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Microsoft, HP and OnForce Team to Deliver a Dynamic e-learning and Certification Platform

The new learning solution is designed to help connect business customers with skilled, experienced IT service providers via an innovative online marketplace.

REDMOND, Wash., Aug. 20, 2007 — Microsoft, HP and OnForce have formed a unique collaboration to create a learning and certification solution for OnForce's community of more than 10,000 IT service providers. The learning solution, which launches this month, is a one-stop resource for OnForce service providers to obtain training and validation on the latest Microsoft technologies. This will help them to meet the demands of Value Added Resellers (VARs) and solution providers who use OnForce to find IT professionals.

This unique learning solution will speed the process of certification so that OnForce buyers have access to an increasingly robust community of highly-skilled service providers that can successfully implement new technologies, like Microsoft Windows Vista.

"This exciting and unique collaboration gives OnForce providers easy access to the training and skills validation they need to help customers to be successful with Microsoft technologies," says Lutz Ziob, general manager of Microsoft Learning.

The partnership has benefited from the strengths of each company: OnForce brings its large community of skilled technicians, Microsoft adds its industry-recognized content and certifications programs, and HP drives it with a learning experience that contains all the elements in one location for easy access.

An Innovative Business Model

Founded in 2003, OnForce is the nation's largest marketplace for on-site IT service professionals. The company has a community of more than 10,000 qualified services providers that deliver a variety of IT service—from simple repairs and part swaps to full system implementation. OnForce buyers are made up of VARs, solution providers, retailers and IT staffing firms who are looking to find and manage off-payroll IT professionals

OnForce is a new kind of business model— providing an online marketplace for IT services. In its early years, most of the work performed was computer break-fix work. As the company has grown and evolved, service buyers have come to use OnForce for rollouts, installations and training in a wide range of IT categories, including point-of-sale, Voice Over IP (VoIP), software, security and consumer electronics.

The company's unique platform for matching IT service buyers to its community of providers has helped drive IT costs down while improving response time and customer satisfaction. Because of its business model and diverse IT community, the company needed an extraordinary, proactive approach to learning and certification.

OnForce's also wanted to attract and retain qualified service providers and address the growing demand from its buyers for technicians who understand the needs of their small business customers.

"We reached out to Microsoft to explore ways of providing e-learning and certification to our provider base," says OnForce Senior Vice President of Business Development, Jose Bernal. "HP took it to a new level by providing a powerful platform that allows access to customizable packages all in one place."

As the first Microsoft certification reseller, HP created a learning certification solution that allows OnForce service providers to access e-learning, practice exams and exam vouchers for any certification paths they need.

"These training packages are customizable, not a one size fits all approach," says Lisa Foulger, general manager, HP Education Services. "Training can be created for very experienced technicians who need to learn specific new technology such as Vista, as well as those who have never worked with Microsoft products."

Vista and Small Business Specialist

Related Links

Microsoft Resources

- [Microsoft Learning Certification Programs](#)

Other Resources:

- [OnForce Web site](#)

Because of the demand from OnForce buyers, the early emphasis for the learning portal will be on Microsoft Windows Vista and Small Business Specialist certifications. As small businesses adopt Microsoft Windows Vista, companies are looking for experts who have been proven to understand not only the new technology, but what their business needs are and how technology helps to meet them.

“Our buyers are increasingly looking for service solutions that focus on their small business customers,” Bernal says. “The Microsoft Small Business Specialist is an excellent program that defines and validates what it takes to deliver solutions tailored to small businesses. The expansion of the program within the OnForce community enables our buyers to have access to trained IT professionals who are equipped to meet the specific needs of their customers.”

“New customers who may not be experienced purchasing on-site services really value certifications. That external validation confirms that the provider has met industry-accepted standards for proficiency,” says OnForce’s Senior Director of Provider Programs, Lauren Macleod. “It’s up to us to ensure that as new technologies are released, we enable our providers to get trained and skilled in those technologies. With this collaboration between Microsoft, HP and OnForce, we have established another way for them to do that quickly and easily.”

The Value of Certification

For both IT services buyers and providers, certification is important. Buyers want independent verification that the provider has the skills to do the job and providers want formal third-party certification of their skills to differentiate themselves. They also want a proven path to become proficient in new areas of technology.

A recent IDC study of IT performance found that 66 percent of the 400 IT managers surveyed believe that certifications improve the level of service and support offered to customers. It also found that top performing IT teams on average are shown to have between 40 and 55 percent certified Microsoft members who are trained on relevant Microsoft technologies and processes.

“It’s one of those things that has a halo affect,” Bernal says. “If a new provider doesn’t have a track record with the platform there is limited evidence of their experience. Having certifications enables them to stand out from the pack and be looked at more favorably by companies buying IT services.”

A framework of learning, training and certifications

Microsoft, HP and OnForce have created a unique learning framework to ensure buyers of OnForce services get highly-qualified providers with the skills and experience to implement new technologies. By providing a one-stop resource for learning and certification, OnForce will be able to quickly expand the national community of providers who have earned Microsoft Windows Vista and Small Business Specialist certifications, ensuring buyers have the skilled resources they need.

“It’s three companies coming to the table saying we are committed to expanding Microsoft certifications to provide all of our customers with a community of highly-skilled service providers that can successfully implement new technologies,” Bernal says. “And we’re all willing to do whatever it takes to help get it there.”

IDC White Paper sponsored by Microsoft, Value of Certification: Team Certification and Organizational Performance, Doc #204360, Nov 2006