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A Global Knowledge Special Report

15 Top-Paying Certifications for 2014

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Introduction

It's always a good idea to take stock of your skills, your pay, and your certifications. To that end, following is a review of 15 of the top-paying certifications for 2014. With each certification, you'll find the average (mean) salary and a brief description.

Based on the 2014 IT Skills and Salary Survey conducted by Global Knowledge and Penton and completed in October 2013, the rankings below are derived from certifications that received the minimum number of responses to be statistically relevant. Certain certifications pay more but are not represented due to their exclusive nature. Examples include Cisco Certified Internetworking Expert (CCIE) and VMware Certified Design Expert (VCDX).

This was a nationwide survey, and variations exist based on where you work, years of experience, and company type (government, non profit, etc.).

1. Certified in Risk and Information Systems Control (CRISC) – \$118,253

The non-profit group ISACA offers CRISC certification, much in the way that CompTIA manages the A+ and Network+ certifications. Formerly, "ISACA" stood for Information Systems Audit and Control Association, but now they've gone acronym only.

The CRISC certification is designed for IT professionals, project managers, and others whose job it is to identify and manage risks through appropriate Information Systems (IS) controls, covering the entire lifecycle, from design to implementation to ongoing maintenance. It measures two primary areas: risk and IS controls. Similar to the IS control lifecycle, the risk area spans the gamut from identification and assessment of the scope and likelihood of a particular risk to monitoring for it and responding to it if/when it occurs.

Since CRISC's introduction in 2010, more than 17,000 people worldwide have earned this credential. The demand for people with these skills and the relatively small supply of those who have them result in this being the highest salary for any certification on our list this year.

To obtain CRISC certification, you must have at least three years of experience in at least three of the five areas that the certification covers, and you must pass the exam, which is only offered twice a year. This is not a case where you can just take a class and get certified. Achieving CRISC certification requires effort and years of planning.

2. Certified Information Security Manager (CISM) – \$114,844

ISACA also created CISM certification. It's aimed at management more than the IT professional and focuses on security strategy and assessing the systems and policies in place more than it focuses on the person who actually implements those policies using a particular vendor's platform.

More than 23,000 people have been certified since its introduction in 2002, making it a highly sought after area with a relatively small supply of certified individuals. In addition, the exam is only offered three times a year in approximately 240 locations, making taking the exam more of a challenge than many other certification exams. It also requires at least five years of experience in IS, with at least three of those as a security manager. As with CRISC, requirements for CISM certification demand effort and years of planning.

3. Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA) – \$112,040

The third highest-paying certification is also from ISACA; this one is for IS auditors. CISA certification is ISACA's oldest, dating back to 1978, with more than 106,000 people certified since its inception. CISA certification requires at least five years of experience in IS auditing, control, or security in addition to passing an exam that is only offered three times per year.

The CISA certification is usually obtained by those whose job responsibilities include auditing, monitoring, controlling, and/or assessing IT and/or business systems. It is designed to test the candidate's ability to manage vulnerabilities, ensure compliance with standards, and propose controls, processes, and updates to a company's policies to ensure compliance with accepted IT and business standards.

4. Six Sigma Green Belt – \$109,165

Six Sigma is a process of analyzing defects (anything outside a customer's specifications) in a production (manufacturing) process, with a goal of no more than 3.4 defects per million "opportunities" or chances for a defect to occur. The basic idea is to measure defects, analyze why they occurred, and then fix the issue and repeat. There is a process for improving existing processes and a slightly modified version for new processes or major changes. Motorola pioneered the concept in the mid-1980s, and many companies have since followed their examples to improve quality.

This certification is different from the others in this list, as it is not IT specific. Instead, it is primarily focused on manufacturing and producing better quality products. There is no organization that owns Six Sigma certification per se, so the specific skills and number of levels of mastery vary depending on which organization or certifying company is used. Still, the entry level is typically Green Belt and the progression is to Black Belt and Master Black Belt. Champions are responsible for Six Sigma projects across the entire organization and report to senior management.

5. Project Management Professional (PMP®) – \$108,525

The PMP certification was created and is administered by the Project Management Institute (PMI®), and it is the most recognized project management certification available. There are more than half a million active PMPs in 193 countries worldwide.

The PMP certification exam tests five areas relating to the lifecycle of a project: initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling, and closing. PMP certification is for running any kind of project, and it is not specialized into sub types, such as manufacturing, construction, or IT.

To become certified, individuals must have 35 hours of PMP-related training along with 7,500 hours of project management experience (if they have less than a bachelor's degree) or 4,500 hours of project management experience with a bachelor's or higher. PMP certification is another that requires years of planning and effort.

6. Certified Scrum Master – \$107,396

Another project management-related certification, Certified Scrum Master is focused on software (application) development.

Scrum is a rugby term; it's a means for restarting a game after a minor rules violation or after the ball is no longer in play (for example, when it goes out of bounds). In software development, Scrum is a project management process that is designed to act in a similar manner for software (application development) projects in which a customer often changes his or her mind during the development process.

In traditional project management, the request to change something impacts the entire project and must be renegotiated—a time-consuming and potentially expensive way to get the changes incorporated. There is also a single project manager.

In Scrum, however, there is not a single project manager. Instead, the team works together to reach the stated goal. The team should be co-located so members may interact frequently, and it should include representatives from all necessary disciplines (developers, product owners, experts in various areas required by the application, etc.).

Where PMP tries to identify everything up front and plan for a way to get the project completed, Scrum takes the approach that the requirements will change during the project lifecycle and that unexpected issues will arise. Rather than holding up the process, Scrum takes the approach that the problem the application is trying to solve will never be completely defined and understood, so team members must do the best they can with the time and budget available and by quickly adapting to change.

So where does the Scrum Master fit in? Also known as a servant-leader, the Scrum Master has two main duties: to protect the team from outside influences that would impede the project (the servant) and to chair the meetings and encourage the team to continually improve (the leader).

Certified Scrum Master certification was created and is managed by the Scrum Alliance and requires the individual to attend a class taught by a certified Scrum trainer and to pass the associated exam.

7. Citrix Certified Enterprise Engineer (CCEE) – \$104,240

The CCEE certification is a legacy certification from Citrix that proves expertise in XenApp 6, XenDesktop 5, and XenServer 6 via the Citrix Certified Administrator (CCS) exams for each, the Citrix Certified Advanced Administrator (CCAA) for XenApp 6, and an engineering (advanced implementation-type) exam around implementing, securing, managing, monitoring, and troubleshooting a complete virtualization solution using Citrix products.

Those certified in this area are encouraged to upgrade their certification to the App and Desktop track instead, which focuses on just XenDesktop, taking one exam to become a Citrix Certified Professional – Apps and Desktops (CCP-AD). At this point though, the CCEE is available as long as the exams are available for the older versions of the products listed.

8. Citrix Certified Administrator (CCA) for Citrix NetScaler – \$103,904

The CCA for NetScaler certification has been discontinued for NetScaler 9, and those with a current certification are encouraged to upgrade to the new Citrix Certified Professional – Networking (CCP-N). In any case, those with this certification have the ability to implement, manage, and optimize NetScaler networking performance and optimization, including the ability to support app and desktop solutions. As the Citrix certification program is being overhauled, refer to <http://training.citrix.com/cms/index.php/certification/> to view the certifications available, upgrade paths, etc.

9. Certified Ethical Hacker (CEH) – \$103,822

The International Council of E-Commerce Consultants (EC-Council) created and manages CEH certification. It is designed to test the candidate's abilities to prod for holes, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities in a company's network defenses using techniques and methods that hackers employ. The difference between a hacker and a CEH is that a hacker wants to cause damage, steal information, etc., while the CEH wants to fix the deficiencies found. Given the many attacks, the great volume of personal data at risk, and the legal liabilities possible, the need for CEHs is quite high, hence the salaries offered.

10. ITIL v3 Foundation – \$97,682

IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL®) was created by England's government in the 1980s to standardize IT management. It is a set of best practices for aligning the services IT provides with the needs of the organization. It is broad based, covering everything from availability and capacity management to change and incident management, in addition to application and IT operations management.

It is known as a library because it is composed of a set of books. Over the last 30 years, it has become the most widely used framework for IT management in the world. ITIL standards are owned by AXELOS, a joint venture company created by the Cabinet Office on behalf of Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and Capita plc, but they have authorized partners who provide education, training, and certification. The governing body defined the certification tiers, but they leave it to the accredited partners to develop the training and certification around that framework.

The Foundation certification is the entry-level one and provides a broad-based understanding of the IT lifecycle and the concepts and terminology surrounding it. Anyone wishing for higher-level certifications must have this level first, thus people may have higher certifications and still list this certification in the survey, which may skew the salary somewhat.

For information on ITIL, including certification exams, visit www.itil-officialsite.com.

11. Citrix Certified Administrator (CCA) for Citrix XenServer – \$97,578

The CCA for XenServer certification is available for version 6 and is listed as a legacy certification, but Citrix has yet to announce an upgrade path to their new certification structure. Those with a CCA for Citrix XenServer have the ability to install, configure, administer, maintain, and troubleshoot a XenServer deployment, including Provisioning Services. As the Citrix certification program is being overhauled, refer to <http://training.citrix.com/cms/index.php/certification/> to view the certifications available, upgrade paths, etc.

12. ITIL Expert Certification – \$96,194

The ITIL Expert certification builds on ITIL Foundation certification (number 10 above). It is interesting that ITIL Expert pays less on average than ITIL Foundation certification. Again, I suspect the salary results may be somewhat skewed depending on the certifications actually held and the fact that everyone who is ITIL certified must be at least ITIL Foundation certified.

To become an ITIL Expert, you must pass the ITIL Foundation exam as well as the capstone exam, Managing Across the Lifecycle. Along the way, you will earn intermediate certifications of your choosing in any combination of the Lifecycle and Capability tracks. You must earn at least 22 credits, of which Foundation accounts for two and the Managing Across the Lifecycle exam counts for five. The other exams count for three each (in the Intermediate Lifecycle track) or four each (in the Intermediate Capability track) and can be earned in any order and combination, though the official guide includes six recommended options. Visit www.itil-officialsite.com for more information.

13. Cisco Certified Design Associate (CCDA) – \$95,602

Cisco's certification levels are Entry, Associate, Professional, Expert, and Architect. Those who obtain this Associate-level certification are typically network design engineers, technicians, or support technicians. They are expected to design basic campus-type networks and be familiar with routing and switching, security, voice and video, wireless connectivity, and IP (both v4 and v6). They often work as part of a team with those who have higher-level Cisco certifications. To achieve CCDA certification, you must have earned one of the following: Cisco Certified Entry Networking Technician (CCENT), the lowest-level certification and the foundation for a career in networking; Cisco Certified Network Associate Routing and Switching (CCNA R&S); or any Cisco Certified Inter-network Expert (CCIE), the highest level of certification at Cisco. You must also pass a single exam.

14. Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE) – \$95,276

This certification ranked number 14 with an average salary of \$95,505 for those who didn't list an associated Windows version and \$94,922 for those who listed MCSE on Windows 2003, for the weighted average of \$95,276 listed above.

The Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer is an old certification and is no longer attainable. It has been replaced by the Microsoft Certified Solutions Expert (yes, also MCSE). The Engineer certification was valid for Windows NT 3.51 – 2003, and the new Expert certification is for Windows 2012. There is an upgrade path if you are currently an MCSA or MCITP on Windows 2008. There is no direct upgrade path from the old MCSE to the new MCSE.

15. Citrix Certified Administrator (CCA) for Citrix XenDesktop – \$95,094

The CCA for XenDesktop certification is available for versions 4 (in Chinese and Japanese only) and 5 (in many languages including English). Those with a current certification are encouraged to upgrade to the new Citrix Certified Associate – Apps and Desktops (CCA-AD). In any case, those with this certification have the ability to install, administer, and troubleshoot a XenDesktop deployment, including Provisioning Services and the Desktop Delivery Controller as well as XenServer and XenApp. As the Citrix certification program is being overhauled, refer to <http://training.citrix.com/cms/index.php/certification/> to view the certifications available, upgrade paths, etc.

Rounding out the Top 25

A few popular certifications just missed the Top 15 cut due to a low total number of responses or an average (mean) pay just outside the threshold. Due to their popularity, I have included them for informational purposes.

Certification	Average Pay
CISSP: Certified Information Systems Security Professional.....	\$114,287
MCSE: Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer 2003.....	\$94,922
RHCSA: Red Hat Certified System Administrator	\$94,802
VCP-DCV: VMware Certified Professional - Data Center Virtualization.....	\$94,515
JNCIA: Juniper Networks Certified Internet Associate	\$94,492
MCTS: Windows Server 2008 Applications Infrastructure Configuration	\$91,948
MCITP: Enterprise Administrator	\$91,280
CCNP: Cisco Certified Network Professional	\$90,833
WCNA: Wireshark Certified Network Analyst	\$88,716
CCNA R&S: Cisco Certified Network Associate Routing and Switching.....	\$81,308

Conclusion

If you're looking to improve your skills (and your pay!), consider adding one or more of the certifications listed. Consider your current skill set and see if a related skill or a management skill may help power your career to the next level. For example, if you already know storage or networking, consider a certification in virtualization. Or, break out of your technical track into a management track by taking ITIL or PMP training and getting certified in one of those areas.

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About the Author

John Hales, VCP, VCP-DT, VCAP-DCA, VCI, is a VMware instructor at Global Knowledge, teaching most of the vSphere classes that Global Knowledge offers, including the View classes. John is also the author of many books, including involved technical books from Sybex, exam preparation books, and many quick reference guides from BarCharts, in addition to custom courseware for individual customers. His latest book on vSphere is entitled *Administering vSphere 5: Planning, Implementing and Troubleshooting*. John has various certifications, including the VMware VCA-DCV, VCA-DT, VCA-Cloud, VCP, VCP-DT, VCAP-DCA, VCI, and VCI Level 2; the Microsoft MCSE, MCDBA, MOUS, and MCT; the EMC Storage Administrator (EMCSA); and the CompTIA A+, Network+, and CTT+. John lives with his wife and children in Sunrise, FL.