



## **CISCO NETWORKING ACADEMY DISCUSSION FINDINGS**

### **Canadian Industry Leaders and Educators Issue Call to Action to Governments and Businesses to Raise Positive Profile of IT Careers**

### **Panelists at Cisco Networking Academy Event Find IT Careers Unappealing to Students and Graduates; Perception Contributing to Canadian IT Skills Shortage**

A panel comprised of Canadian IT educators, administrators, analysts, entrepreneurs and labour market experts overwhelmingly agreed that the profile of IT careers needs to be raised to help address the industry's skills shortage in Canada.

Hosted by Cisco in October to commemorate the 10th anniversary of Cisco Networking Academy<sup>®</sup>, the panel discussion focused on the role businesses, governments and the education sector can play in encouraging more students and graduates to pursue careers in technology.

Comments from the panel, moderated by IT World Canada's editorial director, John Pickett, included:

- "There has been up to a 70 per cent drop in Canadian enrollment in college computer and technical programs, which translates to a considerable gap between the number of qualified graduates and the number of annual hires needed by businesses. We are not getting the message to students that IT is a lucrative and appealing career choice. There is a disconnect between the perception of IT as being boring and irrelevant to what is reality. The industry needs to do more to turn this around and convey the passion and excitement felt by people in the industry." (Paul Swinwood, president, Information and Communications Technology Council)
- "The Canadian dollar has reached parity with the U.S., but yet Canada is challenged to meet the staffing demands of its businesses to ensure this economic growth continues. Ultimately, we may have to look to other countries and outsource jobs." (Sebastián Ruest, vice president, services research, IDC Canada)
- "IT is a great industry, but events such as the 'dot bomb' and Y2K certainly contributed to the negative perceptions that exist among younger generations. Technology is essential to productivity and innovation, but if we don't have people in place to manage it, we are all going to

suffer. I applaud Cisco for its commitment to teaching students IT and networking skills, but more companies need to step up and do their share.” (Mauro Lollo, co-founder and chief technology officer, UNIS LUMIN)

- “Students and youth migrate to jobs that have ‘hot’ profiles. The student population has continued to drop since the Baby Boomer generation and all industries are competing for the same small talent pool. It’s becoming even more challenging to funnel graduates into IT careers when the industry possesses little or no profile.” (Robert Wager, program coordinator for experiential learning, Toronto District School Board)
- “I am very passionate about teaching the Cisco Networking Academy curriculum and I see first hand what IT skills can do for students and their future careers. But the questions we need to ask are, ‘Is it enough? Can this program alone address the demand for IT labour?’ The answers, very obviously, are ‘no.’ Bottom line: more needs to be done at the education, government and business levels.” (Pam Baldaro, IT instructor, West Kildonan Collegiate)
- “Productivity is necessary for Canada’s global competitiveness. It is critical for businesses and governments to take a more active role in finding solutions and filling the estimated 89,000 IT jobs that will become vacant over the next 3-5 years.” (Paul Swinwood, president, Information and Communications Technology Council)

Additionally, the panel cited specific recommendations on how the IT skills shortage in Canada can be addressed:

- More IT education programs lead by public-private partnerships – Businesses must take the initiative and collaborate with educators to foster student interest in IT early in their schooling, and develop programs focused on imparting IT skills essential to succeed in today’s modern economy.
- School-to-school collaboration – Post-secondary institutions need to work more closely with secondary schools to foster initial interest in IT and help build their own student funnel to increase enrollment.
- Building a new “image” for IT – Industry leaders need to work toward transitioning the image of IT careers from being boring, irrelevant and paltry, to fast-paced, vital and lucrative. Branding and advertising campaigns showcasing the success of “real” IT professionals is one way to help accomplish this.

- Taking IT out of the lab and into the real world – Schools that offer programs such as job shadowing, internships and co-ops can help make the concept of a career in IT more tangible to a student whose concept of the profession has been limited to textbook and theoretical learning. Tours and field trips lead by IT professionals who can showcase the innovative use of technology inside the business world can help connect the dots for students whose only exposure to IT has been in the classroom.
- Corporations giving back – Schools routinely lack the modern resources to properly teach an IT curriculum. Businesses who provide grants or in-kind donations such as computers and other equipment can make a big difference.
- Support at business and government levels – IT is essential in supporting Canada's productivity. Governments and businesses need to align programs to promote IT careers and support educational curriculums to help ensure Canada's ongoing global success and competitiveness.

#### **About Cisco Networking Academy**

Cisco Networking Academy is a comprehensive e-learning program that provides high school and post-secondary students with the Internet technology skills essential to compete in today's job market. To date, more than 2.1 million students have graduated from the program around the world, with 60,000 alumni from 300 schools in Canada alone. For more information about the program visit:

[http://www.cisco.com/ca/networking\\_academy](http://www.cisco.com/ca/networking_academy) and <http://www.cisco.com/go/netacad> .

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