



# The New Cisco Channel Specializations

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## Introduction

Do you have any of the Cisco Partner specialization certifications? Or if you use resellers or consultants to perform work relating to your network, do they have them?

Cisco recently announced that its Channel Partners are going to be required to recertify with a new set of specializations. These will be phased in so that all partners are on the new scheme by March 2008 at the latest.

Why do you care?

If you are a Channel Partner, your sales and technical teams are going to have to work through recertifying under the new specializations, when your old ones expire (or sooner).

If you are a Customer, you might want to know what to look for in your Cisco networking resellers or consultants. The new Channel specializations also tell us something about shifts in the market as Cisco sees it. Read on for my impressions on this, below.

Chesapeake Netcraftsmen is a Cisco Premier Partner. I was asked to work with my fellow team leads to plan and coordinate how we migrate to the new certifications. We are trying to do this as quickly as possible. If I were in marketing, I'd say that we wanted to ensure that we bring the best and latest knowledge to our consulting work. Since I'm technical (or would like to think so), I'm not allowed to say things like that. So while that is true, I'll acknowledge that the reality is that we have to fit the training, study, and testing in around existing customer work, just like everyone else.

Now you can probably guess one of my motivations in writing this article -- I've already done some of the work!

In addition, my occasional co-author Carole Warner Reece and I both worked as SME's (Subject Matter Experts) with ElementK in developing the SE (Sales Engineer) and FE (Field Engineer) versions of the new Cisco Foundations Express course for Cisco. These courses are the basic new Channel Partner certification courses supporting the new channel specializations. Partners meeting some other requirements must have staff certified on Foundations Express (or one other specialization area) to qualify as Premier partners. Of course, some Premier Partners may hold several more specializations, as Chesapeake Netcraftsmen does.

## Timing of the New Cisco Channel Partner Specializations

Some specifics extracted from the Cisco announcement:

1. On March 14, 2006, six new base specializations launched, including Express Foundation, Express Unified Communications, Advanced Security, Advanced Unified Communications, Advanced Routing and Switching, Advanced Wireless LAN
1. Several existing specializations were retired, including IP Communications, IP Communications Express, Routing and Switching, Wireless LAN, and Security/VPN. Cisco Channel Partners can apply for or renew these retired specializations through June 14, 2006.

- 1 During the first year of the transition, March 2006 through March 2007, Partners can achieve new specializations as their retired specializations expire. Certifications will be renewed under the current program during this period.
- 1 In October 2006, the new Advanced Specialization discounts will be implemented, allowing six months for Partners to qualify.
- 1 Starting on March 1, 2007, new certification requirements will apply upon the Partner's next certification anniversary that falls on or after this date.

Note that Partners whose specializations expire after June 14, 2006 will have to re-certify under the new specializations.

**Disclaimer:** I've done my best to verify the information in this article. Having said that, there has recently been some changes in the relevant Cisco web pages. As always, I may also have missed something -- so it is up to you to make sure you are spending your study and testing time in accord with the latest Cisco requirements.

## Impact of the New Certifications

Everybody needs to be aware of the new specialization scheme because the training and certification world has become somewhat split. There are now some courses intended only for resellers/consultants, and not for Cisco customers. In more specialized areas, the courses remain the same, and my expectation is that they will continue to do so, just due to the economics. It is quite expensive to develop a new course as polished as those Cisco puts out.

One very Big Deal is the push behind the [Cisco ISR \(Integrated Services Router\)](#). These routers provide increased performance (CPU and memory), and serve as the follow-on products for the popular 800, 1700, 2600, and 3600 families of routers. The ISRs include the later 800 series routers, and the 1800, 2800, and 3800 series of routers. They're the hottest-selling router yet for Cisco, so they've apparently done something Quite Right.

What I haven't heard as much comment on (concerning the ISR's) is the fact that you can put various other forms of hardware into the modular members of this set of routers, including:

- 1 Higher speed WAN interfaces
- 1 Various switchlet modules, including Power over Ethernet capabilities
- 1 Wireless module
- 1 Wireless controller module
- 1 NAM (Network Analysis Module -- RMON server on a bladelet)
- 1 Hardware encryption support
- 1 Hardware IDS
- 1 Unity Express
- 1 Voice gateway modules (FXS, FXO, etc.).

The "Services" part refers to the Cisco IOS features that are also available with these routers:

- 1 IOS Firewall
- 1 IOS-based NAT (Network Address Translation)
- 1 IOS IPS
- 1 Security Device Manager (SDM) -- web interface for configuration
- 1 VPN capabilities
- 1 Call Manager Express

That makes the ISR quite a box for meeting a variety of network design needs. They change the competitive landscape, since the competition is still mostly offering point or niche solutions. They also emphasize the Cisco "value-add", namely all the services built into the Cisco IOS.

## Foundations Express

The Foundations Express courses (SE, FE) reflect the above capabilities. The SE course attempts to cover the various ways you can use the ISR routers and components. The FE course does that and also focuses on using SDM to configure ISRs. They both require ICND and the CCNA certification as pre-requisite. They incorporate parts of the Customer BCMSN and BSCI courses, among other sources of "re-purposed content".

Somewhere between developing the outline and filling in content for these courses, the implications dawned on me. I think up to that point our focus was more on skills needed to deploy ISR's. But really, the Cisco world is changing... The

following are my perceptions, definitely not any sort of restatement of something from Cisco:

*The insight here is that Wireless is really becoming what I would call "infrastructural" -- everybody needs to do it. The same applies to the basics of Security. Everybody needs to know some firewalling, some IPsec VPN. These are becoming so ubiquitous in networks that you can't get by with hollering for "the security person" or "the wireless person" to finish that part of things. No longer is it a good idea to say "I'm a route-switch person who doesn't need to know wireless". Worse, if you defined "security specialist" as firewall plus IPsec VPN configuration, you need to enlarge your focus. There's a lot more to security these days!*

*The other novelty is that Foundations Express (for FE's) focuses on configuration, mostly using the Graphical User Interface in SDM. There is also some coverage of the PIX/ASA software tool, ASDM. These tools work rather well, and genuinely make configuration easier, especially the firewall and VPN aspects. I did find myself dropping into the CLI to configure basic AAA, also interfaces and especially subinterfaces. I'm not saying you don't need to know the Cisco IOS CLI. I am indeed saying that knowing Cisco CLI is removed or greatly reduced as a barrier to new entrants, because SDM eases your way into working with Cisco products.*

By the way, many thanks to the large group of people at ElementK who absorbed our constant and voluminous feedback and did the PowerPoint and online training course development, to a very tight timeline.

Some Cisco partners will have access to the web version of the training (which can be downloaded and studied offline as well), via the Partner E-Learning Connection (PEC). Others may encounter the PowerPoint version of the course through a Cisco Learning Partner. Enjoy!

## The Other New Specializations

Let's take a brief look at the other new "**Base Specializations**". Partners can add more specialization and achieve "Master" status, but let's not get into that amount of detail.

### Express Foundation

Brief description: This specialization is the base for the new SE's and FE's. It includes what I'd describe as some of intermediate routing and switching (about half what's needed for CCNP prep), plus security (emphasis on firewalling, IOS IPS, NAT, IPsec VPN), and wireless (both the autonomous and lightweight approaches, with light coverage of outdoor WLAN but not mesh wireless).

Short version of requirements: Pre-requisite CCDA or CCNA (depending on role), which implies having the ICND course and exam, also DESGN (for CCDA), and the relevant Foundations Express and Lifecycle courses and exams.

### Advanced Routing & Switching

Brief description: Routing and Switching, only more! The courses include BGP, QoS, and MPLS, as well as High Availability and IPv6.

Short version of requirements: The SE role starts with CCDA, QoS, and BSCI as pre-requisites. It adds the Advanced R&S and Lifecycle courses and exams. The FE role has CCNP (implying BSCI) and QoS as pre-requisites. It adds the Advanced FE R&S and Lifecycle courses and exams. **The partner also has to have a CCIE on staff for this specialization.** That makes this a pretty solid specialization. It's going to take some prior expertise and commitment to training and testing for a partner to achieve this.

### Advanced Security

Brief description: For FE's, start with CCSP and add NAC, ACS, NAC on routers, NAC agents, CCA and CANAC Manager, MARS, MARS reporting, configuring security devices, detecting malicious activity. SE's need to know how to design for these platforms.

Short version of requirements: The SE builds on CCDA with the Security Solutions and Design Specialist and Security Lifecycle courses and tests. The **FE starts with CCSP or CCIE (Security)**, and adds Advanced Security Field Specialist and Security Lifecycle courses and test. The FE pre-requisites require a long list of courses and makes this a rather solid specialization as well. It's going to take some prior expertise and commitment to training and testing for a partner to

achieve this.

## Advanced Wireless LAN

Brief description: The SE and FE need Cisco WLAN Fundamentals (CWLF), then Cisco WLAN Advanced Topics (CWLAT). The first of these covers basics of site survey and WLAN device setup. The CWLAT course outline follows:

- 1 Describe detailed technical features, functions and benefits of the WLAN product offerings available from Cisco
- 1 Install advanced feature set hardware so that it functions optimally
- 1 Install and manage the CiscoWorks WLSE and infrastructure devices so that it functions optimally
- 1 Install and administer WLAN management devices
- 1 Troubleshoot and maintain a wireless network
- 1 Administer security so that the network is safe from attack

Short version of requirements: CCDA or CCNA, the above courses, Wireless Lifecycle course.

## Express Unified Communications

Brief description: Partners cannot hold both this specialization and the Advanced Unified Communications, below. I presume that is because Advanced encompasses the Express content, and then some. Express is directed at resellers working with Call Manager Express / Unity Express.

Short version of requirements: CCDA for SE, CCNA for FE, then the IP Telephony Express and Lifecycle Services courses and exams.

## Advanced Unified Communications

Brief description: Partners apparently need this to sell the full range of Cisco IP Telephony gear. It requires sales and project management expertise with Call Manager and Unity deployments, as well as targeted skillsets.

Short version of requirements: The SE role requires the IP Telephony Design certification, QoS and Advanced IP Communications Lifecycle courses and tests. The FE role is rather challenging, requiring CCVP in effect, the CVOICE, QoS, IPT Troubleshooting, IP Telephony, Gateway/Gatekeeper, plus Lifecycle course and exams, and the MeetingPlace course. Some other roles are required: Unity Design and Support, and a RichMedia certification. IPCC Express and IP Interactive Voice Response (IVR) is another required role. I've been quietly not mentioning the Account Manager roles. Advanced Unified Communications requires two AM's with IP Communications and Lifecycle skills (courses and exams), plus Lifecycle course and exam. Oh, and the Meetingplace course.

We've had this requirement covered and have been doing IPT designs and installs. I'll note in passing that what we've seen confirms that an effective project manager was a good call on Cisco's part. There are a lot of moving parts to an IPT deployment, and it definitely takes a dedicated person with good communication skills to drive the project forward to a timely completion. Even when you take this into account, there are a lot of details to be taken care of!

## **Gold, Silver, Premier Partner**

Cisco Gold, Silver, and Premier Partners have done a lot of certification and specialization work and met other requirements (including very satisfied customers), in order to obtain those Partner status levels. We've been a Premier partner for a few years now, and it does take a commitment to maintain that status. We've invested a fair amount in internal lab equipment to support internal training, testing labs, and customer demos. We in fact hold many more specializations than Premier requires, partly to answer the inevitable question "who is Chesapeake Netcraftsmen?"

Detailed requirements can be found under the links off of the following URL:  
[http://www.cisco.com/web/partners/pr11/pr8/partners\\_pgm\\_category\\_page.html](http://www.cisco.com/web/partners/pr11/pr8/partners_pgm_category_page.html). (See Gold, Silver, Premier to the left of the page).

## **Summary**

I hope this information has been useful and at least somewhat interesting. Yeah, it's perhaps a bit dry as reading, and not even really very technical. Variety is good!

Here are some links where you can read more about some of what was discussed above.

**Please note:** if you go to the following Role Requirement links, you can easily shift topics in the left web frame to view the overall description and other information about each new specialization. So I have omitted links to all that information -- too much unnecessary detail.

Document	URL
Cisco Enhanced Channel Partner program	<a href="http://www.cisco.com/web/partners/pr11/index.html">http://www.cisco.com/web/partners/pr11/index.html</a>
Cisco ISR Routers	<a href="http://www.cisco.com/en/US/products/hw/routers/products_promotion0900aecd8017150a.html">http://www.cisco.com/en/US/products/hw/routers/products_promotion0900aecd8017150a.html</a> OR <a href="http://www.cisco.com/go/isr">http://www.cisco.com/go/isr</a>
Foundations Express Role Requirements	<a href="http://www.cisco.com/web/partners/pr11/pr66/fe/role_requirements.html">http://www.cisco.com/web/partners/pr11/pr66/fe/role_requirements.html</a>
Advanced Routing and Switching Role Requirements	<a href="http://www.cisco.com/web/partners/program/specializations/adv-rs/requirements.html">http://www.cisco.com/web/partners/program/specializations/adv-rs/requirements.html</a>
Advanced Security Role Requirements	<a href="http://www.cisco.com/web/partners/program/specializations/adv-sec/requirements.html">http://www.cisco.com/web/partners/program/specializations/adv-sec/requirements.html</a>
Advanced Wireless LAN Role Requirements	<a href="http://www.cisco.com/web/partners/program/specializations/adv-wlan/requirements.html">http://www.cisco.com/web/partners/program/specializations/adv-wlan/requirements.html</a>
Express Unified Communications Role Requirements	<a href="http://www.cisco.com/web/partners/program/specializations/x-uc/requirements.html">http://www.cisco.com/web/partners/program/specializations/x-uc/requirements.html</a>
Advanced Unified Communications Role Requirements	<a href="http://www.cisco.com/web/partners/program/specializations/adv-com/requirements.html">http://www.cisco.com/web/partners/program/specializations/adv-com/requirements.html</a>

Your comments, questions, and suggestions for future articles are of course welcome! See below to decipher Pete's email address.

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