

TELEPHONY[®]

Certification programs outline next-generation skills

Certification programs stress the need of expanding skill sets to remain relevant in a changing industry

By Sarah Reedy
Telephony Online

While service providers will always have to understand the industry staples such as quality of service, virtual private networks and 802.11 wireless, essentially no other skill set is as predictable as it once was, according to Dr. James Stanger, chief certification architect at Convergence Technologies Professional (CTP). An individual can specialize in wireless, but he or she must have a minimum working knowledge of [information technology](#) (IT), wireline, unified communications (UC), Internet protocol (IP) and the signaling protocol SIP.

"The next thing you will see is convergence workers who really better understand Web technology and a whole different set of skills," Stanger said. "Five to 10 years ago, it was, 'Look, you can put down your hardhat and orange cone in the street and come in and learn data.' Nowadays, you may understand the data and voice divide very well, and you've got convergence under your hat, but now you have to understand Web technologies and SIP to move forward."

CTP, sponsored by the Telecommunications Industry Association (TIA), provides vendor-neutral training and telecommunications and IT certification. In order to meet these requirements of established and emerging technologies, the organization's training program covers voice, video, data and convergence. The program is used by service providers, including AT&T, Verizon, Quest and T-Mobile in the US. CTP programs, which take six-to-seven weeks to complete online or 40 hours in a week-long program, focus on converging knowledge with technology.

Granted, a [one-shot training program is rarely sufficient](#) to understand a complex and evolving network, but service providers call on certification companies to keep an employee who may be well-trained in one area of the business and make them better-rounded before they go out and seek new employees, said Jim Koch, CTP product manager. Some companies put CTP certification programs in-house for this reason, while others dismantle the training budget first thing when money gets tight. Employees in this situation would be well-advised to pay for the training on their own if they want to keep their job, Stanger said.

"Whoever is willing to upgrade their skills, whoever is on top of what they need for the future, is the one who is kept," Koch added. "Those who want to stay specialized will be moving on. If they are not resistant, they get into a program like ours and get certified."

Like CTP, the Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA) provides certification for the IT industry. The non-profit, vendor-neutral organization has delved into telecom

more as the [lines between data and voice have blurred](#), according to president and Chief Executive Officer Todd Thibodeaux. Looking to the future, 4G technologies and still-yet-to-be-determined next-generation services will add another dimension to the roles of the telecom worker, as well as the certification they need, he said.

“When we look farther down the road, the [types of jobs that will emerge](#) in that space will be pretty interesting,” Thibodeaux said, adding that even given the economy, CompTIA certification levels are up in the US over last year. “They will be far beyond what we’ve seen in the knowledge required, the technical training required and also the integration skills required to make software work with hardware across the wireless network.”

It sounds contradictory, but to meet these needs, today’s service provider employee must fill the role of a generalist and a specialist. Operators are not abandoning their existing employees, but they are requiring that they become more well-rounded. This is what Stanger concluded after speaking with a Verizon vice president at last year’s Avaya reseller show about the skill set he was seeking in employees. They still need a specialist, but the real key is having a generalist who can talk to that specialist.

“He said I need someone who understands data cold, voice cold, and who can therefore talk about emerging technologies very easily,” Stanger said. “If I have a person who knows nothing about data, they are going to be playing catch up....He still has problems finding those who have that right mix of voice and data and who have nimble enough minds to tackle wireless.”

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