

Trainer Certification: Necessity or Luxury? (Feb 07)

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Because getting certified takes time and money (two things everyone lacks), it's no surprise IT pros spend so much time debating the relevance and practical application of certifications. For certification trainers, however, this debate is much less robust — because most major technology companies require trainers to get their specialized trainer certifications before they can teach, these instructors have little choice in the matter.

For example, Novell trainers must have one of two trainer certifications to access the course materials and resources that they need to teach certification classes. The Novell Academic Instructor (NAI) allows teachers at registered educational institutions to deliver semester-long versions of the training program, and trainers who have the Certified Novell Instructor (CNI) certification teach Novell's commercial partners or their own private customers.

Steven King, Novell director of training and certification, said requiring this certification ensures students taking Novell courses will get the training they need to pass their certification exam.

"If I am a customer and am spending upward of \$2,000 for a weeklong class, I want to make sure that the money is well-spent," King said. "Without a certification, there is no standard for course delivery applied, and the student runs a fair risk of having a bad experience in the class."

Yet, some instructors feel other certifications that are much more important to their success in the classroom. Paul Lamontagne, a CNI who also owns Lamtech Consulting in Quebec, said his technical certifications do a lot more to help him convey his specialized knowledge to a class than the trainer certification.

"In order to be a trainer with what I'm doing, you must be a CNE (Certified Novell Engineer) or a CLP (Certified Linux Professional), so that's my base," he said. "The trainer was a bonus on top of it all."

King agreed that technical certifications are an integral part of a good instructor's toolbox, saying that trainers must be able to demonstrate a certain level of professional expertise in the subject matter to be an effective teacher.

"You wouldn't expect a professor holding a Ph.D. in English to be qualified to teach advanced computer science curriculum," he said. "Similarly, a student shouldn't expect a technical instructor who holds a certification in desktop applications to be able to deliver an in-depth optimization and tuning course for a server operating system."

While he said that he recognizes both trainer and technical certifications are necessary, albeit for different reasons, Lamontagne also said no certification can take the place of old-fashioned experience.

"The knowledge gained through the certification process is what I think is valuable," he said. "For me, it's a minimum barometer of what skill sets I can bring to the table. But it certainly can't buy experience. You've got to work at it, you've got to earn it."

By transferring knowledge from instructor to student, Lamontagne sees teaching as a way to pass on a little bit of his experience.

"The good thing is you can learn from other people's experience," he said. "It doesn't always have to be your own."