

## CompTIA to Launch Printing and Document Imaging Certification in 2008

The Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA), a professional organization representing the IT community, is perhaps best known to document imaging professionals as the creator of the A+, CDIA+, and other technical certifications. In January of 2008, CompTIA will cozy up to the copier industry with its new Printing and Document Imaging (PDI+) certification, the first vendor-neutral exam designed to measure the knowledge of printer and copier service technicians.

CompTIA developed the PDI+ certification with support from a number of equipment manufacturers, including Brother, Canon, HP, Konica Minolta, Lexmark, Ricoh, Sharp, and Xerox. These OEMs, seeing a need for an independent credential for technicians, came to CompTIA with a request: "Build us an exam."



The exam that was built will measure competence across eight key knowledge domains: print engine process and components; scan process and components; general troubleshooting; basic electromechanical components and tools; connectivity; color theory; professionalism and communication; and safety and environment. According to Steven Ostrowski, Director of Corporate Communications for CompTIA, these are "the skills needed to [service a copier] no matter who you're working for."

Although the exam was created primarily with novice technicians in mind, CompTIA believes the certification may also appeal to seasoned techs interested in polishing up their resumes, perhaps in anticipation of a change in employment. Regardless of experience level, Ostrowski says, technicians who hold a PDI+ certification will be in a position to save their employers time and money. "When companies can verify that new employees have that baseline level of knowledge, they can lay the manufacturer-specific training on top of that. It takes a lot of cost out of their training programs because they don't need to teach the same thing over and over."

### **An Emphasis on Communication**

As the sophistication of copiers, printers, and MFPs increases, so do managers' complaints about the limitations of their technicians and salespeople. Their gripes usually go something like this: technicians understand the equipment but they don't know how to talk to customers; salespeople can talk to customers but they don't understand the equipment.

CompTIA has explicitly addressed the first of these complaints by including "professionalism and communication" as one of the eight PDI+ knowledge domains. Explains Ostrowski, "Employers say that one of their great needs is people who have a combination of technical, business, and personal skills. They don't need someone who can just go fix a machine. They need someone who can explain why something happened and communicate it in a way that's customer friendly."

Employers can expect PDI+-certified technicians to know, among other things, how to discuss equipment problems and customer concerns at an audience-appropriate level. Whether a written exam can really measure this ability is questionable, but there's no question that a dealership with well-spoken techs on staff will be better able to address its customers' needs. Similarly, a dealership with technologically-savvy sales reps on board is bound to improve its sales figures – and offering PDI+ training would be one way to get reps up to speed. But will salespeople be interested in PDI+ certification?

Carla Nasse of Specialized Solutions, a Florida-based company specializing in IT training, thinks they will be. Before joining Specialized Solutions, Nasse sold and marketed copiers for 19 years, and she believes “there's a lot of value in a PDI+ certification for salespeople.” Years ago, she says, copier salespeople “didn't have to know who the IT people were. But now if a salesperson or a tech can't intelligently talk to IT people in their language and understand their environment, they're at a terrible disadvantage.”

While Nasse admits that the certification itself may never be a required credential for copier sales reps, she says “there are certainly portions [of the training] that every sales rep should learn,” and she predicts that people interested in long-term copier sales careers will get certified. “It's important that sales reps understand the processes of the equipment they're selling. The people that are serious, the people that want to sell copiers as a career, those are the people you're going to see taking this training and getting their certification.”

### **A Lukewarm Reception**

Although the PDI+ certification exam will not be available until January (some training materials, including those from Specialized Solutions, will be available before the end of the year), both CompTIA and Specialized Solutions have already arranged to offer discounts on testing and training materials to members of the Business Technology Association.

So far, however, few in the copier industry have heard about PDI+, and those who are familiar with the certification expect it to be only minimally useful.

Jerry Newberry, president of BEI Pros, puts it bluntly: “An entry-level employee certification means absolutely nothing to most dealers.” He adds, however, that the various training programs intended to prepare students for the PDI+ exam may be valuable. “What we are missing in this industry,” he says, “is a good, entry-level training program for technicians. If somebody were to create that kind of curriculum, it would be very well received. But a certification at the entry level isn't going to mean a whole lot.”

Dave Grandelis, director of recruiting for Copier Careers, shares Newberry's opinion. He adds that the PDI+ certification, while not without value, is unlikely to change hiring practices in the industry. “It's a worthy certification. Maybe if a technician is doing pre- or post-sales, for example, certification would help that tech gain credibility with IT professionals. But it certainly isn't as important as a manufacturer's certification would be. If somebody doesn't have a PDI+ certification, I don't think it will hold them back.”

### **For Now, An Individual Decision**

When, how, and to what extent the copier industry will use the PDI+ training and certification remains unclear. Although the OEMs are expected to begin taking advantage of the exam soon after it becomes available in January, it may be some time before independents take notice. Until the industry comes to a consensus on the certification, it will be up to individual technicians, salespeople, and managers to decide whether (or not) PDI+ training can help them solidify their credentials, boost their technical knowledge, or train their employees. In the meantime, those interested in learning more about PDI+ can visit [www.comptia.org](http://www.comptia.org) to view exam objectives, read sample test questions, locate training providers and materials, or register for the CompTIA PDI+ mailing list.

