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Microsoft's ^@&^#&@ W2K MCSE Policy

By Richard Lowe

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Like over 800,000 other people, I spent an incredible amount of time and effort studying to be an MCSE (Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer). I took six classes, studied several books from cover to cover, took practice tests and used the knowledge in my job and on my own time. Why did I do all of this? Because I wanted to have one of the most prestigious certifications in the field – the MCSE!

For those of you who don't know, the MCSE consisted of six tests designed to ensure that system administrators meet a minimum level of experience and knowledge with Microsoft products. The concept is this gives guidance to managers as to who they should and should not hire, and ensures that those people know how to use Microsoft products.

In my experience, people who honestly pass the MCSE exams are indeed better qualified for their positions than others with equivalent experience and skills. Of course, boot camps, brain dumps and similar methods of cheating the process tend to allow people to dishonestly pass the exams. This, however, is true with all certifications (and tests for that matter) and not unique to the MCSE series.

In their attempts to get people to upgrade from Windows NT 4.0 to Windows 2000, Microsoft has run into quite a bit of resistance from the industry. While there are very significant reasons to upgrade, Windows 2000 requires major changes in network configurations, applications and user training, which has tended to slow acceptance. In addition, since Windows 2000 was released around the time of large expenditures on the Year 2000 bug, system managers found themselves without funds or manpower to upgrade their networks.

In order to force people to upgrade more quickly, Microsoft has, in it's infinite wisdom, decided to retire the Windows NT 4.0 certifications. Thus, on December 31, 2001 any and all MCSE certificate holders who still have not upgraded will need to remove those four letters from their resume and business cards.

It now appears that over half (at least 400,000) of these MCSE's will be invalid in under five months! I know from experience that the change from Windows NT to Windows 2000 is not an easy one, and given that many people actually have to work for a living it's not surprising that so many of them have not had a chance to obtain the new certifications.

There is also a large amount of anger about the policy. It appears that Microsoft is only interested in increasing it's bottom line, which translates into selling an endless procession of upgrades to the operating system and the office suite. It's plainly obvious that Microsoft feels it's dollars come from these upgrades, and thus those engineers who cannot or will not upgrade their certifications have little or no value.

Even worse is that Microsoft has started the path towards Windows XP certifications! A large number of MCSE's have not even started (much less finished) their training for Windows 2000, and now they have to figure out how to upgrade that to Windows XP! And, of course, it's a sure bet that the next version of Windows will follow very quickly after that.

Me and several of the people who work for me have obtained the MCSE certification for Windows NT 4.0. Given that we all work very long hours (a 60 hour week is a short one) and have lives, it's a miracle that even some of us found time to pass these exams.

And now Microsoft is saying that we are no longer valuable. They are directly implying that we are not worthy of their greatness because, well, we are too busy actually putting their products to work to take the time out to study and pass the exams.

We do want to pass the exams and we do want to become certified on Windows 2000. Every single person that works for me strongly desires to pass these tests. Our objection does not come from the fact that the tests exist or that Microsoft is raising the bar or improving their products.

Our objection is the underhanded, sneaky and downright unethical way that Microsoft is forcing us to put pressure on our company and our employers to needlessly upgrade over and over again. The pressure comes from every aspect of Microsoft – from forced upgrades via their licensing practices to their forced certification policies.

Let's play devil's advocate for a minute and see what we can learn. Perhaps Microsoft has to do this because they are more intelligent and have a wider vision than the rest of the world. Microsoft knows they have a far superior product, and in order to ensure that we lesser beings provide the best value for our companies, they are requiring us to upgrade our knowledge. Heaven forbid that companies (especially large ones) actually keep Windows NT 4.0 installed on their networks (much less Windows 95 or 98). To allow that would be completely irresponsible of Microsoft, wouldn't it?

Okay, enough of that! Now I'm getting sick to my stomach!

The problem that many of us are facing is that we are stuck with what we've got. We have already invested so much in Microsoft products that it would be extremely difficult to switch to something else. In addition, Windows NT 4.0 SP6a is a reasonably reliable operating system, and the Office 2000 suite is

exceptional.

However, every once in a while I get a little whimsical thinking back to the good old days, when I used to run our multi-billion dollar company on two large VAX machines. That's ALL of our applications, every single one of them. Plus hundreds of users, over fifty printers and fax machines and numerous other things. In fact, we ran payroll, accounting, order processing, delivery scheduling, human resources, printing, communications and everything else on those two machines!

To top it all off, we ran for over ten years on these VAX machines without a major operating system upgrade! Yes, there were problems, but constant retraining, reinstalls, service packs, hot fixes and weekly major security alerts were not among them. And compared to the clustering in OpenVMS (the operating system for the VAX and Alpha hardware), the "clustering" in Windows 2000 is a complete joke!

And now I need over 150 servers running Windows NT 4.0 and Windows 2000! The really sickening thing is I'll bet I could run everything on a dozen or so Unix or Linux servers, or, again, two big Alpha (the successor to the VAX) systems. (It's really too bad that Digital Equipment Corporation, which made the best hardware and operating systems on the planet, could not market their way out of a paper bag).

I think that's what is annoying is and many of our peers the most. The constant need to spend an outrageous amount of time to keep up with the new releases from Microsoft.

I know it doesn't fit into Microsoft's hostile "do it our way and pay us for

the privilege" business model, but we would much prefer a different approach to the MCSE certification model. Instead of constantly rolling it forward constantly, invalidating the certifications of those who cannot keep up, why not just append the operating system to the certification?

Why not just make a "MCSE Win4.0" and an "MCSE Win2000"? To me as a manager, it would be far more valuable than the current catch-all scheme. Look at it this way, I could scan a resume for "MCSE Win3.1", "MCSE Win4.0" or "MCSE Win95". Wouldn't that make it easier for me as a manager? You bet!

However, it wouldn't help Microsoft's bottom line, would it?

Fortunately, I am not in the business of helping Microsoft's profit margin. In fact, on my list of worries, that wouldn't even be in the top million! My job, and the job of each and every person in our company, is to support our users by giving them tools which enable them to do their jobs.

To do that, we will get certified on Windows 2000, and probably Windows XP after that. However, we will do it on our schedule, fitting the training and testing time around our jobs and personal lives. In the meantime, we will

take a closer look at other alternatives to Windows and Office, because, well, well really don't like this situation. We may, or we may not, change to those alternatives, but before this we were not even looking ... now we are.

Additional Information

The Certification Debate

<http://internet-tips.net/Careers/certifications.htm>

There is a huge debate out there in the computer world – to certify or not to certify. Here's my two cents.

Microsoft's Licensing Model (Sigh)

<http://internet-tips.net/Microsoft/licensing.htm>

You would think that Microsoft would want to make it easy to give them money, wouldn't you? Think again.

What's Up With Microsoft?

<http://internet-tips.net/Microsoft/whatsup.htm>

Microsoft stock has been going down all through 2000. Here's an opinion as to why.

Richard Lowe Jr. is the webmaster of Internet Tips And Secrets at <http://www.internet-tips.net> – Visit our website any time to read over 1,000 complete FREE articles about how to improve your

internetprofits, enjoyment and knowledge.

Turn About On Certification

By Richard Lowe

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On October 11th I was reading my email as usual when I opened one which stated something so unbelievable that I had to read it three times. I will admit the news was nothing compared to the events going on in the rest of the world (the September 11th terrorist attack and aftermath). However, it was very welcome nonetheless.

Microsoft has changed their policy on retiring certifications.

If you will remember, over a year ago Microsoft had announced that the Windows NT 4.0 certifications were being retired on December 31st, 2001. This meant that everyone who had slaved for months or even years to pass their exams had to rush to take the new exams for the newest operating system (Windows 2000).

Needless to say, this announcement caused quite a stir in much of the computer industry. There were hundreds of thousands of MCSE's, and all of them were effected by this decision. What made it even worse was the fact that most of us were not even upgrading to Windows 2000 anytime in the near future. Thus, we had to get certified yet we didn't really need to get certified to do our jobs.

There were quite a few announcements. The two regarding MCSE's state exactly what I had suggested in a previous article "Microsoft's ^@&^#&@ W2K MCSE Policy", so I was very happy indeed.

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Microsoft/W2KMCSEcertification.htm>

...on Windows NT 4.0, which designates the related certification as based on Windows NT 4.0. This designation applies to the following certifications: MCP, MCSE, MCSE+I, MCP+I, and MCP+Site Building. Thus, this MCSE would formally be called "MCSE on Windows NT 4.0."

...on Microsoft Windows 2000, which designates the related certification as based on Windows 2000, Windows XP Professional, or Windows Server .NET. This designation applies to the following certifications: MCP, MCSE, MCSA, and MCDBA (except for the latter, it's called "MCDBA on SQL Server 2000" instead). Here, this MCSE would formally be called "MCSE on Microsoft

Windows 2000."

The bottom line is simple. Those of us who have the MCSE certification do not need to worry about losing it at the end of the year. It also makes

things much easier for me as an employer – now I will be able to look at a certification and get a little more information. Instead of just finding out someone is an expert on Microsoft operating systems, I will now find out exactly which operating system.

Microsoft also added a new certification, called MCSA, or Microsoft Certified Systems Administrator. This certification is great news, as it provides something between MCP and MCSE. Why is this necessary? The new MCSE for Windows 2000 is a very tough exam and it might take someone (especially those of us who work for a living) quite some time to get it done.

The MCSA certification requires three core exams and one elective. The certification is actually very well designed, and should serve as a useful guide for employers.

Why the change? Well, I think there are a number of reasons. The biggest reason? The terrorist attack and its effect on the economy.

My peers and I have seen, in just a month, our budgets disappear, especially for things like upgrades and certifications. My boss put it very well to me last week, "if you have the choice between upgrading and laying people off, what are you going to do?" The answer is obvious. At my company, we have postponed upgrading until next year at least, which means we do not need to get certified.

Another big reason is that MCSE's have jobs, and I don't know about you, but I have trouble finding time to take the classes and tests to continue certification. It's hard enough just to keep the wife happy, write some articles, and maintain the job. So the certification, testing and learning will wait.

On top of that, Microsoft has been very unsuccessful in trying to force the computer industry to upgrade to Windows 2000 and beyond. Yes, my company did install Windows 2000 on all of our laptops, but we've found Windows NT 4.0 works very well on our other servers and workstations. We have no intention or need to upgrade our hundreds of systems for the next several years, unless there is a valid business reason.

Even more importantly, even though we may upgrade our systems to Windows 2000, we have no intention of installing Active Directory anytime soon. Why not? This is a huge change and we simply don't want to support it at this

time.

Finally, the industry backlash on Microsoft has been huge, and the power of 400,000+ MCSE's and their supervisors should not be underestimated.

Personally, I am happy that Microsoft has made this change. Now I can concentrate on important issues like polishing our disaster site, upgrading our security measures, ensuring our backups work properly and making our systems work better for our users.

Richard Lowe Jr. is the webmaster of Internet Tips And Secrets at <http://www.internet-tips.net> – Visit our website any time to read over 1,000 complete FREE articles about how to improve your internet profits, enjoyment and knowledge.



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