Certification: Your industry needs it!

White, D. (2005). Certification: Your industry needs it!. *Bulletin of Applied Computing and Information Technology*, 3(2). Retrieved June 2, 2015 from http://www.citrenz.ac.nz/bacit/0302/2005White_Views.htm

There are compelling reasons for ICT practitioners in New Zealand to be recognised by their peers, employers, Government, the community and the country as a whole as ICT professionals, rather than merely practitioners. This paper examines the reasons why certification of ICT practitioners is not only desirable, but essential to the credibility of individuals within the industry and to the ICT sector as a whole. First we introduce two scenarios:

Scenario1

Hans Seiffert has just arrived in NZ from Germany and the first thing that happens is he "loses" his wallet. All he has is a cheque book, passport and access to the Internet courtesy of the first Internet café he sees. He will be able to transfer money from his savings account to his cheque account and life resumes as normal. Yes??

No, no, no!!

Hasn't he heard of Keystroke Monitors? The Café he has chosen doesn't regularly update its security, delete Trojan Horses, monitor viruses, bugs, blah, blah, blah. The moment he transfers his monies, he risks being monitored by a crook who will not hesitate in using his password and account number to empty his savings account.

Scenario 2

Susan Spencer is a widget manufacturer CEO and knows that the ultimate selling tool for widgets is a web site extolling the virtues of her quality product at a very competitive price. She also knows that site designers cost at least $80ph. The HR department has sourced two experienced developers for her to interview.

Candidate #1, a smooth operator who in time will make a smooth salesperson, demonstrates two smooth, very bright and flashy sites previously developed - there are bright colours, the client company's logo displayed prominently, half a dozen buttons to click on and a lovely little video clip of the company's product.

Candidate #2 is more of a stereotypical IT geek. The geek doesn't talk much, wears geek clothes and painstakingly demonstrates a couple of ordinary-looking sites.

The CEO chooses the smooth communicator with the attractive web site. Why not?

Well, let me tell you: the web site is poorly designed and built; it has no security; no backup; the video clip is very expensive (in time on a dialup line); it will probably crash next week; it may corrupt her database; she has wasted three weeks at $80 an hour; she still does not have a viable web site; she hasn't sold any more widgets.

To summarise, the credibility of the ICT industry in New Zealand is under threat. We have a myriad of education and training providers: schools, PTEs, Polytechnics, Wananga, Universities and a whole host of number 8 wire do it yourself Kiwis plus a significant migrant community who bring in qualifications in ICT from overseas.

Who monitors this plethora of different qualifications? Who assesses the relevance of different levels and lengths of work experience? Who decides which training provider is strong and which is weak? Who organises ongoing upskilling in an industry that

develops by the day?

New Zealand must tackle this issue and bring itself up to speed with the professionalism that is evident in other areas like accountancy and law.

The Solution

Wouldn't it be nice to be able to offer Hans Seiffert an Internet Café which had a little sign on the window which said "C.I.T.P" - Certified IT Professional backed by the New Zealand Computer Society.

How about choosing a Web Developer with "C.I.T.P"? That is, Candidate #2, who doesn't sell very well, may not look so flash, but has been through the Society's mentoring and certification programme and who maintains certification with a minimum number of hours Professional Development per annum.

The NZCS is firmly of the opinion that the time is well overdue for it to take the lead and provide a solution for our industry.

The Position of NZCS

The NZCS is asking for submissions relating to the development of a strong professional body to support IT professionals and the companies who employ them. We are in the process of approaching our members, the educational fraternity, Government, other professional bodies (law, accounting, engineering), The Australian and British Computer Societies (who both have certification programmes), industry employers and other certifying bodies.

We envisage the NZCS having a certifying body which will be responsible for assessing the experience, qualifications, ethical standards and professional competence of an individual. We see that individual being mentored by a person already certified by the Society, probably for a period of up to two years to ensure that the applicant is schooled in correct procedures, adheres to professional standards (ethical and work) set by the Society and who is then judged by the mentor to be capable of functioning professionally by him or herself independently in the business world.

Having been certified, it will be necessary to undergo ongoing professional development in order to maintain certification. Accountants, engineers, doctors, bus drivers all do it. Shouldn't we?

Where are we?

Over the past two months, the membership has been consulted for ideas. There has been an overwhelmingly positive response from those who are willing to give freely of their time and resources. We are in the throes of creating small working groups to work on the myriad of tasks required to effect a solution.

Some of these tasks include:

1. Debating the methods we will employ to effect certification.
2. Approaching businesses, employers, educational bodies, other professional bodies (ICANZ, IPENZ, TUANZ, etc), overseas computer societies, the Government, Special Interest Groups (security, law, IT in Schools etc) to determine how others have done it - clearly, we are going to need several groups here.
3. Requesting assistance from and keeping Government informed.
4. Determining what percentage towards certification industry experience and other qualifications such as, for example, MCSE, PMI, CISA, a degree, a Polytechnic qualification will contribute.
5. Determining whether we should have NZCS industry-based courses and qualifications - here we might look at what our cousins across the Tasman have done.
6. Establishing (important!) a mentoring system contributing to certification. How would it work?
7. Preparing what we need to consider about on-going professional development as an extension of the certification process- more than one group will be needed

here.

8. Constituting a body charged with the assessment of the individual's qualifications and experience.

Conclusion

The NZCS is determined that all the various participants in the industry should be able to pull together to bring consistency and integrity to the whole IT profession in New Zealand.

NZCS believes that NACCQ is an integral part of the ICT industry in New Zealand and is requesting the advice, cooperation and support of its members as we progress towards a unified, coordinated and internationally sound certification process.

The NZCS needs you!