



// GLOBAL 360° //

WHERE THE GEEKS ARE

Online testing company, BrainBench, reports on global trends in technical certification.

By Meghan Holohan

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Here's a problem

many employers face. They need to hire large numbers of technical professionals for a special information technology (IT) project that the CEO wants done yesterday. But are the prospective employees' skills up to the job?

As a project manager during Y2K, Mark Russiello faced that problem. He founded BrainBench, an online assessment company, to help companies evaluate current and future IT employees.

BrainBench has tested more than 300,000 people using more than 600 types of assessment tests, giving the company insights into the skill needs and capabilities in several industries, including IT, management, customer support, healthcare, finance, and sales and marketing. Their findings are published in the *BrainBench Global Skills Report 2006*, which covers certification trends from 2001 to the present.

The United States currently leads the world in the number of people with

professional certifications even though that number is down 18 percent from last year. Overall, however, certifications worldwide have increased, with IT certifications dominating.

Report co-author Mark Healy, an independent management consultant based in Oakland, California, says the report shows the presence of a virtual work world.

“Work is not dependent on geography any more. To do a job you don’t have to be near the company you work for,” he says.

The report suggests that there are not enough programmers in the United States, but other countries have high levels of certification in that profession. India’s certification rate increased by 47 percent, making it second to the United States in IT certifications.

The United States and India aren’t the only countries with large pools of IT employees. BrainBench reports certifications in Estonia, Nigeria, Thailand, countries from the former Soviet Union, and Latin America. No single country monopolizes the industry.

While outsourcing can mean that jobs are lost to countries with lower pay scales, Healy argues that businesses shouldn’t use outsourcing as a way to cut costs. Smart companies should assess their strengths and then consider outsourcing as a way to bolster their performance.

A computer manufacturer, for example, might consider using programmers from other countries for routine tasks so that its domestic programmers and engineers could focus more on new product development.

Another company may realize that its quality assurance process is problematic and costs too much money. They might want to find a quality assurance company in China, for example, that can perform tests in a more efficient and cost-effective manner.

Some countries are developing new areas of expertise. It was once a safe assumption that China was good at

quality assurance and India excelled at programming. “Now, the skill sets in all countries are continuously evolving,” says Healy.

Even though both Healy and Russiello agree that outsourcing isn’t all negative, Russiello notes that too much outsourcing can be a bad thing—especially when it comes to the IT industry. In the United States, the shortage of Java programmers doesn’t affect companies. If a business doesn’t have enough programmers, it just ships work to India or Latin America. But if there was a high-security situation that threatened the nation, the United States may not have enough domestic programmers to handle it.

According to Healy, people often blame the U.S. educational system for the shortage, saying students don’t acquire strong science and math backgrounds. But he thinks that not enough college-age people know enough about the IT industry to pursue careers in it. Or if they do know about it, they are put off by the nerdy image of the computer programmer. He says it is up to the IT industry and colleges to educate high school students about the field.

The study also examined trends in certification content, not just where people were being certified. Researchers learned that increasing numbers of people throughout the world are getting certified in Microsoft programming languages such as C# and C++.

While Healy, Russiello, and a third author, Charles Handler (founder of Rocket-Hire, a San Francisco Bay Area company that helps companies assess assessment and certification tools) feel that online assessments are the best way to hire a skilled workforce, the study shows how important it is for businesses to know the workplace environment.

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Top 10 Certifications Worldwide

1. C#
2. Software Testing
3. C++
4. .NET Framework
5. Computer Technical Support
6. ASP.NET
7. RDBMS Concepts
8. Project Management (2005)
9. Java 2 Fundamentals
10. Linux Administration (General)

Source: BrainBench Global Skills Report 2006

Countries with the Highest IT Certification Levels

2006 RANK	2005 RANK	CHANGE FROM 2005
1. United States	1	-18%
2. India	2	+47%
3. Russian Federation	3	-21%
4. Ukraine	5	+14%
5. Romania	4	-18%
6. United Kingdom	7	-7%
7. Canada	6	-27%
8. Belarus	11	+49%
9. Philippines	9	-4%
10. Bulgaria	8	-30%

Source: BrainBench Global Skills Report 2006

// NEWS FLASH //

Bill Could Enhance U.S. Competitiveness

The United States Senate appears poised to advance a new bill designed to improve America's economic competitiveness, by providing significant and needed enhancements in scientific research and education.

The bipartisan National Competitiveness Investment Act combines elements of three other bills: the American Innovation and Competitiveness Act, the Protecting America's Competitive Edge (PACE)-Energy Act, and the PACE-Education Act. The bill provides for substantial investment in commerce and science, education, the Department of Energy, and the National Science Foundation. The legislation focuses on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) by authorizing billions of dollars for basic scientific research and creating numerous programs geared toward math and science teachers and professors.

"This bill is an important first step to help protect America's competitive edge in science and technology," says Senator Lamar Alexander (R-Tennessee), a co-sponsor of the proposal. "It will double our investment in basic research and help the next generation of American scientists and engineers learn the skills they need to succeed."

But there is still work to be done when it comes to competitiveness legislation. The proposed bill does not include a number of provisions to address nonSTEM skills gaps that the profession had been seeking. Instead, these provisions will have to come in a separate bill because they deal with tax and financial issues. Some notable absences were several proposed tax credits that would have permitted employers to deduct some or all of their expenses for employee training and

lifelong learning accounts, which would have helped individuals save for training opportunities.

Another proposal that may be included in future competitiveness legislation is the Digital Opportunity Investment Trust (DO IT) Act, a bipartisan bill that provides funding for training, research, and development projects that use advanced information technologies. Funded through a portion of the revenues the government receives from the sale of the electromagnetic spectrum, these investments in education and development could support such projects as the development of authentic assessment methods and digital training tools for educators and trainers, content, and interactive training methods.

Newton Minow, former Federal Communications Commission chairman and co-chairman of Digital Promise, the coalition leading efforts to enact the bill, said during a recent C-SPAN interview that "to keep us competitive as a nation, we've got to take part of the (spectrum) money and invest it in our future for education and new technologies."

According to Minow, an important part of this initiative includes using innovative technologies and digital resources to train people because new technology developments are allowing people to learn more quickly and thoroughly than traditional learning methods.

As the 109th Congress comes to a close this year, it is unclear when lawmakers will address these initiatives. If they are unable to produce legislation by the end of the term, WLP professionals must be prepared to educate the 110th Congress on the vital role that workplace learning and performance plays in maintaining a highly skilled workforce that's globally competitive.

—Alexandra Griffin and Kermit Kaleba
ASTD Policy and Public Leadership



Benefits with Friends

// WORKING LIFE //

Statistical guru Tom Rath, of the Gallup Organization, recently published *Vital Friends*, a book about the value of friendship.

Drawing on more than 5 million interviews, Rath explains how the bonds we form affect everything from our attitude to our productivity. Here are some of his findings about having friends in the office:

- >> People who have a best friend at work are seven times more likely to be engaged in their work. They also have fewer accidents, more engaged customers, and are more likely to innovate and share new ideas.
- >> Close friendships at work boost employee satisfaction by almost 50 percent.
- >> People with at least three close friends at work were 46 percent more likely to be extremely satisfied with their job and 88 percent more likely to be satisfied with their life.
- >> When employees have close friendships with their bosses, they are more than twice as likely to be satisfied with their jobs.

// TRENDS //

Blogging for Business

It seems as though everyone is blogging—not just individuals, but businesses, too. While an individual blog is typically an electronic diary in which the writer expresses personal thoughts and feelings, a business blog that is hosted by an organization gives workers the opportunity to comment on its people and products.

According to Nancy Flynn, author of *Blog Rules*, skillful writers can use corporate blogs as an effective way to position executives as industry thought leaders, facilitate productive two-way communication with clients, enhance media relations, and build brand awareness. More importantly, organizations can use blogs to build valuable relationships, gain the trust of customers, business partners, and employees, and possibly avert public relations disasters—if they're willing to be forthright and honest in their commentary.

However, Flynn warns that a blog isn't the appropriate communications tool for all organizations. A blogosphere can be an extremely risky environment. Before rushing to establish a business blog, it is essential to consider whether a blog is right for your organization and whether the legal liabilities as well as time and technology commitments outweigh the potential benefits.

Flynn offers these rules to help your organization avert blog-related disasters, while maximizing the potential benefits.

- 1) Establish your objective first, blog second.
- 2) Assign a blog management team rather than an individual to develop the blog program.
- 3) Put blog rules in writing and inform employees that any violation of the policies may result in disciplinary action.
- 4) Require employees to sign a confidentiality agreement to protect trade secrets and intellectual property.
- 5) Support blog policy with employee education. Train employees about blog risks, rules, rights, and regulations to help ensure compliance with the policy.
- 6) Discipline blog policy violators. Stress the fact that the organization's rules and policies apply regardless of whether employees are blogging at the office or at home.
- 7) Treat blog posts and comments as business records.
- 8) Battle spam in the blogosphere.
- 9) Review prior to posting content. Given the risks inherent in unsupervised blogging employers are advised to screen posts to avoid publishing content that is defamatory, inaccurate, violates copyright law, or is otherwise inappropriate.
- 10) Address readers' comments. If someone takes time to post a comment, be responsive and gracious.

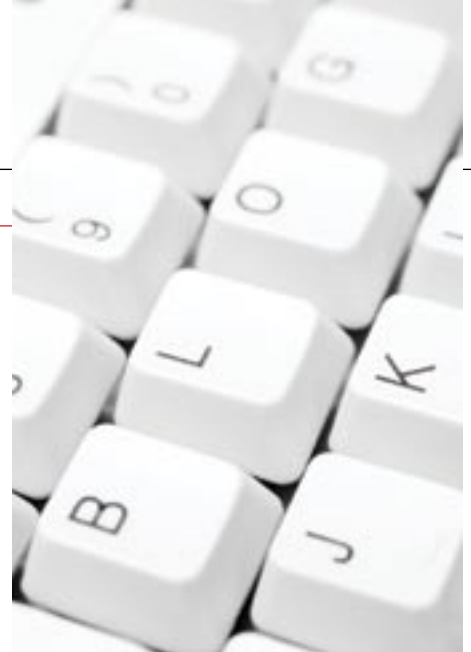


Photo by iStock Photo

For an idea of what business bloggers are writing about, take a look at a few.

IBM developerWorks Blogs

IBM staff lead more than 50 blogs that openly discuss IBM products, as well as general technology issues.

<http://www-03.ibm.com/developerworks/blogs>

FastLane Blog

GM's FastLane blog, led by vice chairman Bob Lutz, is a forum for GM executives to talk about GM's current and future products and services, although nonexecutives sometimes discuss the development and design of important products.

<http://fastlane.gmblogs.com>

// COOL TOOL //

IF YOU CAN'T TAKE THE HEAT...

According to BlueLounge Design, overheating laptops are becoming such a problem that some manufacturers now call them "portable computers" for fear of consumers getting burned.

Cool Feet are the company's answer to sizzled thighs. They are small portable spacers that attach to the bottom of a laptop with suction cups, creating enough space for air to circulate under the computer. Adhesive glossy plates ensure that the suction cups will attach to the bottom of virtually any notebook computer.

According to the product's website, these feet also increase your computer's performance speed and create an ergonomic typing area. One set sells for \$12.95.

[MORE/www.cableyo.com/coolfeethome.html](http://www.cableyo.com/coolfeethome.html)



Good Boss, Bad Boss?

Nearly all managers—**92 percent**—consider themselves to be excellent or good bosses. However, the latest Hudson survey found that employees do not necessarily agree with them. Only 67 percent rated their managers positively, and 10 percent even said that their bosses are poor managers.

The survey also revealed that many bosses may not have a clue about how their employees feel about their managerial skills. That's because only a quarter of the workforce is given the opportunity to formally review their managers' performances.

"Reviews cannot provide a complete picture of a manager's performance if you are not looking at how they are perceived by workers reporting to them," says Robert Morgan, chief operating officer of Hudson Talent Management. "Not only are 360-degree reviews a good opportunity to assess an employee's capabilities as a manager, but they also let workers know that their opinions are valued, regardless of where they sit in the organization."

The survey results also pointed to training as a solution.

Even though none of the managers said that they are doing a poor job, many admitted they could use some help. Twenty-six percent said they do not receive adequate training to handle their managerial responsibilities.

MORE/ www.hudson-index.com



Podcasts for Small Businesses

In addition to free courses, workshops, and resources, the United States Small Business Administration has recently added podcasting to its training arsenal for small business owners.

These new podcasts were developed to introduce busy entrepreneurs to various small business topics, and provide advice on all aspects of starting, expanding, and financing a small business, and on business protection.

Each broadcast is less than 10 minutes long and features interviews with experts from the SBA, the Service Corps of Retired Executives, and the Small Business Development Centers, the Women's Business Centers, as well as various industry experts.

The podcast files can be listened to on a computer or downloaded onto a MP3 player. Additional feeds on new topics will be added regularly.

MORE/ www.sba.gov/podcasts





41% of job seekers mention flexible work arrangements as a characteristic they want when looking for work.

Organization Characteristics that Matter to Job Seekers

1. Offers challenging and interesting work**60%**
2. Recognizes and rewards accomplishments**58%**
3. Provides an opportunity for fast career growth and advancement**44%**
4. Is financially strong**42%**
5. Is people oriented.....**42%**
6. Offers flexible work arrangements.....**41%**
7. Is innovative**33%**
8. Is approachable**27%**
9. Fosters a team-oriented environment**27%**
10. Is a global company**26%**

Illustration by Steve Fife

Source: Accenture

// FAST FACT //

Motivation: A Management Challenge?



30%
of executives cite motivating employees as their biggest management challenge.

KEEPING “IDEA PEOPLE” INSPIRED— particularly among large marketing and advertising companies in the United States—may require ingenuity on the part of their supervisors, according to a new survey from the Creative Group.

When asked to name their biggest management challenge, nearly one-third (30 percent) of executives polled cited motivating employees. Finding qualified staff came in a close second, with 28 percent of the response.

Training ranked third on the list: 14 percent of executives reported it as a

management obstacle. It was followed by retaining staff (11 percent) and resolving staff conflict (7 percent).

The Creative Group is a specialized staffing service headquartered in Menlo Park, California. The survey was conducted by an independent research firm and includes 250 responses—125 from advertising executives with the nation’s 1,000 largest advertising agencies and 125 from senior marketing executives with the nation’s 1,000 largest companies.

MORE/ www.thecreativegroup.com