

Why Do We Get The Certificate

This post was written by Himawan Nugroho. Triple CCIE #8171 in CCIE R&S, Security, Service Provider. A pioneer and a dreamer. About 10 years ago I started my journey with professional certification from different IT vendors. Going to the testing center to take the exam was a regular activity that I did from time to time. I remember some folks used to tell me that I was wasting my time and money. They said getting certification is useless and will not help to advance my career. Interestingly enough, I found the fact is quite the opposite of what people told me. At least in computer networking area where I have involved for more than ten years, professional certification takes an important role in my life. I even dare to say that I would not be at where I am now without having them. And I'm going to write it down here, of all the reasons why I decided to take professional certification, and how they affected my career from the very beginning until now. So if you are looking for the answer of the question if it's still worth to get certified, here are my answers based on my own experience.

- 1. Easier path for career switch** I have a degree in Mechanical Engineering, so the certification program from Cisco Systems and other vendors really helped me out when I decided to switch career to computer networking field. The certifications made it easier for me to show my interest in the area, to build a profile as network engineer and to help shorten the learning curve
- 2. Requirement from the employer** There was a time where system integrator companies are encouraged to have certified staff in order to enhance the relationship with the vendors of the product or solution. That means the companies must either train the staff to pass the certification exam, or hire someone who has already certified. I didn't have much experience in networking after the career switch, so I guess I got hired by my first big employer only because I had CCNA
- 3. To get better paid** So there I was, working in shift as network engineer for the company NOC. It did not take long for me to realize at that time some of my colleagues were in better position in the company, had more exposures and better chance to grow, and had better salary because they had higher certification than me. They had CCIE, in particular. So I was motivated to pass the CCIE lab with a very simple reason: to move to a better position and get a better paid eventually
- 4. To move to another company** It's true these days we don't get hired because of our certification anymore. Now we can get a job more because of our real expertise, past experience and our contacts (Triple W rules: who we know, what we know, what we have done). But professional certification is a benchmark of our knowledge, and from time to time has been used by the recruiters as one criteria to filter the candidates. Imagine you receive thousands of CVs and must bring the number of the candidates down to less than 50 for the interview process. One can just put some search keywords such as 'CCIE', '10 years experience', 'CRS' and so on to narrow down the potential candidates. We can only get a job if we can pass the interview and the subsequent processes. But at least the certification can provide some advantage and better chance to pass the early screening process
- 5. Love the challenges** Having passed the CCIE R&S lab in 2001 really opened many doors of opportunity for me. It gave me chance to work in a big company like IBM and it even made me received many offers to work abroad. So finally after I moved to middle east in 2002, what should I do next? I decided to challenge myself and put target certifications that I should achieve over period of time. It helped me to stay away from boredom and laziness. And to be honest, when the first time I started working in middle east the work situation was not really 'convenient'. But I made my decision to work in the region so I had to live with it. Putting new certifications as target and chasing them was my way to forget all the bad stuff that happened at work
- 6. Enjoy the experience** This may sound silly, but I just love the whole process and experience during my time chasing one new certification. As I mentioned above, the journey to take certification can make me forget about many inconvenient things that happen at work. It makes me focus to one thing. Sometime I even reached a level where all my activities are centered around my target certification. In the past I changed my sleeping time while chasing CCIE. I spent lots of time on eBay to purchase my home lab equipments. I modified my daily schedule so I still can work, be with family, and practice CCIE lab. The whole process of buying lab equipment, managing schedule, practicing in the lab for countless hours, having discussion with study group over the Inetnet, and the feeling when I finally pass the exam I believe is a complete experience that even more important than the certification itself
- 7. To prove thyself** Despite the thrill, the feeling after passing the exam, and experience during the time chasing the certification, there was a time when I took a new certification just to prove that I'm worth it. It was year 2005 when finally I had a chance to get interviewed by Cisco in the region, and I got rejected because I was not 'qualified'. To join Cisco had been my dream, so I really took the comment personally and decided to abandon my plan to pursue master degree and take CCIE Security lab instead. I didn't really like the track but I passed the exam anyway on January 2006 and became one of the few Dual CCIE holders in middle east. Strangely enough, 10 months later Cisco finally hired me but to cover the Asia Pacific region
- 8. Speed up in acquiring new skills** I joined Cisco with extensive experience dealing with Enterprise customers and network infrastructure. In Advanced Services most of the customers are top notch Service Providers, so in order to catch up quickly I decided to pursue CCIE SP lab. In every certification there is a clear study path to follow, there is a list of books to read, topics to be covered and practiced in the lab, and there is the exam to test and verify our understanding. This means

we don't have to reinvent the study plan to learn new skills

9. Instant reward My current employer provides instant reward to employee who can pass tough certification like CCIE or CCDE. In the place where I am now, this might be the only reason why people still take certification. And I don't think it's a bad reason. The companies still give reward probably to encourage their employees, to ensure the employees' skills are updated, or just because they need to justify giving instant bonuses to the employee

10. Be one of the few Certifications give me a target to acquire. They help to improve my technical profile. The skills I learn from new certification make me stay competitive in the market. And be one of the first to pass new certifications make me feel good about myself. To be one of the few that hold several tough certifications obviously is very important for someone in my field. And I think every one of us should always try to be the best in anything we do, to be part of the group that can be entered only by hard work, and be proud of it. I don't know the reason why other people are still taking professional certification these days. But if you are planning to do it, my advice is for you to find the right reason for it. I know my reasons, and I really believe in them, and that's probably what make me who I am today.

June 2000 - passed CCNA, my first certification ever
August 2001 - first attempt of CCIE R&S lab in Brussels
Sept 2001 - passed CCIE R&S lab in Tokyo
May 2002 - joined one Cisco Gold Partner company in Dubai
2002 - 2005 - passed bunch of certifications from Cisco and other vendors
Jan 2006 - passed CCIE Security lab on 2nd attempt
Nov 2006 - joined Cisco Advanced Services Asia Pacific team
August 2007 - passed CCIE SP lab on 1st attempt in Brussels
Sept 2008 - moved to Cisco WWSP NGN practices team to cover Emerging markets
2008 - 2010 - passed several Cisco AS internal certifications on Carrier Ethernet and CRS/IOS XR
July 2010 - took CCDE practical exam for the third time and currently still waiting for the result