

Cisco Learning Partner Unitek IT Education Builds Voice Lab for Cisco CCIE Certification

The Cisco Certified Internetwork Expert designation (CCIE) is the highest level of Cisco certification achievement. Considered the ‘master level’ of the Cisco certification program, it is awarded to the candidate who has an in-depth understanding of the subtleties, intricacies and challenges of end-to-end networking. It earned the number-one spot in the CertCities.com Ten Hottest Certifications for 2005, and for the third year in a row was awarded Most Respected High-Level Certification by CertCities.com readers. Less than three percent of Cisco certified professionals worldwide earn their CCIE. The testing process includes a written qualification exam and the lab exam, an eight hour-long hands-on practicum described by one CertCities.com reader as “grueling.”

Unitek IT Education is a Cisco Learning Partner (CLP) in the San Francisco Bay Area, and a prominent provider of Cisco authorized training. Cisco has a rigid process in place for managing its CLPs, ensuring a level of quality and relevance at all levels of training on any Cisco technology. Unitek worked recently with Cisco to construct a VOIP lab to serve those aspiring to a CCIE Voice certification or who need hands-on experience with voice technology.



“VoIP is the future of communications and a key initiative for Cisco” says Navraj Bawa, vice president of operations for Unitek. “Studies have proven that CCIE certification is a passport to a big leap in bill rates for services. However, the certification is tough to get and there are only a few labs worldwide set up for the hands-on portion of the certification process. The equipment is expensive and high customer demand makes it tough to obtain”.

As part of a business strategy to broaden the scope of training and education services into advanced technologies such as IP telephony and security, Unitek approached Cisco about creating a lab with official Cisco hardware. The lab would help meet the high demand for CCIE certification and for training on this critical new technology.

“Cisco very much wanted a state-of-the-art lab available to its partners, employees and customers, but recognized that it is not in the lab-building and training business,” says Michael Whitlock, director, business development for Unitek. “Besides constructing the lab, courseware needed to be written and qualified instructors had to be found. Cisco wisely decided to outsource this to a learning partner whose core competency it is to train.”

Cisco Account Manager Scott Braddock, who worked with Unitek and within Cisco to get the lab set up, says that CCIE certification differs from other programs in that it’s a very hands-on certification. Those pursuing CCIE certification must have direct experience with the equipment to know how to make it work.

“When you get up to the expert level of CCIE you’re dealing with technology of a certain complexity,” says Braddock. “There are no simulators for learning this technology. Cisco solutions demand high performance so you must learn the equipment to get the maximum performance out of it.”

Braddock worked with Unitek and Cisco to design the lab and populate it with Cisco refurbished equipment. By using refurbished equipment, the lab could be completed more quickly and less expensively.

Prior to this new Cisco lab, Unitek had the facilities and equipment to address Cisco Certified Voice Professional (CCVP) level training. Now it can provide students with the resources necessary to mirror the gamut of deployment scenarios found in real world environments, and provide the hands-on environment necessary to undertake the CCIE Voice certification process.



“This lab allows us to showcase the power of Cisco technology, and Cisco users, the world over,” says Bawa. “As a Cisco Learning Partner, we’re in a unique position to touch hundreds of Cisco customers and partners, and to evangelize this incredible technology. I can’t speak enough of Scott’s commitment to this project. We are small compared to some of the huge Cisco enterprise customers, and yet, with our custom and advanced technical needs, we got what we needed. This personal touch despite the awesome size of Cisco is commendable, and speaks highly of its commitment to its partners and customers.”

Today, Cisco partners, employees, and customers from around the world vie for a spot in Unitek’s CCIE Voice Lab. It represents the final step following 10 weeks of training, after which students may tackle the CCIE certification exam.

A good number of Unitek CCIE students are Cisco employees who need the technical knowledge of VoIP. Cisco partners enroll in the training for the CCIE certification, and many high-end IT Cisco customers take the course to more fully understand the technology being deployed for their company.

“If these customers are not yet running VoIP in their own environment, they’ve never seen it work and want to do so; and if they are running it in their environment they sure don’t want to play around with it while the business is running on it,” says Whitlock. “It is Unitek’s goal to ensure that these people leave the lab with expert level familiarity with the equipment that they will be managing in their work environs.”

Braddock is also confident that the new Unitek CCIE Voice Lab will fill a large, and growing, need.

“With the VoIP market showing exponential growth, access to capable, credible resources for education and hands-on technology training is essential,” he says. “My customers are looking for certified staff resources and proven expertise with advanced technologies. Unitek’s CCIE Voice Lab gives individuals and organizations access to a state-of-the-art facility with all the hardware and software necessary to learn, demonstrate, and prove their knowledge, skills, and capabilities in a controlled environment.”

Unitek estimates it will train 250 students at the new lab this year. And as it entertains requests from around the world, it can take the lab on the road and run it anywhere it’s needed. Plans are in place for a lab road show, with Cisco Singapore as the first stop.

CCIE certification has had multiple designations, offering training to help partners, employees, and customers be best prepared to take on the prevalent issues at hand.

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— Navraj Bawa
Vice President of Operations
Unitek

“CCIE emphasis is a snapshot in time – over the years it’s reached out to embrace routing and switching, and security, and now voice,” says Braddock. “Voice technology is driving many of today’s significant network projects so a CCIE voice lab is a sign of the times — it’s a big signal that says the industry is moving to full convergence.”



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