



Business Certification for IT

Last month I met with about 20 members of the Network Professional Association in Washington. The group comprised a diverse bunch of IT pros, everyone from helpdesk support staffers to information systems directors. The NPA is a nationwide organization of IT professionals, with chapters in seven U.S. cities (see www.npa.org for more information).

When I asked attendees what they needed to know to perform their jobs well, they said strong technical and financial skills—no surprise there. Most went on to say that they have the techie part down pat. Again, no surprise.

But in the course of our discussions one thing kept hitting me: No matter what the topic, a good chunk of the conversation revolved around finance. From writing proposals to getting buy-in from corporate management to building RFPs for new products and services to renewing support contracts, money was always top of mind.

Some of the people in the group were less confident than others about financial matters. For them, the No. 1 item on their wish lists was a way to gain a working knowledge of “business stuff” without having to sweat out an MBA.

We all know what TCO and ROI stand for (if you don’t, pop on over to www.nwc.com/core/core9.html for a primer). We’ve heard of new models, popular with several consulting firms and your finance-buff colleagues, that are being used to build the financial basis for IT projects. But how many of you are truly budget-literate? Do you know, for example, the difference between finance and accounting? How about the difference between financial and managerial accounting? Do you have a working knowledge of statistics?

One business-savvy IT pro I know said that more IT folks need an appreciation for depreciation. Is yours accelerated or straight-line? The model your business office uses can help you decide when to make purchases.

For a few years now we’ve been preaching the need

for techies to get as smart about business as they are about bandwidth. So why is it that there are umpteen courses for certifications in security, Microsoft products, Cisco products, Linux products, Novell products—the list goes on—but to become proficient in the business side of IT you need to enter a full-blown degree program?

Don’t get us wrong—plenty of excellent colleges teach technology from a business standpoint, and a sheepskin in this area can be invaluable. But what if you lack the time, the cash or the inclination to go back to school?

I’d like to see the creation of an independent group to certify techies in common business practices, specifically geared toward IT projects and problems, and then make them maintain those certifications in the same manner as technology certification programs do by, for example, requiring enrollment in continuing education workshops.



I’d like to see the creation of an independent group that would certify techies in common business practices.

Bottom Line

Such a “Business of IT” certification program would not only help IT pros speak the business office’s language, it would also let employers know that they have financial chops to match their technical skills.

Finally, this level of knowledge would help you know when you need help from the business professionals. You trust your business office to have enough technical know-how to make

smart financial decisions about technology—and to know enough to defer to you, the technologist, when things get sticky. It’s only fair that you should have a reciprocal level of knowledge about the business end of things.

How do you deal with these challenging issues? Would a business-certification program make sense for you or for your company? Do you have a similar, homegrown program in place? Let me know about it. Write to me at the address below. [NWC](http://www.nwc.com)



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