Title:
The Future Of Computer Certification Exams

Word Count:
503

Summary:
Computer certification exams have changed tremendously over the years. Chris
Bryant, CCIE #12933, examines these changes and offers projections on future
changes.

Keywords:
ccna, ccnp, exam, pass, free, certification, cisco, nat, computer

Article Body:
The format and difficulty of computer certification exams is constantly
changing. When I took my first certification exam (Novell NetWare 3.1x CNA,
January 1997), there was no such thing as a simulator question, and my practical
skills really were not tested. The exams then were much heavier on memorization.

One factor that helped make up for that was that the Novell exams were adaptive.
If you missed a question on a particular topic, you would continue to be asked
questions about that topic until you got it right. You couldn't afford to be
weak in any topic, because the exam would most likely find that out and keep
hitting you with questions on that topic until you failed.

Adding to the stress, after a certain number of questions your exam could end at
any time. You had no idea how many questions you would get, just that you would
get at least 15. Every time you hit the "next" button after question 15, you
didn't know if you'd get another question or if the exam would suddenly end and
give you a pass or fail response.

Times have changed. Cisco has led the way in introducing simulator questions to
their exams, where the candidate is presented with a simulation of a router or
network and asked to perform tasks that someone who is ready to earn that
certification should be able to perform. This is a much better test of
competency than the exams were eight years ago.

What will be the next "big jump" in computer certification exams? To earn the
world's most difficult technical certification, the CCIE, the candidate must
first pass a rigorous 100-question qualification exam, and must then pass a

practical lab exam. The candidate is presented with an exacting set of network requirements and must build that network on a pod of Cisco routers and switches in less than eight hours.

This is just personal opinion and not "insider information", but I believe the day will come when the CCNA, CCNP, and other Cisco certifications will require some kind of hands-on practical lab to earn the certification. What better way to test competency than to have to perform tasks on real Cisco equipment? There would be more overhead for Cisco with this kind of testing, since lab equipment and lab proctors would be needed, but the already-prized CCNA and CCNP would become that much more valuable in the workplace if employers knew that to earn that certification, the job candidate had to pass a hands-on exam.

This would benefit the candidates as well, since it would do an even better job in protecting their investment in time and money. This could also be the next step in ferretting out candidates who try to get past the CCNA and CCNP exams via braindumps. As I always tell my students and customers, when you're standing in front of that router or switch, there is no multiple choice ... you either know it or you don't!

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