



Cisco CCIE Data Center: Delivering Immense Value to IT Professionals

An Appetite for Achievement

At Axxess, Mark Holm is known as a powerhouse. This network systems engineer began his Cisco certification journey in 2003, when he obtained the Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA) credential. He followed in 2006 with a Cisco Certified Network Professional (CCNP) certification and since then has been certified as a Cisco Certified Interwork Expert (CCIE) in the Data Center, Routing and Switching, and Service Provider tracks. As if that were not enough, Mark also holds four Cisco Design Specialist designations and a Cisco Certified Design Professional (CCDP) certification. Despite his clear dedication to professional development, though, he balances his work and personal lives with serious interest in photography, biking, and running.

Mark began his IT career in 1998 as a technical support representative at a Danish Internet service provider (ISP). He was 17 and in high school at the time. He recalls, “I had no plans to do IT. It was a part-time job while I was studying, but when I was offered full-time employment, I thought ‘Why not give it a try?’” He stayed with his first employer for 11 years, eventually leaving to accept a job at Axxess. He believes that his relatively long tenure is unusual in the industry, but as he says, “I like to stick with something, grow in the job, and be deliberate about where I want to go in my career.”

A large part of Mark’s current professional responsibilities includes data center design, implementation, and troubleshooting. “Data centers are evolving because new technologies are continually emerging,” he says. “It’s critical to broaden your expertise and break down silos between bodies of knowledge. Your competencies must span a range of areas.”

Meeting Business Challenges and Needs

In late 2012, Mark and his employer began to notice abundant opportunities to cultivate data center business. The trend toward decentralization had halted. Companies were attracted by centralization’s promise of efficiency and, increasingly, by the prospect of moving operations to the cloud.

Mark notes that during this time at least 85 percent of customers needed to refresh 5- to 10-year-old infrastructure, and all customers wanted to build their platforms on technologies that would support them well going forward.

The Rewards of Certification

The timing could not have been better. Cisco had just announced the CCIE Data Center certification, and Mark was eager to “play with” new technologies. As he puts it, “I was excited by this new certification and



Cisco Career Certifications

Case Study Subject

Mark Holm: CCIE Data Center, CCIE Routing and Switching, CCIE Service Provider, Network Systems Engineer, Axxess A/S (Denmark)

Industry

Information technology consulting and support

Challenge

Breaking down silos of knowledge to better serve customers while supporting career growth

Solution

Cisco Certified Internetwork Expert Data Center certification (CCIE Data Center)

Professional Benefits

- Technical mastery that supports evolving professional roles
- Recognition and respect from peers, managers, and customers
- Continuous expansion of skills



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— Mark Holm

wanted to be one of the first to get it. I felt that CCIE Data Center provided an excellent opportunity for me to perfect my skills and strengthen some critical areas. My boss approved my request in five minutes!”

Advice to Certification Candidates

Obtaining the CCIE Data Center certification requires substantial effort. Mark devoted some 700 to 800 hours to study over a period of four months. He advises candidates to develop a sound plan that can be modified if necessary. He recommends using the Cisco Learning Network as a resource and counsels peers to be honest with themselves about their strengths and weaknesses. Gaining the support of family and loved ones is also critical, because “they may not see much of you for a while.” He comments that, in the end, receiving his CCIE Data Center certification has been well worth his time and hard work.

Contributing to an Updated Data Center Certification

Mark has recently been involved as part of a certification team in providing inputs to an updated CCIE Data Center certification. As technology evolves—the new policy-driven infrastructure and data center integration with cloud are cases in point—certifications need to evolve to help IT professionals stay relevant. Mark also gives back to the Cisco Learning Network community, where he focuses on helping other candidates meet their professional goals.

Mark describes his experience with the certification team as intense and complex. “The certification remains skill-based,” he says, “but mastering its concepts and practices empowers data center experts to take a leadership role in implementing software-defined networking and in managing the vast amounts of data produced by Internet-connected devices.”

For Mark, understanding and implementing the technology that makes it possible to integrate automation and orchestration into the data center and to improve agility is critical. “These skills allow you to automate many routine tasks and spend your time more efficiently. As a result, you have the time to develop new concepts and to support business needs in a new way—and that helps you grow professionally.”

Over the years, Mark has looked at competitive certification programs, but from the beginning of his involvement in IT, he has always seen Cisco as the “go-to” company for technology education. “This newest version of CCIE Data Center illustrates that Cisco works hard to keep up with the market by incorporating the technology tracks IT professionals need to know. I’ve been crazy enough to get three CCIE certifications in two years, but there’s been a good reason: they have helped me in designing and implementing data centers that meet real customer needs and in keeping my skills relevant.”

For More Information

To learn out more about Cisco CCIE Data Center certification, go to www.cisco.com/go/cciedc.