

Certifications Are No Longer Optional

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By Bart Perkins

For many years, IT management has preached standardization -- within IT and across the corporation. Yet at the same time, we have largely failed to standardize IT skills within our own organizations or across the industry. Certifications can help there, but for much of IT's history, such credentials have often been overlooked or undervalued in the hiring process.

That's changing.

Some employers are beginning to require [certs](#) for a wide range of jobs, and they often adjust salaries accordingly. With so many job seekers to choose from, employers need to quickly identify those who have the skills they seek. Granted, technical certifications do not guarantee that applicants will have the people and political skills that it takes to succeed in a corporate environment, but they can help employers triage resumes. And they're helpful in avoiding the costs and productivity losses associated with training new hires. For new college graduates, a certification in programming says, "I know about more than the theories and models we learned about in school."

Outsourcers also favor certifications, since they add credibility to project proposals. So if your department gets outsourced, certs can influence whether you are offered a job with the outsourcer or become unemployed.

Nonetheless, many older employees eschew certifications, asserting that their college degrees and job experience are sufficient. That's unfortunate, because even experienced IT professionals benefit from certs that demonstrate their understanding of the latest [developments in a particular area](#). Because most certs are awarded for three to five years and require continuing education, being certified demonstrates that an employee has taken the initiative to stay current in an ever-changing field. That's a trait that's important to most employers. And as technology continues to proliferate, specialized technical expertise will become increasingly valued.

For me, the question isn't whether you should get a certification; it's which certification you should pursue. Certifications have proliferated over the past five years. In 2005, Microsoft offered six technical certifications; today that number has increased to 46, and

technical certification holders have nearly doubled, to 2.9 million. Other organizations, such as the Business Architects Association, the International Institute of Business Analysis and the Institute of Management Consultants, offer specialized certification programs. Many universities are also beginning to offer certifications.

There are even certs in IT management. The Project Management Professional (PMP) and ITIL Service Manager certifications are widely recognized and have a significant impact on hiring decisions. In fact, most of the federal government's RFPs for project managers list PMP certification as a requirement. Government contractors speculate that the PMP cert will soon be mandatory.

But [all certifications are not created equal](#) . The PMP, ITIL and Microsoft certifications will continue to be widely recognized. Over time, however, some of the lesser-known certs will likely be merged, making some obsolete. Meanwhile, when choosing between such certifications, select those that are ISO 17024-certified.

It's natural for certifications to grow in prominence as an industry matures and places more importance on professionalism. And the trend will continue. Many current IT managers are unfamiliar with the broad range of certs available, but as younger employees rise to management positions, certification will likely become a basic requirement, especially for more senior positions.

How many certifications are on your resume? If the answer is none, you need to change that. The time is coming when the word certified will be a synonym for employable.

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