

Why Become A CCIE?

The CCIE is a very difficult and expensive (potentially VERY expensive) certification. So why in the world would anyone want to spend the time and money necessary to pass the CCIE lab exam and get their digits? While each CCIE candidate has their own reasons for doing this, there are some common benefits:

?1? Salary Oh the vulgarity of chasing filthy lucre! Regardless of your views on the whole "mo' money, mo' problems" debate, money is one of the leading motivations for many candidates seeking the CCIE. Because the CCIE is such a difficult and highly respected certification, there is a very competitive market for CCIEs. With high demand and low supply come high salaries. The CCIE has consistently been at or near the top of the certifications with the highest salaries. [The current average salary for a CCIE is somewhere in the \\$93,000 - \\$111,000 \(US dollars\) range.](#) I live in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota and I've been told that \$125,000 is the average salary of a CCIE in this area. [Brad Reese has a nice collection of links to various salary surveys.](#) As with any "average" salary you need to take into account that there are likely other variables at play (years of experience, location, specialization, consultant versus permanent employee, etc) but suffice it to say, a CCIE can make a decent living. While I would love to believe that companies pay high salaries solely based on expert level Cisco knowledge that is only one part of the salary equation when it comes to CCIE pay. [Cisco's Channel Partner Program rewards companies by branding them as Select, Premier, Silver, or Gold partners.](#) I won't pretend to know much about the details of this program, but there is a stipulation by Cisco that each partner maintain a certain number of Cisco certified employees in certain technologies. For instance [a Gold partner requires:](#) 12 unique certified individuals and all four of the following Advanced Specializations: Routing & Switching Security Unified Communications - Wireless LAN I think that this number fluctuates based on variables such as specialization and total sales, but I'm not sure. I have also heard that Gold partners (and possibly the other levels as well) need to maintain a certain number of CCIEs on staff in order to maintain their partner status. [Cisco has a web page that shows the benefits of hiring a CCIE,](#) one of those benefits is: *Preferred status is given to Cisco partners who employ CCIEs (find out more at Cisco Channel Programs).* On the same page Cisco also warns that losing a CCIE may affect partner status: *The benefits of Gold or Silver Channel Partner status are only available to companies who maintain the required number of certified staff.* So why does this mean more money for CCIEs? One of the benefits that a company receives for becoming a channel partner is a discount on Cisco equipment (I've heard that it's a pretty hefty discount). That means that a partner can save substantial costs on equipment. In turn they can put in lower bids on contracts. If a company can save hundreds of thousands of dollars on equipment and bring in more business by hiring a CCIE, then they certainly can afford to pay that CCIE very well. The fact that a CCIE will be able to give expert level support to their customers may be an afterthought.

??? Accomplishment/Challenge The CCIE is the most difficult Cisco certification (with the possible exception of the new CCDE program) and becoming a CCIE makes you a member of a pretty exclusive group of network professionals. For many candidates getting their digits is tangible display of their networking abilities. It looks awesome on a resume and effectively ends any networking bragfest: "I've been working in networking since routers came with dip switches and I was the guy that the ARPAnet engineers called when they..." "That's adorable. I'm CCIE #12345." "Drat. I have been bested." "Yes you have, lesser engineer." Okay, that's the way it goes down in my head at least. Becoming a CCIE gives one an air of authority (for better or worse). Does becoming a CCIE automatically make you the best engineer on your team? No. But at the very least it shows a dedication and technical prowess that few engineers can claim.

?3? Job Advancement/Job Opportunities This category ties together both of the previous categories. In some situations you may be happy with your salary and employer, but you want to move up the networking ladder. Or you may be looking for a new position outside of the company. Either way, having a CCIE will definitely set you apart from the crowd. It will also give you an advantage in the job market if you lose your current job (a very real possibility in the US at this time). Another benefit is that you're more likely to be tasked with playing with the latest and greatest technology if you're a CCIE. Your boss more likely to give that new CRS-1 or Nexus 7000 to a CCIE to play with....err, "test".

?4? Maintaining An Expert-Level Skillset This one is not mentioned often and can also be looked at as a disadvantage of being a CCIE. Once you become a CCIE, there is an (unreasonable or not) [expectation that you have an expert level knowledge of networking.](#) When there's a difficult issue or just whenever some smart-ass wants to test your knowledge; you will be expected to answer these questions - especially if you're being paid handsomely. You're going to want to remember all of those default timers, subnetting skills, LSA types, BGP commands, etc. that you worked hard to learn for the CCIE exam and lab. Instead of reviewing them before an exam or an interview, you'll want to have them committed to memory so that you don't become the CCIE that everyone whispers about ("He's a CCIE and he doesn't even know [insert technology here]"). Sure there are going to be cases where you'll tell your inquisitors that you'll need to research it and get back to them, but you'll probably want to be quick with an accurate answer to most questions. There are a multitude of lesser reasons for getting the CCIE such as Cisco Perks like better TAC service and Networker's parties, but the ones that I have listed are the ones that I've heard most candidates use

when asked why they are pursuing the CCIE. In my personal case, I started down the CCIE path mostly as a challenge. I wanted to see if I had what it takes to become a CCIE. While job advancement and salary were not at the top of my list, I would be lying if I said that they weren't in the mix. I love working in IT because it's one of those fields where more knowledge generally results in more opportunities and/or better pay. So we've seen what the CCIE entails as well as some of the benefits.