Raising the bar

Launched at the end of 2014, the Certified Network Cable Installer (CNCI) certification aims to raise standards amongst those responsible for designing, specifying and installing network infrastructures. Inside_Networks has assembled a panel of industry experts to assess whether the CNCI has got what it takes to make a difference

The important role of the IT network infrastructure is beyond dispute and its designation as the 'fourth utility' is well deserved. Therefore, it has long been a source of concern that those responsible for specifying and installing the cabling that forms the basis of the network infrastructure are able to do so without any formal training, qualifications or certification.

This is not a new concern either – the same discussion has been part and parcel of the industry for some years and despite the attempts of some industry bodies to do something about it, nothing has achieved mass acceptance. In fact, educational requirements, competency levels and regulation within the network infrastructure and data centre industries, particularly at the operational level, have remained conspicuously low on the agenda.

The CNCI programme hopes to change all that. Launched by CNet Training, it is hoped that it will 'shape the future of the industry' and provide high standards of learning and working practices required by today's network cabling professionals and, just as importantly, their customers. Blending a mix of theoretical study and practical exercises, the CNCI certifies an individual's ability to work to the correct cabling standards and follow the recommended codes of practice.

The CNCI has already been warmly welcomed by some of the industry's 'big hitters' including major installation companies, manufacturers, end users, construction companies and consultants.

So can the CNCI succeed where others have failed and what makes it so different from what's been tried before? Inside_Networks has assembled a panel of experts to discuss whether the CNCI can make a difference and raise the bar in improving levels of competency.

If you have a question that you would like answered in Inside_Networks, **CLICK HERE** and we'll do our best to feature it.

WHAT IMPACT WILL THE CNCI PROGRAMME HAVE ON IMPROVING LEVELS OF COMPETENCY AND RAISING STANDARDS AMONGST THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR INSTALLING NETWORK INFRASTRUCTURES? DOES THE CNCI MEET THE NEED FOR A CERTIFICATION SCHEME THAT ENHANCES KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND EXPERTISE IN THIS INDUSTRY?

LORD BAKER

TRUSTEE AT THE CAREER COLLEGES TRUST

"There is no doubt that regulation is needed within the network infrastructure industry, and it is encouraging to see a skills provider taking the lead on this.

The CNCI certification will raise standards within the industry. It will increase the level of skill within the existing workforce, as well as providing assurance to clients that work is being completed to an approved, and consistently high, standard.

However, we must also consider the longer-term goal. Creating a sustainable and skilled workforce is crucial to industry as a whole. We need to ensure that young people are not only aware of the opportunities within each sector, but that high quality training is available to them from the age of 14.

Network infrastructure is an industry that is not yet understood or indeed, even known about, by many teachers, parents or young people. But the fact remains – it is a rapidly growing area, offering many career opportunities. It is a worrying fact that in 15 years' time, we will be in desperately short supply of technicians, engineers, designers, project managers and installers.

This issue must be addressed and setting up a Career College for 14-19 year olds is a key element of the solution. We are delighted to be working with CNet Training to do just this.

This innovative, employer-led Career College model of education will allow industry to define the curriculum, ensuring that students are taught the practical skills needed to help them become work-ready – alongside traditional academic lessons in key subjects.

Taking on motivated young people at the age of 14 means they can be trained from scratch and get a head start in a specific vocational area. This results in a sustainable and motivated workforce, securing the future of both a company and for the young people themselves.

CNet recognises the important role it needs to play in addressing the skills gap – and I'd urge other businesses to do the same."

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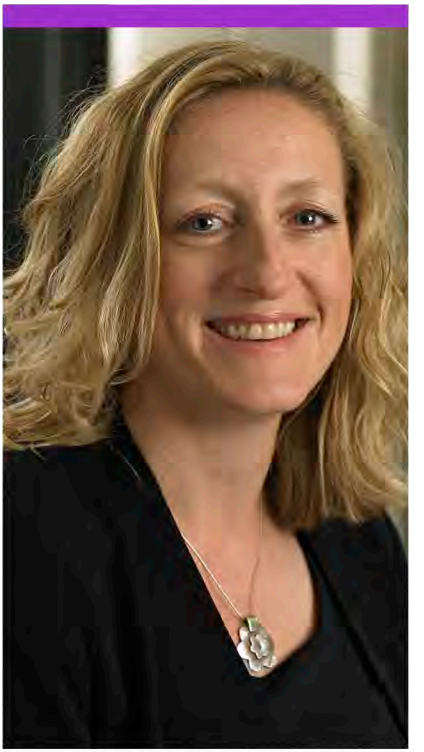
TRACEY CALCUTT

MARKETING MANAGER AT **EXCEL NETWORKING SOLUTIONS**



"Training is vitally important, yet it is something that is often forgotten or pushed aside, particularly when money and time is tight. Over the years there have been a number of different courses available but none that have really offered the depth and knowledge about both copper and fibre required by today's installers. I believe that the CNCI course has been developed from the ground up, with much thought and time taken to make it as relevant as possible.

For any cabling manufacturer, having an installer that hasn't been properly trained can damage brand reputation. As well as being dangerous, ultimately it's the end user customer that loses out and has a bad experience. We offer a 25-year warranty so to be able to do this we have to have trained partners. We feel that installers that have taken the CNCI course are at the right level and therefore don't have to complete our two day course. They can instead take our online course to bring them up to speed on our product range.

Structured cabling is at the heart of any IP network. Expensive equipment will be run on that network, so making sure that it's installed correctly to meet specified standards really is critical. Otherwise, the investment in hardware will be wasted and the business will suffer.

Many surveys over recent years have confirmed that more than 50 per cent of network failures are due to problems with the installed cabling. A well designed, correctly installed, standards compliant structured cabling system, backed by a comprehensive warranty programme is the best way of protecting your investment and allowing for future needs. The CNCI course will help towards this objective and will provide installers with a well respected and worthwhile qualification."

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LEE EIFFERT

HEAD OF PROJECTS AT NG BAILEY IT SERVICES

"The recent recession had a dramatic effect on skills development in the IT industry – for several years training and personal development budgets took a hammering and the number of roles that enabled learning-on-the-job declined sharply. In this context, the CNCI can only be good news.

As the economy returns to some semblance of normality, the government is now starting to back initiatives like the CNCI, which not only aim to upskill both IT specialist services companies and their customers on impactful technologies such as IP-converged security.

'As network infrastructure technologies evolve, the CNCI will help companies provide the best services by future proofing capabilities and ensuring individuals have the right skill-set to implement solutions correctly the first time round.'

Currently, it's a win-win situation – everyone is on the same page.

As network infrastructure technologies evolve, the CNCI will help companies provide the best services by future proofing capabilities and ensuring individuals have the right skill-set to implement solutions correctly the first time round.

What this brings to light is the need to invest in the future, and not just in forward thinking technologies, but in the next generation of individuals who, in 10 years' time, will be carrying the industry.

NG Bailey's IT Services division has a two year development plan to bring school leavers into the business and spends approximately £3m a year on training. Having the CNCI, which has the facilities to replicate real life data centre scenarios and a training programme that guarantees individual progression, is an absolute career selling point.

Not only will it help train our recruits, but it will also enhance competency levels and raise the standards of the individuals already responsible for installing network infrastructures."

JAMIE ALLENDER

HEAD OF PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AT **COMPUTACENTER**

To understand the potential positive impact of the CNCI, I have looked at it from two perspectives – the customer and the individual.

From a customer perspective, without a recognised, industry-wide certification, outside of trust and reputation how can you be confident in the level of both the competency of individuals and the standard of overall physical and network infrastructure installations?

With few professional certifications available to prove competence and credibility – especially at an operational and installer level – this has been difficult to predict.

It continues to amaze me that organisations will layer millions of pounds of IT infrastructure on top of the cabling infrastructure without the assurance of a recognised industry standard for installation. How can those customers be sure that the knowledge, skills and expertise of those installing that underlying cabling infrastructure are appropriate?

At Computacenter we believe the CNCI programme will bring a defined and appropriate level of competence and therefore increased confidence for customers, which in our view is much needed.

And what does the CNCO mean for the individual?

There is no doubt that there are a lot of very experienced and knowledgeable installers and engineers within our industry, but it is also a very fragmented market and it can be difficult to differentiate skills and experience outside of having good references. For those individuals the programme unquestionably offers the opportunity to prove their capability and credibility in a very objective way.

As important a question for me is the question 'How do we attract future generations of physical infrastructure installers?'

In my view we need recognised accreditations to make working in our industry something to aspire to and I therefore welcome a programme that offers personal development opportunities for individuals as part of their overall career development.

I am confident that CNCI will indeed meet the need for a certification scheme that not only enhances knowledge, skills and expertise in this industry, but offer customers a greater confidence and consistency in the service they will receive.

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KEITH SULLIVAN

MARKETING DIRECTOR EMEA AT **CORNING**

"Nations throughout the world rely on their network infrastructures like we rely on electricity and water. Robust, reliable and secure are all core requirements for any cabling infrastructure – these are what customers have a right to expect when using this utility. To guarantee these, we need to demonstrate that the cabling is top quality, and that the people installing it know what they are doing.

This is why the Certified Network Cable Installer (CNCI) certification will provide a very solid foundation for the industry to grow from where we are today – a place where there is no regulated skill force and wildly varying quality of installation.

As a manufacturer, we need to demonstrate the quality our customers expect and this means excelling with our products and also having a network of highly skilled installation partners. While we endeavour to train all our NPI partners, the depth and reach of our training cannot provide a broad enough base and this is where the CNCI certification perfectly complements our manufacturer specific training.

The CNCI will do a much-needed job of raising the standards amongst those responsible for installing network infrastructures. It will improve engineers' knowledge, skills and expertise, and as a result, increase the overall quality of the structured cabling market.

The knock on effect of this is reduced installation time, increased efficiencies and a reduction in costs. I am on board with it, and have already begun to implement the CNCI certification into our essential training requirements, not only for our NPI partners but also for our internal engineers and commercial staff.

Adding to our own training, it provides our customers with the knowledge that they are receiving the best possible installation from a highly trained workforce. Surely this is what all customers should strive for – after all it is they who reap the benefits of a best in class installation of a best in class product."

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