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The importance of choosing a reputable training provider is also a key factor. Marina Gil-Santamaria, director of Product Marketing, Ipswich Network Management Division, says that although an online search for “cloud computing certification” will reveal a host of results, a lot of them will be companies you’ve never heard of. “Stick with certifications with recognised names who provide training in the fundamental skills you need to provide excellent cloud offerings,” she says.

Gil-Santamaria recommends courses such as *VMware Certified Professional*, *Cisco Certified Network Associate*, and *Microsoft Certified Professional*. But she also points out that it’s vital to brush up on your people skills as well.

However, even if you can find a course that fits the bill, you’ve still got one more hurdle: will your employer invest in it?

Richard Flanders, product marketing director at information infrastructure provider MTI, says: “When finances are squeezed, as we are experiencing currently, these courses may be beyond some budgets. Network managers could find themselves with many different applications and products to learn and deploy from a number of different vendors without the requisite skills in-house.”

There could be an alternative here – let your vendor provide the support as you dive into the new technology.

A helping hand

“Managers in the position of financial hardship can address these skills shortages if they are savvy enough to purchase products from vendors who offer a little extra,” says Flanders. He believes it has become vital for technology providers to add value to purchases, with extra support for the customer. So it might be possible to learn on the job with the help of the right vendor. (See *Picking the right vendor*, below, for advice on how to do this successfully)

Flanders explains how MTI offers a skills transfer process to its customers where a consultant will work with IT managers to transfer any related skills

until the client’s team is confident in implementing and deploying new technology independently.

Cloud computing provider Memset has also helped out its clients with the new technology. “We provide Tier 2 support and often, when we bring a new client on board, we work closely with their IT resource to clearly work out their requirements and advise on the necessary skills needed in-house to meet those demands,” says Craig-Wood.

And if you’re a manager who’s worried about sending employees on a course just to have them leave soon after, then Sourcefire offers piece of mind. Leon Ward, senior security engineer for the company, explains: “We offer instructor-led classroom training, onsite training, and computer-based training. But we also provide a unique ‘Turnover Guarantee’ for any company that enrolls an employee in a Sourcefire class who then leaves the company within 60 days of the original class date, allowing that company to enrol one additional employee in the same class/version within six months of the original student’s class at no extra charge.”

The next step

At some level, particularly if you work in a large organisation, you might find yourself in a position where you can’t expect to go on courses. From that point you’ll have to be self-motivated and investigate new technologies on your own.

“Once you get past a certain stage, you can’t expect a lot of hand-holding,” says Marcus Ranum, chief security officer, Tenable Network Security. He says that it therefore becomes important to find the time to do your own research, keep up to date, and build a network of peers who share information with you. He adds that you’ll also need to spend time “filtering through lots of annoying emails from vendors and occasionally checking to see if what they’re talking about is interesting or makes sense”.

Ipswich’s Gil-Santamaria echoes the point and says that you should visit online communities and work on your interpersonal networking. “Network



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*Richard Flanders,
Product marketing director,
MTI*

and speak with other IT network managers who have been through the process,” she says. “Their advice and insight will prove invaluable.”

So with courses, vendor assistance, or some personal research and conferring with your compatriots, there are multiple choices in preparing yourself for encountering cloud or virtualisation in 2011. ■