

AWS certifications: Worth the effort?

Will an AWS certification give you a leg-up in your job search, or start you on a certification wild goose chase when new technologies, and therefore certifications, are constantly released.



In this e-guide

- AWS certification types with the most street cred
- AWS careers benefit from skills, not certifications

In this e-guide:

A certification in AWS can certainly help your resume or sales pitch. It shows the employer or prospective client that you have the understanding necessary to get the job done. But does this make you a shoe-in? While a certification might help boost your chances, many are looking for a subject matter expert with hands-on experience. So are AWS certifications worth the effort it takes to earn them? And if so, which ones?

Continue reading this e-Guide to find our experts' objective opinions.

In this e-guide

■ AWS certification types with the most street cred

■ AWS careers benefit from skills, not certifications

■ AWS certification types with the most street cred

Alan Earls, Contributor

<http://searchaws.techtarget.com/tip/AWS-certification-types-with-the-most-street-cred>

Many IT job seekers believe AWS certification training will improve their career prospects. And there are a range of AWS certification types for newcomers and skilled IT professionals alike.

IT administrators place emphasis on [hands-on experience](#), and some AWS certification types require extra degrees of effort and expertise to pass. IT professionals can get a leg up on their peers by obtaining advanced certifications.

The AWS Certified Solutions Architect - Professional certification is the toughest to gain, said Dan Robinson, senior engagement manager at TriCore Solutions, a consultancy based in Norwell, Mass. This certification validates advanced technical skills and experience needed to design distributed applications and systems on the AWS platform.

Kevin Clements, CTO at SHI International, a provider of information technology products and services based in Somerset, N.J., also put the Certified Solutions Architect - Professional at the top of the certification hierarchy.

In this e-guide

■ [AWS certification types with the most street cred](#)

■ [AWS careers benefit from skills, not certifications](#)

"This certification ... requires you to choose solutions that optimize around the customer's individual priorities," he said. For example, each business places different levels of priority on saving money, time to delivery and [application performance](#), resulting in vastly different workloads.

The AWS Certified DevOps Engineer - Professional certification, which tests technical expertise to provision, operate and manage [distributed application](#) systems on the AWS platform, is probably just as challenging to achieve. AWS suggests that those seeking this cert have two or more years' experience provisioning, operating and managing AWS environments before undergoing AWS certification training. They also should have requisite associate certifications.

Managed services providers test their AWS mettle

The sprawling AWS ecosystem is built on the talent and capabilities of thousands of partner organizations. And those partners also need to acquire AWS certifications to keep pace with competitors and be able to help IT enterprises solve their problems.

Some AWS certification types hold extra value in the [AWS Marketplace](#), where managed services providers (MSPs) and technology vendors are listed. AWS' Managed Service Program and competency programs put vendors to the test to earn AWS benchmarks.

In this e-guide

■ [AWS certification types with the most street cred](#)

■ [AWS careers benefit from skills, not certifications](#)

"[Certifications] help customers understand that the partner has a validated capability to be able to provide a given set of services, giving them confidence that they're talking to vendors who are able to work on a particular space," Clements said. The audit requirements are thorough and help set a baseline for customers looking for MSPs, he explained.

MSPs hire certified AWS professionals with particular skills to fit the diverse needs of their enterprise customers, said Randy Streu, VP of business development at Sumo Logic, a cloud-based log management and analytics service based in Redwood City, Calif. "From the partner perspective, achieving AWS certification helps us to co-educate our customers who are already using or thinking about using AWS in a given category," he said. For example, AWS is rolling out three [new specialty certifications](#) around advanced networking, big data and security.

AWS vs. Google: For the love of cloud providers

You're in the market for a new cloud provider, and you have an idea of your 'perfect match,' but do your wants and needs match up to what's available? Take [this quiz](#) and find out. "The full suite of AWS services is now so large that even the professional-level certifications don't guarantee that someone is experienced with the specific workloads or tools needed for a specific business workload," he said.

In this e-guide

■ [AWS certification types with the most street cred](#)

■ [AWS careers benefit from skills, not certifications](#)

For example, an IT pro can have experience building complex web platforms to deliver SaaS without any actual experience using Elastic MapReduce to run Hadoop or Spark, or in architecting complex hybrid network deployments. "The new specialty certifications make it easier to validate expertise [of a MSP] and for customers to find them and make sure they've found the right people for their specific project," he said.

➤ **Next article**

In this e-guide

- AWS certification types with the most street cred
- AWS careers benefit from skills, not certifications

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David Carty, Site Editor

<http://searchaws.techtarget.com/news/4500278045/AWS-careers-benefit-from-skills-not-certifications>

If an IT job seeker has his head wrapped around the cloud -- instead of stuck in the clouds -- his odds of landing a job are quite promising.

AWS careers and cloud skills are on the rise, and IT professionals seeking a new opportunity will find no shortage of prospects.

Job postings requesting cloud skills have seen consistent year-over-year growth, according to IT and engineering jobs site Dice. The number of job postings increased 38% from January 2014 to January 2015, and rose another 37% year-on-year into 2016, making it one of the fastest-growing skills employers desired, according to Dice.

Increasingly, AWS is synonymous and representative of the cloud market. AWS' top-dog standing among [infrastructure as a service](#) providers means those in search of AWS careers must know how to [operate in that environment](#). Considering AWS has been a prominent cloud player since its launch in 2006, many of today's young IT professionals have undergone a thorough Amazon cloud indoctrination.

In this e-guide

■ [AWS certification types with the most street cred](#)

■ [AWS careers benefit from skills, not certifications](#)

"AWS has now been around long enough that an entire generation of developers has grown up on it," said Carl Brooks, an analyst at 451 Research. After five or six years, it's achieved semimainstream use, he said, which is "enough time to go through a full computer sciences course and do some job training as an undergrad." Now, graduates "not only know what AWS is, [they] basically marinated in it," he added.

AWS skills, accordingly, are in increased demand. "It is a de facto lingua franca at this point," Brooks said. At the same time, other in-demand skills closely mirror the AWS suite of services.

In LinkedIn's list of "Hottest Skills of 2015," published in January, "cloud and distributed computing" was ranked the No. 1 job skill sought by global employers. Other high-ranking areas of expertise -- such as "statistical analysis and data mining" in second, "mobile development" coming in sixth on the list and "storage systems and management" at eight -- can be managed with AWS products.

As the cloud grows to encompass other areas of the business, AWS has been all too happy to nurture that evolution by introducing services to analyze data, track [Internet of Things](#) objects and perform other business functions.

AWS careers are available to be had for those willing to put in the effort. If you have expertise in AWS, "you can basically punch your own ticket right now," Brooks said.

In this e-guide

- [AWS certification types with the most street cred](#)
- [AWS careers benefit from skills, not certifications](#)

Partner up with a consultant

The diversity and confluence of AWS products has cultivated an entire partner network that numbers in the tens of thousands. As enterprise IT staffs shrink, or simply tread water, they turn to the [AWS Partner Network \(APN\)](#), where numerous consulting and technology partners are at the ready. This feeds the AWS coffers -- partners must reach a revenue threshold to remain in the APN -- and the job market alike.

"This cottage industry of managed services providers, consultants and AWS specialty shops has sprung up like mushrooms," Brooks said. "They're all AWS partners, and they all focus on effectively using AWS and being able to demonstrate that to other people. They sit between enterprise consumption and AWS itself."

Enterprise users aren't as actively hiring cloud-savvy IT pros, because they're looking for [managed service providers](#) to provide that middle step, according to Brooks. Instead, "there's an awful lot of growth within that particular niche, the layer that [communicates] between AWS and the development shop."

Brooks mentioned a specific partner that planned to grow its staff to 45 members after employing just 15 last year. The company's CTO was so busy with technical requests from clients that he had no time to interview job seekers.

In this e-guide

■ [AWS certification types with the most street cred](#)

■ [AWS careers benefit from skills, not certifications](#)

Joe Emison, CTO of BuildFax Inc., based in Asheville, N.C., illustrates the trend toward hiring consultants -- his business has gone seven years without an in-house IT professional.

"I think it's hard to hire talent -- I know it is -- in this climate, and I think you'd be better off hiring a firm," said Emison, who recommends ThoughtWorks, Pivotal Labs and Originate among higher-end firms. "I think it's well worth bringing in firms like that at the beginning to help you set up the practice, and then arrange for check-ins every once in a while to make sure you're not drifting too far off course."

With a glut of [AWS partners](#), job seekers can tailor their training to match a particular opening -- or create a niche as an expert in a particular type of AWS deployment.

It isn't enough for IT pros to just read blog posts, scan through [Stack Overflow discussion threads](#) and attend conferences. They need to get their hands in the mix.

"I think this is true, in general, about new technology -- there is not any good continuing education in IT," Emison said. "Most people learn whatever they learn in whatever school they're in, then they go to a company and learn practice, and they simply rarely learn any new skills. Any time you have a new skill that comes along, the vast majority of people implementing it are implementing it badly and wrong."

Ultimately, it's a matter of trial and error for developers and other IT pros -- but employers also want to see that experimentation. [Core AWS](#)

In this e-guide

■ [AWS certification types with the most street cred](#)

■ [AWS careers benefit from skills, not certifications](#)

[competencies](#) -- storage, compute and networking -- are beyond necessary, and can even be seen as common IT parlance.

"It's a part of basic systems understanding as much as being able to know what the parts inside of a computer do. You have to know what's available and possible on platforms, such as AWS and Azure" Brooks said.

The glut of job openings means broad demand for a variety of skills. Developers should gain [competencies with AWS Lambda](#), Docker containers and microservices architectures, but also explore new cloud services when released. Programming experience and an understanding of Linux system administration are helpful, as Windows is not an ideal environment for orchestration.

AWS has more than 1,000 potential API calls -- compared with around 300 for [Microsoft PowerShell](#) -- which speaks to the wide-sweeping compatibility of the AWS framework, according to Brooks. The more proficiencies an IT pro can list, the more opportunities will become available.

Emison typically derides job requirements in any form, but he said he wants to know that a collaborator or employee is, above all, nimble-minded and self-challenging.

"You want to continuously improve yourself," Emison said. "The best practices way of [deploying in the cloud] in a year and 24 months will have substantial changes. You have to be willing to believe whatever you're doing right now in cloud will be thought of as a [poor] way to set up the cloud in 12, 18, 24 months. If you don't have people with that attitude, you are going to

In this e-guide

■ AWS certification types with the most street cred

■ AWS careers benefit from skills, not certifications

get stuck. It changes so rapidly. You've got to be willing to continually change."

Skills rule the roost in AWS careers

Amazon offers five options for AWS certification: Associate-level certifications for solutions architects, SysOp administrators and developers; and Professional-level certifications for solutions architects and DevOps engineers.

AWS certifications are viewed by many as a [benchmark for qualified candidates](#). They are not, however, golden tickets to a new or better job.

"I think the right way to think about certification is that it might be a low bar," according to Emison. "In the absence of any other ability to vet candidates, it would be good to [evaluate certifications]."

Vendor bias can contribute to poorly executed cloud deployments. In some cases, an AWS- recommended approach may not fit a business' needs.

[Amazon certifications](#) aren't really a good indicator of best practices, Emison said. "If you are an organization, and your goal is to change what you are doing now, then you really need to have high talent and real subject matter expertise. It can't just be certifications."

Still, at an affordable price for many job seekers, it's likely a good idea to get certified, as employers have a hard enough time evaluating candidates' abilities.

In this e-guide

■ AWS certification types with the most street cred

■ AWS careers benefit from skills, not certifications

"[Employers] don't have a good way to judge those skill sets yet," Brooks said. "[Certifications] show that you have the ability to show up and pass a written test. It's probably not a bad idea to pick up a few, if you can pass a test and gain those basic skills."

That's no guarantee, however, that a candidate can actually perform their necessary job functions. Emison said he asks conceptual cloud questions when evaluating potential employees, and many businesses conduct a technical challenge to make sure a candidate possesses the necessary skills.

The ultimate motto for a candidate might be summed up bluntly by Brooks: "The ultimate expression of cloud computing is, 'Put up or shut up.'"

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➤ **Next article**

In this e-guide

■ AWS certification types with
the most street cred

■ AWS careers benefit from
skills, not certifications