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Computer Certification: What Happened in 2004, Predictions for 2005
Certification continues to provide good value and to add respected credentials to a resume.

 Published **January 10, 2004**

 By **Anne Martinez**

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2004 was a year of no surprises in the certification marketplace. Although many of us hoped for another big growth spurt for the value and popularity of certification, there was little change. But that's not necessarily bad news; certification continues to provide good value and to add respected credentials to a resume. The most advanced certifications can lead to quite high salaries.

Certification and Salary Trends

One of the first things people want to know about certification is, will it boost my salary?

According to Certification Magazine's 2004 Salary Survey of nearly 35,000 IT professionals from 160 countries, the average compensation for IT workers in 2004 was \$67,000, up from the 2003 average of \$63,540. The study reports that the highest paying certifications for computer professionals cover Cisco networking, telephony, project management, or IT security. It also found that people who are already certified must be happy with their achievements, because 83.2 percent of them plan to add one or more certifications in the coming year. 48% of respondents reported that employers picked up the whole tab for their certification, up from 42% in the 2003 survey. You can read the full Certification Magazine 2004 Salary Survey on their [Web site](#).

Microsoft Magazine also does an annual salary survey. Their findings, which were published several months earlier, were a little bit different. The Microsoft Magazine survey included 5,000 individuals, and categorized salaries for Microsoft Certified Professionals as stabilized but flat, with average salaries of \$61,900. That's barely above the previous year's figure. Not surprisingly, the entry level MCDST (Microsoft Certified Desktop Technician) title received the lowest compensation. The complete survey is available at [MCPMag.com](#).

For a third viewpoint I contacted David Foote, of [Foote Partners LLC](#), which studies and reports on pay for skills as well as for

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certification. According to Foote, during 2004, pay for certifications averaged 7.6 percent of base pay in late 2004. That is a change of -0.6 percent, or basically flat growth from 2003 and a decline of 6.1% percent from 2002. Certifications showing the highest annual growth rates were: HP/Compaq ASE and MASE; Cisco CCIE; MCSE(Security and Messaging specializations only); and Citrix Certified Administrator.

Foote also reports that Certifications earning the highest premium pay rates in 2004 were: Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP); Cisco CCIE and CCDP; Project Management Professional; Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA); GIAC Security Expert and Windows Security Administrator; Microsoft Certified Solutions Developer and Microsoft Certified Trainer; Citrix Certified Enterprise Administrator; HP/Compaq MASE.

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Cheaters Still Don't Prosper

People who invest time and money in certification in hope of a positive return are sometimes worried (and rightly so) that its value will be slashed if unscrupulous individuals can earn it without actually obtaining the related knowledge. Cheating received a little less press this year than in years past, but that it's still an important issue for certification vendors. Anonymous "report the cheater" links have appeared on several certification vendor Web sites. You may have to dig a bit to find them, so here are several that may be of use to you:

- Microsoft provides an email address for reporting of cheaters and the Web sites that support them. It is tctips@microsoft.com.
- Cisco has a [Web form](#). The CCIE program has its own separate [reporting route](#).
- CompTIA's "security breach" email address is security@compia.org

Most Active Certification Programs

Cisco Systems' certification program was one of the most active in 2004. Notable changes included:

- [Cisco Optical Specialist](#) was completely revised
- [Cisco Wireless LAN Design Specialist](#) and [Cisco Wireless LAN Support Specialist](#) certifications substantially updated
- [Cisco Unity Support Specialist](#) was added
- A new version of the [CCIE](#) routing and switching exam was released.
- Recertification requirements were modified so that candidates can complete recertification requirements for lower certifications while pursuing the CCIE.

The folks at CompTIA were hard at work as well, keeping existing certifications current and marketable. Both CompTIA [Linux+](#), and CompTIA [Server+](#) were completely revised, and an update to [Network+](#) is well under way. These still provided excellent value as entry-level certifications.



Nortel was also quite busy, adding [numerous new certification](#) exams covering additional products, and offering certification candidates plenty of beta opportunities. Oracle came out with [exams covering Oracle 10g](#).

Novell also continued its expansion into Linux certification releasing the [CLP \(Certified Linux Professional\)](#) practicum. The Certified Directory Engineer (CDE) program was retired.

Red Hat wasn't especially active, however, since the RHCE is so well respected it's worthwhile to note that they did add a new, even higher level designation: [Red Hat Certified Architect \(RHCA\)](#). According to Red Hat, the RHCA is "a capstone certification to [Red Hat Certified Engineer \(RHCE\)](#) and [Red Hat Certified Technician \(RHCT\)](#)."

Security certification seemed to hold fairly steady during 2004. One security certification vendor, the International Council of E-Commerce Consultants (EC-Council), added a slate of new designations, but the other vendors seem to have focused on administering the programs they created in the past few years. The new EC-Council certifications include: [Computer Hacking Forensic Investigator \(CHFI\)](#) Certification, [Licensed Penetration Tester \(LPT\)](#), and [EC-Council Certified Security Analyst \(ECSA\)](#).

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Certification by the Numbers

Although certification vendors seem to want to keep secret the number of individuals they certify in any particular year, some are willing to share the total number of certifications earned to date. Here are some of the numbers it was possible to dig up:

Cisco

- all career designations: 500,000
- CCIE: 11,912

CompTIA

- Linux+: 5,970
- Security+: 12,300
- A+ 548,669

Microsoft (as of September 2004)

- MCSA on Windows 2000: 113,719
- MCSE on Windows Server 2003: 21,053
- MCSE on Windows 2000: 253,005
- MCSE on Windows Server 2003: 11,379
- MCP: 967,221

ProsoftTraining CIW 80,000 (50,000 unique individuals)

The Year Ahead

What will 2005 hold for certification? It's hard to say, but there are several likely developments:

The hottest certifications will be the high end designations, such as Cisco's CCIE, Red Hat's RHCE, and Microsoft's MCSE. Internet and Web development certifications, like Sun's Java certifications, and the **Certified Internet Webmaster (CIW) program, will also be among the most worthwhile investments.** The CISSP, arguably the best value in security certification, is another top title that IT professionals can count on. All of these certifications will hold or increase their value throughout the coming year.

Entry level certifications seem to lagging a little in popularity, which is likely to continue through 2005. This is probably related to the state of the IT job market.

A number of smaller certification programs may fold in 2005,

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as they reach the conclusion that the cost/benefit ratio no longer justifies the expense.

Due to convenience and low cost, self study, using self-study books and practice tests will continue to rule as the most popular certification preparation tools.

Overall, don't expect a fresh surge of popularity of certification in the near future. The certification marketplace will not expand at the rate it has in the past. However, those who earn certifications that are appropriate for their career plans will continue to find them very valuable to have on a resume, as well as an important route to expanded technical expertise.

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