



IT institute strengthens England's workforce, achieves eighty percent employment rate

Zenos, a national work force development provider in the United Kingdom, funded through the government's Learning and Skills Council, strives to improve the employability of England's young adults. To enhance job prospects and meet employer demand for highly-qualified IT workers, Zenos provides Microsoft certification opportunities through its Microsoft® IT Academy membership. According to Zenos, Microsoft certifications have contributed to an 80 percent employment success rate among graduates.

Education needs

The evolution of the technology industry and the emergence of a global economy have enabled many companies to look beyond their locales to find skilled IT workers. In many countries, globalization has meant increased competition from neighboring economies. Such is the case in England. To rise to the challenges of globalization and help students compete successfully in the work force with neighbors across the English Channel, such as France and Germany, the government of the United Kingdom launched the Learning and Skills Council to "make England better skilled and more competitive."

In the field of IT, the organization mandated and funded by the Learning and Skills Council to carry out this mission is Zenos. To help ensure a workforce of world-class standard, Zenos provides comprehensive IT training through programs for people currently employed in the IT industry, as well as those just entering the workforce.

During its early years, Zenos programs were work-based, targeting workers in their early twenties. A requirement of enrollment was full-time employment, with students completing the Zenos program over a period of 14 to 18 months during a series of week-long training sessions.

Then, in September 2006, in an effort to reach a younger age group, Zenos implemented a school-to-work program called Zenos Academy, focused on providing IT training to those aged 16 to 18. George Anderson, Managing Director at Zenos, says, "We wanted to reach younger people who weren't headed towards a university education and didn't have strong job skills for entering the work force. This age group was a very important target for the government." The organization wanted to give young people enrolled in Zenos Academy the skills that would ensure their employment in quality jobs leading to careers in IT.

Solution

Zenos combines education in core information technologies with work force and business skills training, such as problem solving, communication, resumé creation, and interview techniques. "Zenos provides IT training as part of a



Customer: Zenos

Web site: www.zenos.com

Number of staff: 140 across 12 sites

Number of students: About 2000 annually

Location: United Kingdom

Industry: Education

Customer profile

Zenos is a government-funded IT training organization. Since 2001, it has worked to improve the skills and employability of young people in the United Kingdom. Based in Aynho in Oxfordshire, Zenos runs 12 academies nationwide

Software and services

Microsoft IT Academy Program

larger, rounded package of business skills training. This helps our young apprentices succeed once they enter the industry," says Anderson.

Through its mandate from the Learning and Skills Council, Zenos is required to provide specific training in topics including health and safety and equal opportunity employment, as well as government-approved technical coursework. In addition to these requirements, Zenos offers Microsoft training and certifications through membership in the Microsoft IT Academy Program, a comprehensive IT learning solution through which member institutions gain access to Microsoft training and software licenses, and discounts on courseware and certification exams.

Until recently, the government did not provide funding for courseware and certification through the Microsoft IT Academy Program, but Zenos provided it anyway. "Training in Microsoft technologies greatly increases the possibility of employment," says Anderson. While Zenos offers Microsoft training as an integral element of all of its programs, it has found that Microsoft certification is especially important for young Zenos Academy students. Anderson says, "Through Zenos, 17- and 18-year-olds are becoming Microsoft Certified Desktop Support Technicians. That's a huge accomplishment for a person of that age in this country, and employers take notice." Upon completing the Zenos Academy program, Zenos helps graduates find quality jobs through its connections with regional employers.

Benefits

Through the Microsoft IT Academy Program, Zenos provides its students with training opportunities that improve their skills and employability. Anderson is convinced that certifica-

tion not only boosts chances for employment and consequently helps to strengthen England's work-force, it also means that students are more likely to find high-quality, career-path jobs.

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— George Anderson,
Managing Director, Zenos

Affordable IT training and certifications

Zenos offered Microsoft training as part of its curriculum even though it wasn't receiving government funding for it. "The Microsoft IT Academy Program made materials, support, and resources affordable," says Anderson. "This enabled us to include Microsoft training and certification, which is highly sought after by employers." The Microsoft IT Academy Program provides comprehensive coursework and special savings for academic institutions, helping to prepare students for the workplace and to advance the careers of those who are already employed.

Eighty percent employment rate

Upon graduating from Zenos Academy, 80 percent of students find employment in high-quality jobs that align with the IT skills they have gained. "Microsoft certification opens the door to employment," says Anderson. "It gives us a way to prove that our students know the skills that the job requires. It takes the risk factor away from the employer."

Stronger work force to boost economies

Each year, Zenos produces 1,000 graduates with IT industry qualifications. "These are people who would have never gone into the industry," says Anderson. Zenos is about to implement a new program called "Train to GainPLUS," a scaled-down version of its work-based learning programs but without age limitations, that is expected to produce at least 1,000 additional graduates each year. Anderson says, "We chose to include Microsoft training in this program because those are the skills that employers want."

Zenos also runs a program in the Black Country, an area of the English West Midlands that suffers from high unemployment as a result of a loss of the heavy industry that once dominated the area. "By offering young people in the Black Country specific training—including Microsoft training—we hope to broaden their opportunities as well as attract new industry to the region."

Better-qualified, higher-paid workers

Anderson says that some Zenos graduates earn 30 to 40 percent more in first jobs than other people their age. Zenos students receive a Level 3 National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) upon graduation, a work-related, competence-based qualification, alongside their IT qualifications. Anderson largely attributes the success of Zenos students to the well-rounded training they receive as a result of this combination. "The broader skills they receive through the NVQ, such as record keeping, customer care, principles of maintenance, and so on, complement the technology education they get through the Microsoft IT Academy Program. Put these together, and you have a well-rounded, highly qualified, highly employable individual."