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**As Certifications Lose Their Luster, What Next?
The Answer: Vendors Go Higher**

New Canaan, CT, May 2, 2006 – On the heels of a research report issued last week by the IT workforce research firm Foote Partners that noncertified IT skills have been growing in value at a rate nearly two times that of certified skills over the last year, several inquiries have been made about what’s next for vendors who rely on their certifications programs to gain mind share for their technologies and support sales of their products.

“It’s true that the lion’s share of certifications available to IT workers today are vendor-driven, although the vendor independent certifications from such purveyors as the SANS Institute, Project Management Institute, Information Systems Audit and Control Association (ISACA) , and International Information Systems Security Certification Consortium (ISC)²[®] are among some of the highest paying and most popular,” remarks David Foote, Foote Partner’s co-founder, CEO and Chief Research Officer. “Vendors created the certifications industry principally to sell their products. What fascinates me is that when we asked several vendors recently if they use their own certifications internally to qualify their own employees’ technical skills, the answer was largely ‘no’. I guess I expected to hear that, but it still surprised me.”

Continues Foote, “It appears that they do not consider their own external certifications tough enough for their own people, and that may just be the issue with employers who are starting to place less emphasis on technical certifications, in favor of paying more for other qualities of IT professionals that are more critical to their business. Things like industry knowledge and experience with their customers.”

But in an interesting development, vendors have been banding together to create new ‘guru’ level accreditations while others are doing this by themselves. All of these new master level certifications are vendor-independent and technology-neutral in focus and available to any person who can qualify.

Once such certification, Master Certified IT Architect, was developed by the Open Group (www.opengroup.org), a consortium consisting principally of top engineers at Hewlett-Packard and IBM. The focus of this group has been to create a credential based on its definitions of “global standards for measuring the skills and experience of IT architects, and for the operation of IT architecture practices within enterprises.” It is a “premier, global certification program” aimed at practicing Enterprise / IT Architects who must be able to perform independently and take responsibility for delivery of systems and solutions as lead architects, and who have at least three years recent experience of developing IT architectures. Candidates must demonstrate having core foundation skills that include people skills, project management skills and architecture skills, and meet requirements related to experience, professional development, and contribution to IT Architecture community” and pass a peer board review to achieve designation.

The Open Group will make the Master Certified IT Architect available in several ways:

- Practicing IT architects can appeal for certification by demonstrating skills and documenting experience and successes with past architecting efforts.
- Third parties can apply for accreditation of their own IT architecture certification programs. (No word yet as to whether or not Microsoft plans to participate.)
- Franchise operations are available to professional societies and other eligible organizations.
- Individuals can either seek certification directly from the Open Group, or through an employer if that organization operates an accredited IT Architect certification program.

Recently announced by the Open Group is a first-level Certified IT Architect certification requiring less on-the-job architecture experience and less rigorous qualifications, but is still aimed at creating an industry-wide benchmark for selecting highly qualified architects.

“I liken the new Master Certified IT Architect to a symphony orchestra, with the top architect playing the role of a composer,” says Mike Sylvia, Distinguished Engineer and Global Executive of IT Architecture Professions at IBM and one of the members of the Open Group that developed the new certification. “Like a composer, architects at this level are responsible for the abstract form of the architectural design, translating new structures and directions and ultimately defining the skills necessary to create the systems that underlie the architecture and make it a reality. The architect has to bring it all together, and that requires both a very broad and a very deep set of seasoned technical and business aptitudes and interpersonal qualities. You’ll find these in any individual who attains the Open Group’s Master Certified IT Architect accreditation.”

Microsoft Corporation has recently overhauled its certifications programs, partly in response to employer attitudes about certification. In addition, it has developed its own top-tier Microsoft Certified Architect Program in their attempt to define a new ‘guru’ architecture credential for Microsoft technical professionals, stressing non-Microsoft best practices, tools and technologies as well as knowledge of in-house offerings and platforms. It also requires peer review as part of the certification process. The program is expected to be available later this year.

Microsoft insists that only 25 percent of their architecture certification program will relate to Microsoft technologies; the remainder of the certification will cover non-proprietary technologies.

“These new architectural programs will require candidates to have a broad range of skills, significant work history in the field and the ability to demonstrate good architectural judgment in previous projects,” says Foote. “You won’t be certified by these organizations by completing a quick boot camp and taking a test. You’ll be matched up against standards required of an experienced

professional IT architect by a tough review board, and you'll have to pay top dollar for the certification.”

One difference between the programs is qualification experience. The Open Group specifies a minimum of three years of experience, while Microsoft wants a minimum of 10 years.

But the price for achieving these new master level architecture certification doesn't differ: It's anticipated that they will cost employers (or the candidates themselves) \$10,000 or more to acquire. “That's certainly one way to prove how special your certification is,” says Foote. “But if that's what it will take to keep skill certifications upfront in the minds of managers competing in the intense and very dynamic IT employment market in which they're now finding themselves in, then so be it.”

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http://www.footepartners.com/FPnewsrelease_1Q2006skillspay_042506.pdf

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[Foote Partners LLC](http://www.footepartners.com), founded in 1997, is a New Canaan, Connecticut based management consultancy and IT workforce research firm comprised of former Gartner Inc., META Group, McKinsey & Company, and Towers Perrin consultants and analysts, and former HR, IT, and business executives. The firm employs innovative data collection methods and analytical techniques to correct for mismatched IT job titles (versus actual job content and duties) and produce a highly accurate, constantly updated, consistent and comprehensive view of what tens of thousands of IT workers in the North America and Europe are being paid in total IT compensation. The firm's senior research team publishes survey-backed analytical trend reports on a variety of management and technology subjects and advises companies on increasing performance and achieving business goals through maximizing collaboration and integration of IT, business, and HR resources.

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