

# 9 Ways to Get an MCSE or CNE Without Wasting \$5000+

By Richard Stoker

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Secrets of Changing to a Computer Career <http://www.inforingpress.com/>

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1. Buy good certification books.

Yes, I know how thick they are - the tests do cover that much material, so what can you do? A teacher is not going to talk that much without wearing out their throat, so in the final analysis you are going to spend a lot of time reading and studying those books anyway.

I was told by a training school recruiter that the recommended process was to take a class for 3 full days, then study for a month, then take the certification exam.

So, that's at least ten days of study in front of a thick book for each day of class anyway.

So you're going to buy and study thick books anyway. Do you really need to pay for a live teacher too? People can and do pass the certifications simply by studying on their own.

2. Buy computer based CD-ROM training.

This is of course very similar to the above method, except that computer based training is more interactive, more fun, probably more effective for most people and also more

expensive, although still nowhere near \$5000.

It's easier to stay awake. The questions and interactivity force you to interact with the material. Using it immediately and getting immediately feedback does help reinforce learning and understanding.

This is recommended for people who really dread the thought of just sitting and reading the thick books, but who can't afford the \$5000 classes. If you have a question you just cannot find the answer to, put it out on one of the many newsgroups or listserves on the Internet, and let experienced on the job networking professionals help you out. Live teachers can do the same, but sometimes not with the same extensive background in what's happening in the real world.

People can and do pass the certification exams just by taking computer based training. One company, Forefront, even gives you a 90 day money back guarantee on all its certification courses. If you don't pass after using their CBT course, you get your money back. Details available at (877) 872-4646.

3. Take training classes online through the Internet.

Again, it will take long hours of study, but it's an interesting format.

4. Put together your own network study laboratory by buying several used PCS hooking them up in your home office.

Look for used computers cheap online, in your local newspaper For Sale ads or just ask your friends. Lots of people have old 386/486s they'd gladly give you for free just so they'll have more closet space.

Buy the network parts in a local computer store or online.

This is a terrific way to get hands on experience. I saw it mentioned in a letter in a discussion forum by someone who actually did it. You'll learn directly how to work with the equipment.

It's not the same as networking 100 stations in a company, of course. But it's still a good idea. You'll still have to study those thick books, but you'll be able to right away put your hands to work on that chapter, thus reinforcing your new knowledge and skills as you go.

5. If you're currently employed in a networking job, get your current employer to pay for the classes.

You may have to sign an agreement to continue working for them for two years or so. Many companies are starting to require such policies after they paid for certification classes for employees who then immediately got better jobs and quit, or who first demanded higher pay and, when refused, then got better jobs and quit.

In other words, most companies are willing to pay for your certification only if you are planning to put your new knowledge and skills to work for them for a reasonable time period.

It is certainly fair however to make it clear to your boss that you want to take on more responsibility as you are prepared for it and you expect to be paid a higher salary commensurate with your higher level of job duties, as they do expand to a higher level.

If your company refuses that, it wants to keep you trapped in your current dead end job. That should be a clue that you need to get out, whether they pay for your certification or not. Look for a company that wants to build itself by building its employees.

A lot of course will depend on your relationship with the company. How long you've worked there already and whether you act in a way that makes them believe you see a long-term future with them - or not.

6. Pass the first several required tests, use those credentials to get an entry level job and then get your new employer to pay for the

classes.

You're not going to be hired as a network administrator after you pass one or two of the MCSE required exams. However, you may be able to use those exams to get your foot in the door with some menial entry-level job. Even if it's repairing computers, that's something.

Many new IT job seekers are hired to answer customer technical questions.

Make it clear to your boss however that you have set your sights on networking and that you are going to continue your education whether they pay for it or not. Don't say so right out loud in so many words, but do make it clear that if you wind up paying for your certification by yourself, you will feel no loyalty toward the company, and will therefore feel free to take any position for which you qualify once you are certified. Why should you not feel that way, if you did have to do it all on your own?

That's not a threat, just you looking out for yourself.

7. Pass the new CompTIA Network+ cross-platform certification test, use that to get an entry level job, then get your new employer to pay for the classes.

This answer is obviously similar to the one above. You can use the new Network+ certification to get your foot in the door.

Almost everything in these cases depends on your relationship with the company. If it's a good one, and they see you as an evolving superstar who's going to have a lot to offer them down the road, that's obviously to your favor.

If you are seen as someone out just for themselves anyway, they're not going to risk the money on you. If you leave, good riddance anyway.

8. If you are unemployed, the government may pay for your training.

Check with your local unemployment office to see what is available in your area. Here in St. Louis, laid off Boeing workers have a complete center paid for with a government grant, and the program is sending some to computer training.

9. If you are on Supplemental Security Income (SSI), apply for a Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS Plan).

The basic idea is, you are capable of working as a networking professional, but you can't yet because you don't know how. So you want to learn by buying the books etc.

Consult with a good career counselor or Vocational Rehabilitation. Come up with a good estimate for the cost of the certification. (Don't forget to include the cost of the examinations too, not just the training.)

Assume you may have to repeat some of the examinations - that's normal, most everybody does. Whatever that amount of money is, you don't have it. But if you could only go to work, maybe at McDonald's or whatever, you could save the money up in 6 months or so. But you can't now, because if you go to work your SSI will be cut so much you still won't be able to save much. That's where the PASS Plan comes into play.

If you agree to put \$X out of your paycheck into a savings account until you have enough saved up to buy the books you need etc. (Actually, you could get started right away after it's approved. . . Social Security will then agree not to count the \$X you are saving as income that cuts your SSI check. Therefore, you can work but still use your SSI to pay your bills with, while saving \$X out of every paycheck toward your eventual financial independence.

Social Security will also ignore the usual \$2000 resource limit. They will continue to send you SSI while you have over \$2000 as long as this money you are saving for your PASS plan is in an account that's separate from your living expenses money.

Go to your local Social Security office with

all your estimates and how you plan to proceed and how long it will take - put together all the details you can. Someone there will help you fill out their form, and then will submit it to a PASS expert, who is the person who decides whether or not you qualify. The more detail you have in your PASS plan and the more you make it clear that you are serious and prepared and capable, the better your chances.

It also wouldn't hurt to include the standard material in Chapter 3 of the book, the boom in computer jobs chapter, especially to show them the high demand there is for people with the certification you are shooting for. Use brochures from your local training company even if you don't plan to take their \$5000 classes. Your goal at this stage is just to have SSA approve your PASS Plan.

You must convince them of three things:

1. You are capable of doing the job you are shooting for, you're just not qualified yet. You need more knowledge, a professional degree or certification etc.
2. You have a feasible plan for getting yourself to the point where you qualify for the job.
3. When you finish your plan, there is a reasonable chance you can get the job and that doing so will reduce or eliminate your dependence on SSI.

The MCSE/CNE certifications certainly meet requirement #3. #2 is not hard if you just look around for the price of the books and equipment you need. #1 is up to you.

Not all methods will work for everybody.

The point is, if you're willing to read, study and work hard on your own, you don't have to spend top dollar. If you can get your employer or the government to pay for your classes, go for it. All these methods have been used by somebody and will be used by many more. Now they're yours.

I wish you all the greatest success in  
your networking careers.

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Richard Stoker is the author of Secrets of Changing to  
a Computer Career.

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