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## Infosec Certifications: Beyond Basic Training

**Get the right certifications to compliment job experience and ensure career mobility.**

By Joanne VanAuken

[Secure Enterprise](#)

As businesses are barraged by information-security threats and data-retention mandates, IT executives are recognizing the growing need for infosec managers and staff with more than technical experience and on-the-job training. At the same time, career-minded employees are aiming to demonstrate commitment and depth of knowledge, and to differentiate themselves from the crowd.

That's where security certifications come in. Solid work experience coupled with certification lets hiring managers know that the applicant follows a strict code of ethics, adheres to best practices and has a high level of integrity when dealing with systems and customers, according to Michael Maloof, CTO of TriGeo Network Security. In addition, customers have more confidence in vendors or individuals who've obtained CISSP or CISA credentials, Maloof says.

Indeed, though it's impossible to measure the exact value of any certification--the best candidate for an infosec managerial or executive job must have the particular combination of experience, training, communication skills and technical and business knowledge that a company seeks--about 90 percent of security hiring managers rate security certifications important in hiring decisions, according to IDC, which forecasts that spending on infosec training will reach \$1 billion in the U.S. by 2006, with more than 70 infosec certifications currently being offered. What's more, as the infosec job market expands--from 1.3 million professionals in 2004 to 2.1 million by 2008, according to IDC--certifications serve as an incentive to keep valued employees motivated and up to date on critical technology.

But that means you must make some tough choices. Before you or your company invests thousands of dollars to get CISSP, GIAC, SCNA or any other initials tacked on to your name, you must do your research, just as you would if you were pursuing another college or graduate degree. Find out which certifications are "hot" and who offers them. Ask if your company will pay for the additional training and determine what payback you might get from having a certification.

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MOST WANTED CERTIFICATIONS	
What certification are you working on or planning to get?	
CISSP	100%
GIAC	95%
SCNA	90%
CCNA	85%
CCNA Security	80%
CCNA Wireless	75%
CCNA IPv6	70%
CCNA SD-WAN	65%
CCNA Cloud Managed Networking	60%
CCNA SD-WAN	55%
CCNA Cloud Managed Networking	50%
CCNA SD-WAN	45%
CCNA Cloud Managed Networking	40%
CCNA SD-WAN	35%
CCNA Cloud Managed Networking	30%
CCNA SD-WAN	25%
CCNA Cloud Managed Networking	20%
CCNA SD-WAN	15%
CCNA Cloud Managed Networking	10%
CCNA SD-WAN	5%
CCNA Cloud Managed Networking	0%

Most Wanted Certifications

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Most of the certifications discussed here are intended for working professionals with several years' experience and intermediate to advanced skills. These are the most prominent certs--some are must-haves, others are essential only if you plan to specialize in a particular area, such as wireless security or forensics. See the tables on this page for a more detailed list.

And yes, we've heard the horror stories about fly-by-night training companies that sell IT certifications online with all the value of Joey's minister's license on Friends. Avoid getting scammed by checking the validity of the sponsoring organization--does it have ISO/IEC 17024 accreditation from the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), which validates that it has a standardized certification and management process, for instance? And, of course, check job ads regularly to see which certs are

in highest demand. Currently that list includes:

Rising/Declining Certified Skills	
What certification are you working on or planning to get?	
CISSP	100%
GIAC	95%
SCNA	90%
CCNA	85%
CCNA Security	80%
CCNA Wireless	75%
CCNA IPv6	70%
CCNA SD-WAN	65%
CCNA Cloud Managed Networking	60%
CCNA SD-WAN	55%
CCNA Cloud Managed Networking	50%
CCNA SD-WAN	45%
CCNA Cloud Managed Networking	40%
CCNA SD-WAN	35%
CCNA Cloud Managed Networking	30%
CCNA SD-WAN	25%
CCNA Cloud Managed Networking	20%
CCNA SD-WAN	15%
CCNA Cloud Managed Networking	10%
CCNA SD-WAN	5%
CCNA Cloud Managed Networking	0%

Rising/Declining Certified Skills

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- **CISSP (Certified Information Systems Security Professional).**

(ISC)2, the 15-year-old International Information Systems Security Certification Consortium, which issues this popular (more than 30,000 certificate holders) and well-respected certification, also provides three CISSP concentrations: Security Architecture (ISSAP), Security Management (ISSMP) and Security Engineering (ISSEP). CISSP, which has ISO/ IEC17024 accreditation, is required for many government and private-sector information security jobs. Almost any professional with an understanding of risk and how it relates to business process could benefit from these credentials.

- **CISA (Certified Information Systems Auditor).**

Issued by ISACA (Information Systems Audit and Control Association), CISA has been considered the standard of achievement for information system auditing and controls since its introduction in 1978. Of the approximately 38,000 professionals who hold this certification, ISACA says more than 900 are chief information officers or IT security directors and 8,500 hold managerial or consulting IT operations, security or auditing positions. CISAs have the highest-paying infosec positions, followed by CISSP, according to Foote Research.

- **CISM (Certified Information Security Manager).**

More than 5,000 infosec pros have earned the CISM title since ISACA introduced this cert about two years ago. The program is designed for seasoned infosec managers and focuses on management rather than practitioner skills. There are about 2,000 CISM in infosec management jobs and 1,000 CISM in security consulting or training positions, with more than 1,000 CISM holding titles of CIO, CEO or IT security director, according to ISACA.

If you're climbing the ladder to a management position, CISSP or CISA certification is a must; some CISO positions require both. CISM is still new, but analysts at Foote Research say it's likely to compete with CISSP, and we think it may eventually become a requirement for many C-level positions.

- **GIAC (Global Information Assurance Certification) and GIAC Security Expert (GSE).**

The SANS Institute established GIAC not just to validate the knowledge and skills of infosec professionals but to address skill sets in specific areas: auditing, intrusion detection, incident handling, perimeter protection, forensics and Windows and Unix OS protection. If you're aiming to develop in-depth technical knowledge in a variety of infosec specialties and demonstrate practical applications in real-world scenarios, the GIAC Security Expert (GSE) certification could be the ticket. It requires completion of a topic-specific assignment or research paper as well as one or more technical exams. (Go to [www.sans.org/rr/](http://www.sans.org/rr/) to check out some sample assignments.)

If you plan to specialize in a narrower security discipline, consider these certification examples:

- **SCNA (Security Certified Network Architect).**

SCNA focuses on the advanced security skills and technologies of building trusted networks, including law and legislation, forensics, wireless security, e-mail security, biometrics, strong authentication, digital certificates/signatures and cryptography.

- **GCWN (Certified Windows Security Administrator).**

The SANS Institute's GCWN is designed for security engineers wishing to show proficiency in securing Windows NT, 2000/2003 and XP systems. Intermediate-to-advanced knowledge in securing Active Directory, Group Policy and DNS is required.

- **CWSP (Certified Wireless Security Professional).**

CWSP builds on the professional's knowledge of LAN intrusion, security policies and security solutions, all in the wireless context.



Security  
Certifications  
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## Vendor-Specific Certs

It's not unusual to see both general and vendor-specific certificates on an infosec pro's resume, and for good reason: The most attractive job candidates have knowledge they can apply broadly as well as skills they can apply only in specific kinds of shops. Cisco's Certified Security Pro (CCSP) and Microsoft's Certified Systems Engineer:Security (MCSE:Security) are big, of course, but Hewlett-Packard/Compaq Accredited Systems Engineer (HP ASE) has been coming on strong, as have Sun certifications for Java and Solaris, according to Foote's annual skills survey.

The products used in your own IT shop will most likely dictate your certification options, but try not to limit yourself. If your resume lists only a vendor-specific cert, you may be restricting future job opportunities.

## Your Tab or Mine?

Nearly half of the 35,000 IT professionals surveyed by Certification Magazine say their employers foot the bill for their

certifications, and 14 percent say their companies split the bill. That's a significant investment, considering cert-related costs can run several hundred dollars for books and CDs to several thousand dollars for attendance in instructor-led classes, topped by exam registration, travel and, later, refresher course and renewal fees. The intensified emphasis on compliance with government regulations may motivate more midsize and large enterprises to support employees seeking additional training as well.

As the number of certified individuals increases, the stringent requirements for obtaining and renewing high-level certs such as CISSP and CISA will help maintain their market value. Each certification program demands a certain amount of related job experience and, in some cases, updating and retesting down the road. A CISSP, for instance, must complete 120 continuing professional education (CPE) credits every three years and get confirmation, through a qualified third party, of your professional experience and good standing in the information security industry.

As you investigate your options, note that the value of any certification varies with changes in infosec technology, regulations and competing programs. The certs currently most critical to enterprise managers who are hiring or promoting security personnel, according to the Secure Enterprise 2004 Strategic Deployment Survey: CISSP at a whopping 48 percent, followed by SANS certifications at 26 percent and CISA at 24 percent.

Meanwhile, security-management practices, telecom and network security, and business-continuity and disaster-recovery planning top the charts of emerging areas for security training and certification, according to IDC.

### Plan accordingly.

*Joanne VanAuken is a technology editor for Secure Enterprise. She has 14 years' experience in computer operations and systems administration. Write to her at [jvanauken@secureenterprisemag.com](mailto:jvanauken@secureenterprisemag.com).*

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