

By [CRN Staff](#)



Solution providers are reaping high rewards from their investments in certified personnel, but which certifications provide the highest rates of return largely depends on the size of the solution provider.

The 2003 *CRN* Certification Study found that for large solution providers with at least \$5 million in annual revenue, two relatively new Microsoft certifications provided the biggest bang for the buck. The Microsoft Certified Solution Developer for Microsoft .Net (MCSD) topped the list by a

wide margin, providing a strong 170 percent return on investment (ROI). The Microsoft Certified Database Administrator (MCDBA) was a solid No. 2 with an ROI of 122 percent.

Since the MCSD and MCDBA certifications lie in more specialized areas of technology with fewer certified technicians available, one would expect the rate of return for them to be well above that for more basic Microsoft certifications, such as the Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE). This is indeed the case (see chart on [Page 58](#)).

Not surprisingly, security certifications also provide high rates of return to large solution providers. Two Check Point certifications, CCSA with an ROI of 110 percent and CCSE with 104 percent, ranked third and fourth, respectively. These were also in the top five last year.

A high percentage of certifications deemed most important by solution providers indicate that ROI is increasing over time, compared with those indicating that ROI is declining. Solution providers cited benefits such as the ability to charge a higher hourly rate as one of the major reasons.

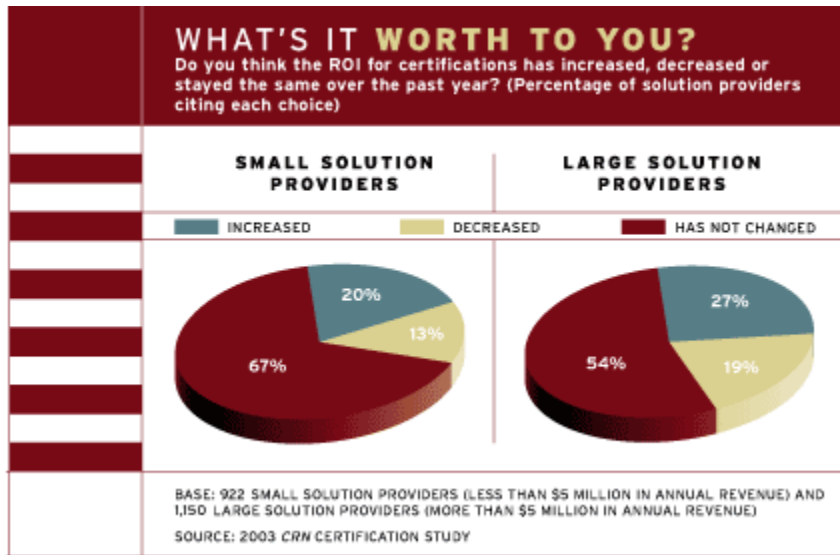
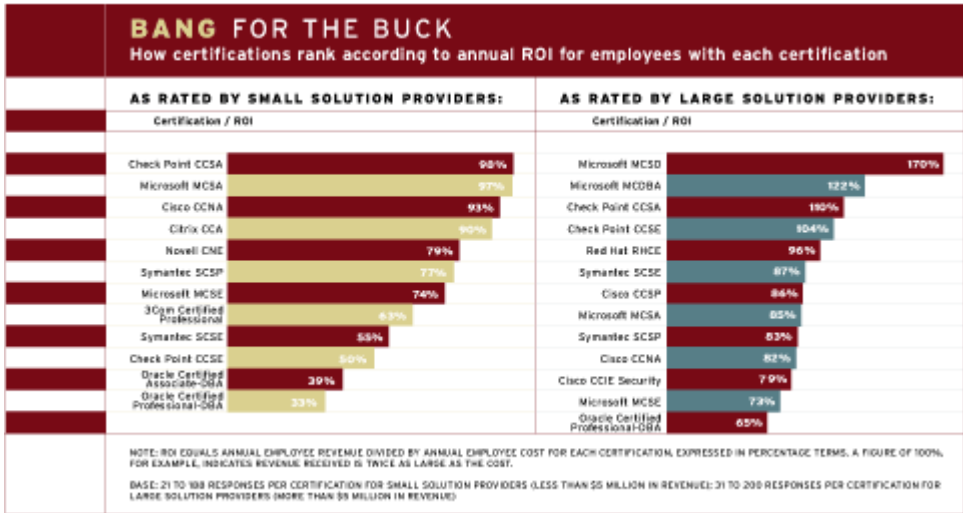
Among smaller solution providers with less than \$5 million in annual revenue, no single vendor or technology dominated the ROI list. The Check Point CCSA certification edged out Microsoft Certified Systems Administrator (MCSA) for the No. 1 spot with an ROI of 98 percent.

To explore the ROI equation further, *CRN* took a closer look at certification policies of a dozen vendors that dominated this year's lists of the most important and fastest-rising certifications. Snapshots follow.

--[John Roberts](#)

To earn certification, technicians must pass proctored exams, which cost \$125 each. Associates must pass one to two exams; Professional designations require four to five exams. The CCIE certification requires a \$350 written exam and a \$1,250 lab exam.

[Larry Hooper](#)



Microsoft

Microsoft is adding specializations to reflect the growing variety of corporate IT roles and tasks within them.

At Tech Ed 2003, the Redmond, Wash.-based software giant introduced a new security specialization available to MCSEs and MCSAs.

The company is exploring other areas of specialization including messaging and architecture/design, said Dan Truax, director of business and product strategy for Microsoft Training and Certifications.

"The certifications are not just based on technology but job roles," Truax said. "If a customer needs planning, designing and implementation, they need an MCSE. If they have staff embedded into customers' day-to-day operations, they should pursue an MCSA. Within those job roles, you can get specializations."

*Since 1992, the company has issued 1.8 million certifications in seven categories to more than 900,000 individuals. **The categories include system engineers (MCSEs), administrators (MCSAs), database administrators (MCDBAs), application developers (Microsoft Certified Application Developer), solutions developers (MCSDs) and trainers (Microsoft Certified Trainers).***

Training courses and exams take place during three-day and five-day programs. Costs vary depending on the certification. Microsoft provides training programs from thousands of authorized Certified Training Education Centers (CTECs) around the world. In the United States, each exam costs \$125. Some certifications can require five or more courses and exams.

This fall, the Microsoft Training and Certification group plans to launch its certification program for Windows Server 2003. To cut costs and ease the burden for those who have earned their Windows 2000 stripes and want to move to Windows Server 2003, Microsoft will offer a single-exam upgrade for MCSA holders and two exams for MCSEs to earn their Windows Server 2003 credentials. For those with NT credentials, the process will be more significant, Truax said.