



Cisco Data Center Certification

Case Study Subject

Sharon March
 Manager, Cisco Technical Team
 Cisco Education and Certification Lead

Employer

Avnet Technology Solutions
 (AVT Technology Solutions LLC)

Industry

Business-to-business technology distributor, including Cisco data center products and solutions

Cisco Certifications

CCNA Routing and Switching, CCDP, CCNP Data Center

Professional Benefits

- Upward mobility in career path
- Ability to inspire confidence with customers and thereby provide value to employer
- Ability to empower and support team members successfully as they engage with customers
- Opportunity to prove herself as a leader in male-dominated IT world

LinkedIn Profile

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/sharon-march-pmp-95922515>

Full Speed Ahead with CCNP Data Center

Cisco Partner Uses Data Center Certification to Stay at the Forefront of a Rapidly Changing Field

When Sharon March's employer Avnet, one of the world's largest business-to-business technology distributors, first signed on to represent Cisco in the marketplace, Sharon states, "I jumped out of my chair and ran over to the vice president for our new Cisco team and said, 'Hire me now!'"

Sharon knew that a large part of being a Cisco channel partner would involve Cisco's data center business, and she was excited to be right in the middle of it. When the charge went out from the company that employees in customer-facing roles must carry Cisco CCNP Data Center credentials, she stepped up to the challenge.

"In our world, CCNA Data Center is table stakes, but CCNP Data Center is being able to speak at the table. It enables you to have that broader expertise," says Sharon. "With CCNP, you need to know about both compute and fabric. The fabric part takes the data center and extends it out into the environment. So now when you're talking to customers, you can help them look at a converged infrastructure."

Walking the Data Center Walk with Cisco Customers

Avnet's customers are the VARs (value-added resellers) that engage directly with end users and sell them Cisco solutions. "Out in the field with the VARs, our field technical consultants are talking to engineers who know their stuff," Sharon states. "Those engineers are going out and selling UCS data center solutions. To gain their confidence, you'd better have a Professional-level certification attached to your name."

The field technical consultants, according to Sharon, use their Cisco training to address many of the issues on the minds of customers today and facilitate their journey:

- Integration of computing, storage, networking, virtualization, and management into a unified platform
- Enablement of a cloud-ready data center
- Virtualization of the data center infrastructure
- Streamlining of data center operational tasks through automation
- Planning and implementation of a policy-driven data center infrastructure

Sharon has risen from being a field technical consultant to a manager of the consultants. She has also taken on a second role as a "Cisco education and certification lead," coaching VARs and ensuring that the



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— Sharon March

certification paths they choose for greater effectiveness in their roles—be they within Cisco Career Certifications or Product Specializations—will get them to their goals and maximize their business.

Data Center: Not Just Blades and Servers Anymore

As manager, Sharon reaches out proactively to her technical consultants, all of whom hold at least CCNP Data Center certification, and makes sure they know that they can call on her and bring their challenges to her. The Data Center certification has helped her and her consultants greatly in their roles, enabling them to understand and appreciate how immensely the data center landscape has been changing in recent years.

“Knowingly or unknowingly, CCNP Data Center certification has prepared me for the future,” Sharon says. “There’s no way we could have predicted how much the cloud was going to grow or how much the infrastructure was going to grow. What Cisco has done well with their strategy is that they have realized it is not just blades and switching and storage all working harmoniously together, but have questioned what this is going to do in the future. A lot of the training is about virtualizing the data center and arriving at a truly converged infrastructure—extending the data center outside the four walls.”

For Sharon and her Avnet technical consultants, it’s all about leveraging their Data Center certification knowledge and taking it to the next level with their customers. “It never stops with the request ‘Configure a UCS for me,’” says Sharon. “We are always ready to press further and ask, ‘How are you using it? How are you implementing it? How does it need to fit within your architecture?’”

Mastering Routing and Switching One Rubber Ducky at a Time

Sharon also has CCNA Routing and Switching and CCDP certifications in her personal portfolio and is no stranger to the focus and dedication it takes to achieve the Cisco certification goal. “I remember studying for CCNA while my son was playing in the bathtub: ‘Here’s the duck, here’s the washcloth, and Mommy needs to read another paragraph.’ You need to find where that balance is, and you need to sit down and get it done.”

Sharon’s advice to other Cisco certification aspirants is straightforward: “Plan for more time than you think, and then DO it. Don’t say ‘I’m going to take the exam in July.’ Say, ‘I’m going to take it on July 15th at 2:00 in the afternoon.’”

For More Information

To begin your exploration of Cisco Data Center certifications, visit www.cisco.com/go/dccert.