

# The International Market for Certification

KELLYE WHITNEY

**Certification in the United States has had its ups and downs in recent years. In the early part of the decade, there was a widespread industry battle between those who said certification had no value and those who were convinced that it did.**

The latter group won — new certs crop up regularly, old certs are retooled to fit technology's ever-changing needs and more IT professionals have turned to certification as one way to prove they're skilled, capable and deserving of coveted jobs in a tough employment market.

The international certification space, in particular, is drawing a lot of attention. Although most agree the United States has the biggest certification market, determining who the other major players are, and why they're busily getting certified, depends on whom you ask.

Industry experts agree, however, that hiring managers need to see not only technical competence, which certifications can demonstrate, but also business capabilities. Therefore, IT professionals worldwide should think outside the siloed world of IT and expand their knowledge into business.

## Who are the Players?

Cushing Anderson, program director at research company IDC, said the U.S. IT market and the resulting spending are four times the size of the next-largest country, Japan. There is a correlation between countries with the greatest IT spending and certification activity, Anderson said.

"Certifications are adopted by individuals who are interested in gaining employment in regions, and increased IT spending suggests there are more job opportunities. Therefore, people get certified," Anderson explained. "The fastest-growing IT environments, in order, are India, Russia, Mexico and Turkey. India and Russia are about the same size. Compared to the U.S., they are dramatically smaller, but their IT growth rates are triple the more developed countries."

Explosive growth rates imply there is a faster-growing certification market, although that does not necessarily translate to larger numbers of certified professionals — at least, not yet. For example, India's certified population is growing much faster than in the United States.

Much of India's increased interest in certification is the result of its use as an offshore resource, Anderson said. Whether multinational companies are setting up service centers in India, or Indian firms are setting up offshore locations so they can service their clients globally, companies are investing money in IT infrastructures, which require skilled individuals to run efficiently.

"The same is probably true for Russia," Anderson said. "The most rapid growth of IT spending is proba-



bly the result of service centers and IT support centers being opened up in Russia to service other countries. The reason why is that you have an intelligent, well-educated workforce that is a relatively inexpensive labor base.”

India is near the top of the heap in production of software and high-end servers as far as growth, so Anderson said you can assume certifications related to applications development will be in demand, as well as application deployment for things such as service-oriented architecture (SOA), middleware and systems infrastructure software, management software and security.

“High-end servers are high-growth, but they’re a very, very small market,” Anderson said. “We go to other markets such as personal computers (the computer of choice in a lot of different build-outs), contact centers, office buildings, whatever — there’s big growth in India,” Anderson said. “Russia has fast growth in packaged software and applications software, so certifications related to specific software packages are probably going to do very well, and that means vendor-specific to applications like ERP (enterprise resource planning), CRM (customer relationship management) or finance systems. You’re going to be certified to deploy or customize or even run ERP systems, etc.”

### **Why do International Countries Care About Certification?**

Neill Hopkins, CompTIA vice president of skills development, agreed the United States has the biggest IT market, and by association, certification market. He named European countries a close second, however, and said Asian countries such as India and China are catching up quickly.

“I would rank China as one of the most exciting ones for IT implementation, but it comes with a bit of a challenge,” Hopkins said. “The Chinese authorities are not necessarily going to follow the standards that have been set by the West. More particularly, they’re not very good followers of intellectual property.”

As the market in China evolves, the country likely will set new standards, and Hopkins said it will be interesting to see whether that significant market share affects the West.

Further, he said the Chinese government very strictly controls which certs IT professionals can pursue and/or earn. Often, if a certification is not government-endorsed, it won’t get the traction it might in another environment — IT certifications that do well in China usually are supported by a government-controlled group.

## CERTIFICATION'S BENEFITS FOR THE EMERGING HISPANIC MARKET

FELIPE PAYÁN

The Hispanic community is one of the largest-growing ethnic groups in California and the United States. Many IT professionals already have Hispanics participating in training sessions who would prefer a computer certification over a college degree to gain an entry-level position in the IT market or to secure a promotion in their career.

Although college degrees are still a standard benchmark across industries, many professionals emphasize "el práctico," or what works now. What works for many U.S. Hispanics and those in Latin America is the opportunity to achieve computer certification.

According to the September 2006 report by the Pew Hispanic Center, the Hispanic labor force continues to grow. Overall, employment for Hispanics increased by 993,000 in 2006, rising 5.3 percent over the previous 12-month period. With that growth in the Hispanic labor community comes the prospect to expand the opportunities of the Hispanic population through computer certification in a Web 2.0 economy.

One career course suggested for Hispanics interested in a technology career is to pursue CompTIA A+, Microsoft, Cisco, Apple and Red Hat certification.

Why these certifications? For starters, they offer the most opportunity for advancement. Because the cost of attending a four-year university is increasing, computer certification for Hispanic students offers a cost-effective alternative to a college degree.

One example of a person benefiting from computer certification is former student Josh Garcia, who is now a computer consultant serving the Los Angeles and San Diego areas.

Garcia is certified in CompTIA A+ and also is a Microsoft professional. He thinks the computer certifications have given him more confidence and have enhanced his career.

Computer certifications also can benefit Hispanics who already possess a college degree such as Ariel Barco, a help desk analyst who has a degree in computer science from California State University, Los Angeles.

He thinks pursuing a Cisco certification would be a big boost to his career plans, would carry more weight than a graduate degree in information systems and would be less time-consuming, in addition to costing less.

For people living south of the border, there are many advantages to pursuing computer certification. Residents of Latin America who have computer certifications immediately identify their expertise in software and hardware, and they assist the employment of Hispanics looking to increase their pay and job prospects.

Moreover, in many Latin American countries where U.S. technology dominates business and industry, there would be a natural fit for Hispanics with U.S. computer certifications who also work with U.S. technology.

Computer certifications for the emerging Hispanic workforce in the United States and in Latin America serve as an entry point into the technology-oriented economy.

As the IT sector grows, so will the opportunities and benefits for Hispanics who can gain a computer certification.

Felipe Payán has two graduate degrees in addition to the CompTIA A+, Security+ and an MCP. He has six years experience as a computer trainer in Los Angeles. He can be reached at [editor@certmag.com](mailto:editor@certmag.com).

"We've worked with many organizations in China, and it's a very tough market to get into," Hopkins said. "I'm not talking specifically IT certification. People often think it's the biggest IT market in the world, therefore, you're going to sell hundreds of thousands of certifications. That's not necessarily true.

"However, that doesn't mean they're not interested in certifications — they are. You just have to go about it

in such a way that it becomes attractive to the individual so that they are interested in having industry recognition and certifications that are world-recognized, not just Chinese government-recognized."

Internationally, individuals and organizations deploy technology products and services that primarily come from the West, which creates a market for IT certifications the West accepts.

"Microsoft sells certification to this market, Cisco's in the market, Oracle's in the market," Hopkins said. "We are also in the market, and we're finding it not as simple as going into a country and saying, 'Let us help you deploy the industry standard,' certainly not in the Chinese market or, to a lesser degree, in the Indian market. Those are the two rapidly growing economies."

Hopkins said the Latin American IT market, particularly that in Brazil, is a sleeping giant and most likely will play a role in the world economy in the next five to 10 years as it deploys a lot of IT equipment and infrastructure.

He also highlighted Korea and Japan, both of which are well-established economically and in terms of IT infrastructure.

"The Korean market is probably way ahead of the U.S. market when it comes to broadband implementation," he said. "They are very, very interested in certification. In fact, these are 'certification junkie' countries — they would like their kids to get as many certifications, credentials

and degrees as possible before they leave their postsecondary education. They value the certificate and the credential, and they use it as part of their hiring criteria."

But don't discount the United States, which is still No. 1 for certifications around the world and probably will remain so at least for the next three to five years, Hopkins said.

During that time, the IT certification market likely will grow, as more certification providers deploy more job role-based certifications. The United States will adopt these, and other countries will follow suit. Europe will become a major market for IT certifications, as well, Hopkins said.

Roughly 35 percent to 40 percent of all CompTIA certifications are taken outside the United States, and that is a greater percentage than last year. The A+ certification, in particular, is growing internationally, while it has flat-lined slightly in the United States.

Hopkins said some international certification growth can be attributed to the fact that many individuals would like to work in the United States.

"In the Asian and Middle Eastern countries, there's a big demand to get that international certification and recognition so that they can get employment outside their own country in places like the U.S.," he said. "That has declined over the years, but when we look at the number of H-1B visas being issued, I'd say 90 percent are used so that people with technical abilities can come into the U.S. and do the work that they can't find the U.S. person to do."

The United States also is looking for skilled workers, of course, and IT certifications are one measurement of competency. Other countries such as Australia and Japan use IT certifications to gauge whether an immigrant can get in to work, Hopkins said.

"If you want to get a job in Japan, and you can speak Japanese, credentials are a key part of getting into the Japanese market and economy," he said. "Having globally recognized credentials is certainly beneficial at the employer level in India and China. They're still deploying Western-made infrastructures, a lot of which are made there but under Western technology. They need to understand it, and they need to use it effectively."

"Therefore, credentials the IT industry has developed are applicable and relevant. IT credentials offered today are still extremely relevant and used by employers as a means to get a good position, no matter where you're located — they cross boundaries and borders."

### What Certification Markets are Hot?

Dr. James Stanger, Prosoft Learning chief certification architect and vice president of certification, said open-source technology is driving the growth of the organization's Web-based Certified Internet Web



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Professional (CIW) certification in China and the Middle East.

There's also a great interest in the Linux Professional Institute and its LPI certification program because Stanger said open source is perceived to be less expensive and quite robust, and it allows people to think outside the box and adopt new technology without paying a lot of licensing fees.

"In developing countries, certification becomes a proxy for education — people want to make sure they've received skills that are perceived as important," he said. "If you tie certification into education into a meaningful way, some sort of university endorsement or high corporate endorsement, then certification becomes very valuable. In the IT field, you tend to hear certification has a whole lot less value in general, but a lot of those same folks will say that college doesn't mean much either. The question becomes, 'How do you learn this stuff?'"

The older model of sitting at the feet of gurus and waiting for pearls of wisdom to fall from their lips is not scalable for the third world, developing countries or North America, Stanger said.

"There are a lot of newer ways to get people information, and certification is one way to do it," he said. "As long as it's tied to a meaningful program, to people who really know what's going on in the industry, then certification takes the place of that mentor model in many ways."

"In China, a lot of people are matriculating out of universities or training programs of various types into a negative job market right now. That's going to reflect negatively on the value of certification in general. The burden on an education or certification program is to make sure that there are internship programs and things of that nature to make up for that problem. Problem-solving skills, project management — that's what people are looking for internationally, and certification, if it's done right, can give you all of that." 🏠