged community of certification holders will give you a great start towards having an effective recertification program that provides obvious value to its stakeholders.