Cisco's New CCNA Certifications (Jun 08)

By Rick Gregory

Cisco has announced three new CCNA concentrations in voice, wireless and security. The CCNA certification is Cisco's most popular career certification and the new concentrations are role based and relevant to the rapid deployment of converged technologies in today's sophisticated network environment.

Companies are investing in new tools and infrastructure to keep pace with new business requirements. As the network increases in sophistication, the skills requirements for network professionals will also increase. New job roles in security, voice and wireless are becoming critical to the functionality of the network. Designed to build on the core CCNA skills, the highly specialized concentrations offer IT professionals a career springboard in converged technologies.

Worldwide Growth in Specialization

Cisco recently commissioned Forrester Consulting to conduct a worldwide survey of 1500 individuals responsible for managing, hiring or evaluating network professionals. The results showed that there is a pervasive need for specialized networking skills in multiple functions of IT organizations that will grow dramatically in the next five years.

Forty-six percent of the companies surveyed had a dedicated security role. That is expected to increase by thirty-four percent by 2012, when eighty percent of the companies expect to have a dedicated security role.

Voice was another role cited for rapid growth with a projected twenty-nine percent increase in dedicated voice specialists, from forty percent currently, to an anticipated sixty-nine percent five years out.

Wireless projections were similar, with a thirty percent increase from thirty-six percent of companies with a dedicated wireless role to sixty-six percent in 2012.

As these technologies become embedded in the network, their importance to the organization become increasingly business critical. Security is a near universal concern with worldwide regulatory compliance demanding better data protection and threat mitigation. The workforce is increasingly mobile and dispersed, driving increasingly sophisticated wireless connectivity and security. And voice over IP has become a defacto standard that is driving a shift from traditional telecom experts to networking professionals with data backgrounds.

The Increasing Importance of Certification

The surveyed managers said that training and certifications programs would be a critical part of the recruiting and hiring of individuals for specialized networking roles. They rated professional certifications second (49%) only to a four year college degree (51%) as a requirement to qualify for their jobs. And they say that certification will be increasingly critical in hiring networking specialist roles in their organizations.

Seventy-five percent of those surveyed considered certification as absolutely or somewhat critical for a security professional. Wireless certification was considered critical by fifty-eight percent and fifty-one percent considered a voice certification critical in a specialist role.

Increasing network sophistication, a forecast worldwide shortage of qualified networking professionals, and the increasing importance of professional certification make the new CCNA concentrations a way for IT professionals to differentiate themselves in the marketplace. They also provide hiring managers a means to determine that a candidate has the requisite skills to perform successfully in a specialist's role.

Certification Paths for CCNA Concentrations

The CCNA Voice certification validates skills in VoIP technologies including IP PBX, IP telephony, handset, call control and voicemail solutions. The CCNA Voice specialist would fill roles such as voice administrator, voice engineer or voice manager

CCNA Security validates skills in troubleshooting and monitoring Cisco network devices to maintain integrity, confidentiality and availability of data. The CCNA Security specialist would fill roles such as network security specialist, security administrator and network support engineer.

The CCNA Wireless certification validates skills in configuring, implementing and supporting wireless LANs using Cisco equipment. The CCNA Wireless specialist would fill roles such as wireless support specialist and WLAN project manager.

All of the CCNA concentrations require the CCNA certification plus an additional exam in the specialty area.

The CCNA Security certification requires successful completion of the 640-553 IINS exam. The exam is supported by the Implementing Cisco IOS Network Security (IINS) course.

The CCNA Wireless certification requires successfully completing the 641-721 IUWNE exam. It is supported by the Implementing Unified Wireless Networking Essentials (IUWNE v 1.0) course.

CCNA Voice certification requires successfully completing the 640-460 IIUC exam. The exam is supported by the Implementing Cisco IOS Unified Communications (IIUC v 1.0) course.

The Cisco Learning Network

The new CCNA concentration, and other Cisco learning initiatives, will also be supported by the new Cisco Learning Network. The Cisco Learning Network is the industry's first social network for learning. It is a Web 2.0 community featuring blogs, wikkis, document sharing and collaboration. The Learning Network is open to anyone and provides a wealth of services including: training and certification roadmaps, job listings, simulation labs, corporate sponsored internships, mentorship, employee recruiting and referral, and much more.

The Cisco Learning Network is billed as the first of its kind Social Learning resource for people at all levels of knowledge and experience who are interested in a career in networking.