

The Importance of Being Trained

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The May issue of *NetWare Connection* explained how to find reliable technical support. (See "Good Help Is Hard to Find," pp. 39–41. You can download this article from <http://www.nwconnection.com/may.99/techsp59>.) This month's article explains how to maintain your own level of technical expertise through on-going technical training. You can use on-going technical training to ensure that you are familiar with the latest products and technologies and to earn industry certifications. In this way, you can enhance your networking skills, and you can reduce your reliance on external technical support.

TO CERTIFY OR NOT TO CERTIFY?

Training centers provide a variety of training programs. For example, you can get information about networking concepts, learn how to implement products and technologies, and prepare for certification tests.

If you prefer traditional, instructor-led training, you should consider taking a class at your local training center. Training centers offer two types of classes:

- **Certification Classes.** Certification classes generally focus on a particular product. These classes, which are sponsored by the product's vendor, adhere to the vendor's training standards. These classes are also led by instructors who have been certified by the vendor. You can attend certification classes to learn how to install, configure, and manage a particular product or to prepare for certification tests.
- **Noncertification Classes.** Noncertification classes generally provide real-world, hands-on training. You can attend noncertification classes to learn networking skills that help you do your job better. Although you may find that you can pass certification tests after attending noncertification classes, these classes are not designed to prepare you for certification tests.

Obviously, you should decide which classes to attend based on your particular objectives. For example, if you want to prepare for one or more of Novell's certification tests, you should attend certification classes at a Novell Authorized Education Center (NAEC) or a Novell Educational Academic Partner (NEAP). (For more information about NAECs and NEAPs, see "Technical Training Resources." See also the ad on p. 47.) If you want to receive hands-on training, however, you should attend noncertification classes at a specialized training center, such as a New Horizons or a Wave Technologies International training center. (Many specialized training centers are also NAECs.) In addition, a local community college or technical school may offer both certification and noncertification classes.

TRAINING CENTERS

Finding reliable technical training can be just as difficult as finding reliable technical support. Training centers have two unique characteristics that may complicate the matter of separating the good from the bad:

- **No Continuing Certification Requirements.** Unlike universities, training centers are not required to renew their certifications by demonstrating that their technical training meets a particular standard. In fact, no standards exist because there is no organization to set such standards or to monitor the quality of technical training that each training center offers. Some training centers do not even bother to earn certifications or to seek any type of approval from vendors. They simply create their own training programs.
- **Contract Instructors.** Rather than maintaining a staff of instructors, many training centers hire instructors on a contract basis. Most contract instructors provide exceptional instruction in their area of expertise. Because experienced contract instructors garner higher wages, however, some training centers hire inexperienced contract instructors instead. In addition, training centers that rely on a large number of contract instructors may offer inconsistent instruction due to the high turnover rate.

To ensure that you find technical training that meets your needs, you should always take the following steps:

- **Check Certifications.** You should ask the training center to provide proof of its certifications. For example, if you want to attend classes to prepare for Novell's CNE tests, you should ensure that the training center is certified as an NAEC.
- **Check References.** You should ask the training center to provide a list of references. This list should include contact information for students who have attended classes at the training center. You should talk to several students, ensuring that they had a positive experience and asking them what they liked and disliked about the training center.
- **Check Instructors.** You should ask the training center to provide information about its instructors. For example, you should find out whether or not these instructors have received consistently high or low ratings from students in previous classes.
- **Do Not Trust Guarantees.** You should avoid training centers that guarantee you will pass the certification tests. After all, there are no guarantees. Even if you pass the certification tests, you may find that you do not have the networking skills you need. Training centers that "train to test" may offer an easy way to get a certificate, but a certificate cannot help

Technical Training Resources

For more information about the technical training resources mentioned in this article, you can visit the following web sites:

- **Novell Education** (<http://education.novell.com>). This web site provides information about all of Novell's certification programs, such as the Certified Novell Administrator (CNA) and the CNE program. For example, this web site offers a list of certification requirements and an online course catalog.
- **Authorized Training Locator** (<http://novell.netpub.com/cgi-bin/locator/naecloc>). This web site allows you to search for the Novell Authorized Education Centers (NAECs) and the Novell Educational Academic Partners (NEAPs) near you.
- **BrainShare and TechShare** (<http://www.novell.com/events>). This web site provides information about BrainShare and TechShare

conferences, including a list of session topics and speaker biographies. This web site also includes a calendar of upcoming conferences and an online registration form.

- **NetWorld+ Interop** (<http://www.interop.com>). This web site provides information about NetWorld+ Interop conferences, including a list of sessions and exhibitors. This web site also includes a calendar of upcoming conferences, an online registration form, and a pass for free admission to the exhibition hall.
- **Internet World** (<http://events.internet.com>). This web site provides information about Internet World conferences, including a list of exhibitors. This web site also includes a calendar of upcoming conferences and an online registration form.
- **COMDEX** (<http://www.comdex.com>). This web site provides information about COMDEX conferences, including a list of session topics. This web site also includes a calendar of upcoming conferences and an online registration form. ●

you when you are troubleshooting networking problems.

You should also avoid training centers that guarantee you will find a specific job or earn a specific salary upon completion of the training program. Although there is a shortage of network administrators in many areas throughout the world, your area may not be one of them. Any job or salary guarantee is too good to be true.

- **Make a Commitment.** After you pick a training program, you should complete it. In this way, you receive consistent technical training, and you develop a rapport with the instructors. You should switch from one training program to another only if you encounter a significant problem with the training program. Doing your homework ahead of time, however, minimizes this possibility.

TRADE SHOWS

Trade shows—such as Comdex, NetWorld+ Interop, and Internet World—also offer training opportunities. Most trade shows, which are organized by event companies and are sponsored by participating vendors, consist of multiple events that occur simultaneously. As a result, you may have several events to choose from during the course of a trade show that lasts for up to a week. For example, trade shows may feature instructor-led classes, vendor-led presentations, and an exhibition hall where vendors demonstrate their products.

Trade shows are a good place to get a lot of information about a lot of different products. You can talk to industry experts and discuss a particular product with the vendor who makes that product. The

downside of trade shows is they are often held only in large cities, so you may have to travel to attend a trade show.

CONFERENCES

If you have ever been to Novell's BrainShare conference, you know that conferences are another excellent training tool. Conferences, which tend to be smaller in scale than trade shows, are generally organized and sponsored by a few vendors—or even by only one vendor.

By covering fewer products than trade shows, conferences are able to provide more in-depth technical training. In addition, conferences provide a better venue for giving feedback directly to the sponsoring vendors. For example, BrainShare offers opportunities for users to interact with Novell employees. You can attend classes taught by Novell product managers and programmers, and you can attend question-and-answer sessions conducted by Novell executives. As a result, you can give product suggestions to the people who are responsible for creating Novell products, and you can get information about existing and future products. Depending on your needs, this one-on-one attention may offer a better return on your time and your investment than you would receive at a trade show.

If you are interested in a particular vendor or product, you should consider attending a conference. The good news is conferences are generally held more often and in more locations than trade shows. For example, BrainShare is held nine times a year, in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Brazil, China, Japan, Australia, and South Africa. Novell also

offers an extensive series of TechShare conferences, which are held at Novell sales offices throughout North America. (For more information about BrainShare, visit <http://www.novell.com/events>.)

SEMINARS

Seminars are a great way to learn about a particular product in a short period of time. Seminars, which generally focus on a single product, may be sponsored by a vendor, a reseller, or a technical training company. During a seminar, one or more vendors give presentations about a particular product—often a new product. These presentations, which range from basic to quite technical, are designed to introduce you to the product and to teach you how to implement this product. However, most seminars do not include hands-on training or product demonstrations.

Seminars offer one distinct advantage over trade shows and conferences: You can fit them into a busy schedule. Most seminars are held at a local sales office, lasting only a half or a full day.

CONCLUSION

With all of the technical training options that are available, you can find an option that meets your needs. On-going technical training not only helps you do your job better now, but it also improves your chances of keeping your job in the long run. On-going technical training is essential to keep up with the astounding pace of change in the networking industry. If you stop learning, you will be left behind.

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