



Cisco Data Center Certification

Case Study Subject

Rickey Keith
Service Operations Manager

Industry

IT services and computer support

Area of Focus

Cisco data center solutions

Cisco Certifications

CCENT
CCNA Routing & Switching
CCNA Data Center
CCNA Security
CCNA Wireless
CCDA
CCDP
CCNP Routing & Switching
CCNP Data Center
CCNP Wireless

Professional Benefits

- Increased job security, salary, and advancement with data center expertise
- Valued as an adviser helping decision makers address infrastructure needs
- Ability to understand and solve clients' "big picture" business issues
- Recognition as a key player managing a critical part of the infrastructure

LinkedIn Profile

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/rickey-keith-4567bb8>

Riding High with Data Center

The sky's the limit for a former "IT guy" who transitioned to data center management.

Before he was 30 years old, Rickey Keith was well on his way to being an IT pro. After he had earned his degree and gained valuable experience doing IT management for a hospital in Alaska, he landed his current IT management position in New Orleans. While he was developing his career, he also acquired more than a dozen IT certifications.

His first Cisco certification was CCNA Routing and Switching, which helped him acquire increasing responsibility. He went on to earn additional CCNA certification in Security, Voice, and Wireless before adding CCNP certifications in Routing and Switching, Wireless, and Data Center, along with CCENT, CCDA, CCDP, and other certifications.

Data Center Is the Brains

But Rickey believes it's his Data Center training and certification that delivers the most value right now for his employers and clients.

"The data center is the brains of the environment," he says. "This is where all the critical activities and processes happen, which makes it central to the way a company operates. Even small enterprises have it in some form, so data center management is a great career. If you can keep the data center functioning, you can keep the whole enterprise operating."

Rickey adds that understanding cloud management is now a basic skill for managing the data center. "This is especially important as more companies move into the cloud because they can't maintain those services on site," he states. "This means that more Data Center-certified people will be needed. It's an excellent choice if you're looking for job security and advancement."

Certifications Were Essential

Rickey notes that his career trajectory, plus the certifications, brings a unique perspective to his job. "Working for several companies and holding different positions helped me learn the best ways to perform the work. My certifications ensured that I understood the big picture."

Rickey recalls that he learned the most when he managed IT for the hospital in Alaska. "It was like I wore a jet pack. I pressed a button, and the sky was the limit because I had the opportunity to redesign the whole system."

He started by creating a three-year plan and methodically went through it until the network was perfect. Then he rounded off the last six months by focusing on the data center because he understood this was the heart of the system.



“Intelligent design mixed with intelligent implementation leads to successful customer outcomes.”

– Rickey Keith

He’s Now a Virtual CIO

But he wanted more, and his growing list of Cisco certifications enabled him to leap forward. When an opportunity came up five years later, he moved to Universal Data in New Orleans.

“We do two things: projects and implementations,” he explains. “A company will contract with us to create their technology. Then we hand it back to them to manage. But the majority of our business is in managed services, where we become a company’s IT department, managing the entire environment. That accounts for about 600 or 700 of our customers.”

Essentially, Rickey becomes the customers’ virtual CIO, with 600 workstations and 100 servers under his wing. In that role, he works with company decision makers regarding their infrastructure, and he discusses their struggles from a business standpoint.

When it came to his more formal training, Rickey was a classroom fanatic. He’s even created a library of all his certification training manuals, which he uses as a continual reference.

He Values Cisco’s Holistic Approach

So, what made him decide to move from his other areas of expertise to CCNA Data Center certification? “It was easy,” he says. “I wanted to learn about the technology before I implemented it, so I made sure everything was to best practices. Intelligent design mixed with intelligent implementation leads to successful customer outcomes.”

In fact, he focused almost entirely on Cisco training because he believed the company had a holistic approach in which all the solutions communicate with each other.

Excited to advance his data center expertise further, Rickey paid for his own CCNP Data Center boot camp experience through learning partner Global Knowledge. “It was expensive for a 22-year-old, but once I had earned my CCNP Data Center certification, I was able to make more money. The salary increases justified the investment right away!”

Rickey’s plans don’t stop there: “In the next few months, I plan to earn my CCIE in Data Center, which is a big leap.”

With a career arc that’s the envy of many young engineers, Rickey feels lucky to be doing something he loves. “We’re in a digital age, and even small companies are moving to the cloud and to data centers. I’m so lucky that I have a passion for the technology, the storage, the Cisco servers, and especially the data centers.”

For More Information

To begin your exploration of Cisco Data Center certifications, visit https://learningnetwork.cisco.com/community/it_careers/get_data_center_certified.