Cisco's Architecture Specializations

Q&A

Frequently Asked Questions for Partners
New Architecture Specialization and Evolution of Certification Program
Aligning the Channel Partner Program to Cisco's Architectural Direction

ARCHITECTURE SPECIALIZATION
Q**. What are specializations?**
A. Specializations are a framework that we use to increase partner competency. As company-level designations (administered on a per-country basis), the specializations help our partners understand our vision and direction. Partners can use the specializations as a way to build competency within their organization and highlight their competencies. Specializations also open the door to the desired certification level and additional program incentives such as the Cisco® Value Incentive Program (VIP) and Opportunity Incentive Program (OIP).

Q. Why did we develop architecture specializations?
A. The move to the architecture specializations is the fastest way to align our certified partners with Cisco's architectural direction and vision. This alignment will help our partners understand their role in this vision and to identify opportunities to help transform their business.

Additionally, the architectural approach provides a relevant way to organize training content, starting with the high-level view and then focusing on the individual pieces. This organization provides a blueprint of how the various pieces work together, while also focusing on the top-down or architectural selling approach.

Q. What is the difference between product-based selling and top-down or architectural selling?

A. Product-based selling starts with specific products and looks at how they can be made to fit into a customer environment. Top-down selling, by contrast, involves a proactive study of the customer's business issues in order to gain insight into their business-critical problems and priorities. The objective is to enhance the customer's long-term business viability. This approach starts with the highest business levels and cascades down into (and across) technologies and products. It often involves multiple organizations within the customer account, as well as nontraditional partners. An architectural approach to the solution/technology and product selection simplifies the huge number of potential technology and product choices and ensures that the solution will solve the business problem. An architecture also provides a common ground between the different perspectives of the business decision makers and technology decision makers in an organization. It is a framework around which a common, consistent conversation can be constructed.

Q. How are specializations structured?
A. Since the Small Business, Express-level, and Advanced-level specializations focus on building and validating knowledge, the specialization training requirements are tailored to job roles to provide the right level and focus of training to various individuals in a partner company. For example, we have sales training that is tailored to account managers, technical training focused on Cisco product deployment that is aimed at field engineers (FEs), and so on. These roles are used only as a way to create relevant training

and to help the partner understand the type of individual he or she should send to the training. Once all role requirements are met, the company can submit the specialization for approval.

The names of the roles do not necessarily correspond to the titles of the individuals in a company. Again, they are intended simply as a way to align training to the skills needed to be successful.

Q. How do the specialization job roles work together?
A. Because specializations are company-level achievements (on a per-country basis), we require multiple individuals to pass exams to prove they have the knowledge and expertise to fill a particular role in the partner company. The value in having these roles defined with different training requirements is to increase company-level competency with Cisco solutions. It is very similar to the multitude of roles we have in our own Cisco sales force. One of the qualities that sets Cisco apart is the combination of people who participate in a deal. You need to have the account manager or "selling" skills, you need to have the architectural design skills represented by the architecture SE, and you need to have engineers with expertise in deploying the solutions. All parties included in the specialization work together to propose and deploy the best option for the customer. No one person or role is equipped to know it all, because it is the teamwork that makes the difference. Keep in mind that the role requirements for Cisco specializations are the minimum standards. It is in the partner company's best interest to send more than the minimum number of personnel to the trainings; however, this is ultimately the company's decision.

Q. Will the individual technology specializations be retired?
A. No. Cisco will continue to maintain the technology specializations in addition to the new advanced-level architecture specializations. These specializations will continue to focus specifically on individual technology areas, whereas the architecture specializations will provide a broader view of the architectural play, vision, and top-down selling approach. As before, a natural lifecycle will determine when to replace or retire some technology specializations with newer ones. For example, the Advanced Data Center Networking Infrastructure and Advanced Data Center Storage Networking specializations are being combined into a new specialization called the Advanced Unified Fabric Technology specialization, as this is a natural evolution of our data center portfolio based on the underlying concept that unified fabric represents.

Q. Does achieving the Borderless Network Architecture Specialization automatically renew my technology specializations (such as Advanced Wireless LAN, Advanced Security, and Advanced Routing and Switching)?
A. No. Architecture specializations and technology specializations are unique. Each specialization must be obtained and renewed separately.

Q. There are a lot of similarities between the new architecture specializations and the existing technology specializations. Why is that?
A. Our approach is based on the desire to preserve our partners' existing investment in the technology specializations and to make the migration of certified partners to the new architecture specializations as seamless as possible. For this reason, we have reused many of the existing training courses and exams that are currently included in the technology specializations. Over time, however, the technology specializations and the architecture specializations will evolve to look uniquely different.

Q. Is role sharing permitted across the new architecture specializations?

A. Yes. One account manager can be shared across two architecture specializations, and one architecture SE can be shared across two architecture specializations. FEs cannot be shared across architecture specializations. However, one FE can fulfill another FE role within the Advanced Borderless Network Architecture Specialization or the Advanced Data Center Architecture Specialization. (There is only one FE role in the Advanced Collaboration Architecture Specialization; therefore, this rule does not apply.)

Q. Can I use the same individuals from technology specializations to fulfill roles for the Advanced Borderless Network Architecture Specialization (as an example)?

A. Yes. Allocation of job roles in technology specializations won't affect their allocation in the architecture specialization.

Q. Why should I consider applying for the new architecture specializations?

A. Partners can achieve branding through the Cisco Certification Program, as these specializations will become a requirement for certification in the future. Specializations are required for participation in channel incentive programs such as VIP and OIP, although the timing will be announced later. Specializations also provide the ability for partners to differentiate themselves through the Partner Locator reference.

Additionally, the architectural approach gives partners the ability to offer high-end professional services, simplifies deployments using proven design solutions, provides a competitive advantage with Cisco solutions, and can help migrate the installed base, using trade-in programs and other architecturally focused promotions.

Q. Do the new architecture specializations have to be renewed every year?

A. Yes. Partners have to renew each year and meet the current requirements of the program.

Q. Do any of the new architecture specializations have a mandatory lab requirement?

A. No. The architecture specializations do not require a lab for specialization approval. However, to be successful, partners will need to be able to demonstrate solutions that showcase their knowledge and their ability to solve customer problems using Cisco solutions.

Q, Will I continue to earn VIP incentives under the architectural specializations?

A. Yes, VIP incentives will be paid on identified SKUs when the architecture or technical specialization is in place, provided you meet theater volume and customer satisfaction thresholds.

CERTIFICATIONS

Q. When will the new certification requirements take effect?

A. The requirements will be in effect beginning August 2012. However, partners can apply for the new certification program based on the architecture specializations as early as August 2011.

Q. Will I be able to meet the Gold Certification requirements if I obtain the Advanced Borderless Network Architecture Specialization and have a valid Advanced Unified Communications Specialization?

A. Yes. You will be able to maintain Gold Certification until your following anniversary date, when you will have to meet all the new architecture specialization requirements.

Q. Will I be audited during the transition year?

A. The audits will continue during the transition time. Of course, the audit waiver policy will continue to be applied without interruption. To review the audit waiver policy, please refer to the Audit & Policies document found at www.cisco.com/go/audit.

Q. Are any other portions of the certification requirements changing?

A. No other requirements for the certifications will be changing. Please read the audit document

requirements to understand all the requirements needed to meet your desired certification level.

Q. Why are you adding data center to the certification requirements?

A. The three new specializations align with Cisco's architectural vision. The Cisco architectural vision centers on Collaboration, Data Center/Virtualization, and Borderless Networks, where the value lies in the sum of all parts.

In addition, we see cloud as a huge opportunity and invite our partners to expand their skills to serve this opportunity with a new area such as data center.

Q Were can I go if I have questions about my anniversary dates or transition dates?

A. For any question regarding the transition or program, contact your partner account manager or visit the Resale Channel Program website.

How can I learn more?
- o   For more detailed information on the new architecture specializations or the upcoming certification program transition, please contact Anne Friendly (afriendl@cisco.com).

Resources
www.cisco.com/go/resale
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www.cisco.com/go/borderless-specialization
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