

Microsoft Certification Exam Preparation Tools

Exam simulations help you hone your test-taking skills



For better or worse, many of us who work in IT must be certified in our respective fields of expertise. Although the debates continue about the overall value of a given certification, certification improves your chances of getting a job and a higher salary. It's no wonder that an industry has blossomed that's devoted to helping you pass Microsoft

certification exams. This month's Buyer's Guide highlights vendors who provide computer-based Microsoft certification exam-preparation tools.

The ostensible goal of the certification process is to train and develop skilled IT professionals. But because of the difficulty of Microsoft's tests, you should hone your Microsoft test-taking skills along with your IT skills. Exam simulation is the most popular and effective means for this type of preparation. Each product in this Buyer's Guide provides exam-simulation software. Although comparing the prices and coverage that each vendor offers is relatively easy, you should also investigate how accurately the simulations represent the actual tests, how well the vendors explain and reference the test answers, what tools the vendors provide for tracking your progress and identifying areas that need work, and what kind of customer support the vendors provide.

Microsoft exams incorporate long, technical scenarios, multiple correct answers, interactive graphical exhibits, and time limits. This exam format creates trouble for the novice. Fortunately, most vendors offer trial versions of their exam simulators so that you can

see for yourself how true the tests are to the real thing. If you've never taken an MCSE exam, check with colleagues or discussion groups to get opinions about different vendors' exam simulations.

The quality and quantity of reference material are extremely important in exam simulations. You should be able to easily access a clear explanation of a test question and any supporting explanation or reference material. Some vendors reference their own training material, which they provide in separate products. Such a vendor not only forces you to purchase additional training materials but makes you rely solely on that vendor for providing accurate information. Use many sources when studying. Using multiple sources not only increases the likelihood that you'll find an explanation that makes sense to you but also lets you cross-reference the sources for accuracy. You'll find a wealth of good information available, much of it free. Exam simulations should help direct you to those sources.

Most of the products in this Buyer's Guide offer additional tools to augment the learning process. Some important features include the ability to track your test scores, identification of areas that you

need to work on, and direction to helpful study materials. Some products provide electronic flashcards that you can load onto a PC or PDA to quiz yourself. Ask yourself whether a product's additional study tools fit your learning style.

Several of the vendors in this Buyer's Guide offer a money-back guarantee if you use their products to prepare for a test and you don't pass. Although this seems like a testament to the vendor's faith in its

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product, don't neglect to read the fine print. You'll likely find some exception to the offer that makes you ineligible for a refund.

Fortunately, most vendors in this guide offer several means for you to test-drive their software before you make a purchase. Many vendors also sell their products individually, so you can buy one product to prepare for a particular test without making a financial commitment to an entire suite of products. Either way, you should be able to find a tool that works for you.

—Tom Iwanski

InstantDoc ID 25336

Editor's Note: The Buyer's Guide summarizes vendor-submitted information. To find out about future Buyer's Guide topics or to learn how to include your product in an upcoming Buyer's Guide, go to <http://www.winnetmag.com/buyersguide>. To view previous Buyer's Guides on the Web, go to <http://www.winnetmag.com/articles/index.cfm?departmentid=118>.

Compiled by Sue Cooper

Contact Information	Product Name	Price	Description
BeachFront Quizzer 281-992-3131 888-992-3131 http://www.bfq.com	MCP, MCS D 70-210 to 70-227, MCSE	\$49.99 to \$99.99	Choose from 26 practice exams for Microsoft certification and 55 exams for other IT certifications; features include flash cards, study sessions, explanations, links to e-books and Web sites, historical analysis, question tracking, randomized answers, and unlimited unique exams
	BeachFront Quizzer Online Exams	\$9.99 to \$49.99	Lets you use the Internet to access 26 Microsoft exams and 55 other exams; provides immediate feedback after you answer a question
BFQ Press 281-992-3131 888-992-3131 http://www.bfqpress.com	InsideScoop to MCSE Certification E-Book on CD	\$129.99	Certification practice exams that interact with the InsideScoop to MCSE Certification Series e-books; questions link directly to relevant e-book chapters; explanation feature lets you access additional information directly from the e-book stored on your PC
CBT Vision 905-709-3466 877-733-5228 http://www.cbtvision.com	Examiner	\$75	Exam-simulation software for Microsoft and Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA) certification exams; features more than 170 questions, a customizable format, three testing modes (learning, testing, and adaptive), instant feedback score bar, an exam-pass guarantee, and free mentoring by the exam's author; lets you save and retrieve score reports and exam sessions for later review
Cert21.com 570-425-6695 cert21@ptd.net http://www.cert21.com	Online Practice Tests	Starts at \$19.95	Online practice tests for 23 MCSE exams; questions include explanations that reference official training guides; features practice and test modes, randomized question-and-answer choices, a score history for practice tests, and access to more than 70 exams
The Coriolis Group 480-483-0192 800-410-0192 http://www.examcram.com	Exam Cram Review Guides	\$19.99 to \$34.99	Exam-preparation guides for most Microsoft Certified DBA (MCDBA), MCS D, Microsoft Certified Systems Administrator (MCSA), and MCSE exams; features include concise, targeted content, realistic practice questions, and a tear-out cram sheet with tips, acronyms, key facts, and memory joggers
	Exam Prep Study Guides	\$39.99 to \$59.99	Includes practice questions with explanations, real-world projects, and a CD-ROM containing additional study and reference tools; titles available for most MCDBA, MCSA, MCS D, and MCSE exam topics
FastTrak Express 281-992-3398 866-992-3398 http://www.ftexp.com	MCP, MCS D 70-210 to 70-227, MCSE, and Electives	\$59.99	A testing engine that offers more than 20 unique Microsoft practice exams; features include adaptive and simulated exams, exam review after taking the test, explanations, links to Web-based content, and randomized selection of test questions
LearnKey 435-674-9733 800-865-0165 http://www.learnkey.com	MasterExam	\$125	Practice tests for 13 Microsoft certification exams; features include dynamic test progress and scoring, technical resource references, marking of questions for further review, customized answer guides, and three testing modes: open book with answers, explanations, and no time limit; closed book with correct and incorrect answer feedback; and certification test simulation with time limit

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MeasureUp 678-356-5000 800-649-1687 http://www.measureup.com	Certification Preparation	\$59 to \$89	Practice tests and e-learning for all Microsoft products; features free 24 x 7 online tutoring, multiple testing modes (including study and certification), detailed explanations, and Microsoft-simulation questions; vendor references Microsoft Official Curriculum (MOC) and is a Microsoft Certified Practice Test Provider (PTP)
Mobiliware 616-292-4049 http://www.pocketexams.com	PocketExams	\$19.95	Lets you use a Palm device to easily review for any test; choose between practice exams for the most popular Microsoft certification exams or creating your own exam; includes a technical explanation for every question, an overall exam score, and scores on each topic in the certification exam; feedback helps you focus your study efforts and identify weaknesses
preptest.com 416-271-4434 http://www.preptest.com	Certification Exam-Preparation Tools	\$28 \$45 Canada	Study guides for Microsoft exams; guides include sample questions and explanations and free email support and upgrades
Self Test Software 770-643-3600 800-244-7330 http://www.selftestsoftware.com	Self Test Software Windows Exam Simulations	\$99	Realistic practice tests that include study tools and resources; standard features include learning and certification modes of study, in-depth tutorials, test history, and score reporting by objective; advanced features include 24 x 7 instructor mentoring and flash cards; Self Test Software is a Microsoft Certified PTP
TestOut 801-785-7900 800-877-4889 http://www.testout.com	TestOut for Win2K MCSE	\$1995	Covers seven exams necessary to pass the Windows 2000 MCSE certification exams; includes five required courses on six CD-ROMs, two elective courses on two CD-ROMs, hands-on LabSim software, ExamSim software, and online syllabus
Toggit Software 941-292-8049 http://www.toggit.com	Exam-Preparation Software	\$39.50	Software to help students become A+, Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA), Certified Internet Webmaster (CIW), iNet+, MSCE, and MCSA certified; Toggit Software test simulations offer standard and adaptive formatting; includes detailed answers to test questions and software that tracks and monitors your progress
Transcender 615-726-8779 http://www.transcender.com	TranscenderCerts	Contact vendor for pricing	Full-length simulated exams for MCSE, MCSA, Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP), MCSD, and MCDBA certifications; features include score-report history that pinpoints your progress and weak areas and answer explanations that contain references to study resources; single-user license includes a money-back guarantee if you don't pass
Whizlabs Software (91) (11) 510-7511 http://www.whizlabs.com/mcse-exam/mcse-exam.html	MCSE@Whiz - MCSE Exam Test Simulators	\$29.95	Five mock tests with more than 300 questions on the latest MCSE 2000 certification; features include real-exam-type questions with a high level of customization and detailed explanations, quick revision tips, and scorer of the month