Fostering network quality for India's broadband industry

by Chris Swires, Treasurer, SCTE (Society for Broadband Professionals) and Chairman, Broadband Training Ltd

Rapidly developing networks in India cannot be successfully managed and sustained without professionally trained staff to build and operate the reliable broadband networks that a modern economy demands.

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Chris has lectured regularly on Cable Television subjects and is the author of many technical papers. He is a member of the IBC Technical Papers Selection Committee.

He is the treasurer of the UK SCTE and a director of SCTE Ltd, one of the IBC partners. Two years ago, Chris became Chairman of the newly formed "Broadband Training Ltd", the company which supplies SCTE training manuals and trainers.

With 1.2 billion people and the world's fourth-largest economy, India's growth and development has been a significant achievement. With an estimated GDP of 5.6% India will soon have the largest, and youngest, work force that the world has ever seen.

At the same time, the country is in the midst of the largest rural-urban migration of this century, as some ten million people move to towns and cities in search of jobs and opportunities each year. Massive investment will be needed to create the jobs, housing and infrastructure required to meet soaring aspirations and make towns and cities more habitable and environmentally friendly. The fastest-growing part of the economy has been its services sector - which includes construction, telecoms, software and information technologies. India also has one of the world's largest television markets and is currently undergoing its national digital switchover programme, which will generate more opportunities in the broadband and telecoms sectors for operators, manufacturers and technicians. As a result, cable and broadband networks benefit from greater network investment and an increase in revenues.

As infrastructure and digital switchover programmes progress, SCTE India (Society for Broadband Professionals), a non-profit Learned Society whose sister organisation, the SCTE, was first established in the United Kingdom in 1945, drives the professional development, training and accreditation of India's wireline engineers and technicians, while providing a networking platform and knowledge base to support its members.

SCTE India is based in New Delhi and is led by nine founding members from the Indian telecoms industry. Like the SCTE, SCTE India is a Learned Society designed to promote expertise, the exchange of information and experience, and the training and accreditation of its members. SCTE India has access to the accredited training programmes of the UK SCTE, which allows engineers who successfully pass the exams to receive full SCTE accreditation.

Benefits of training for operators

Rapidly developing networks in India cannot be successfully managed and sustained without professionally trained staff to build and operate the reliable broadband networks that a modern economy demands.

Network operators can sometimes view training as an additional and unnecessary expense that they can do without. However, the cost of good training programmes is very quickly recovered by the resulting improvements in network performance and reliability by efficient and competent staff who have been trained in best practice procedures for all contingencies.

Training saves network operators significant costs as trained engineers maintain their networks, dramatically reducing the need for added truck rolls and/or customer visits. Operators also benefit from improved networks as trained engineers will be fully conversant with the latest technologies and how networks can be best adapted and designed to incorporate these developments.

An added benefit to the operator of employing highly trained engineering staff to manage a modern and adaptable network is the increase in value to its end-user. An operator's customer is more likely to purchase additional services, or recommend its services to others, as a result. An operator who invests in specialist professional training is best placed to generate increased customer loyalty and enhanced revenue potential.

In addition, trained and accredited engineers can be used to market and illustrate the quality of an operator's network, compared to its competitors. Accreditation is a recognised route to quality in the eyes of the customer and the industry. Improved performance of a network demonstrates the operator's commitment to providing a quality service to both its customers and potential investors.

Benefits for end-users/customers

Better networks mean better business, faster communications, greater bandwidth, more stable connections and, ultimately, more satisfied customers. Customers will enjoy better Quality of Experience (QoE) and a higher Quality of Service (QoS) if it is provided by properly trained network engineers.

Customers are also less likely to become frustrated by network problems, interruptions or issues in a properly managed and maintained network. As we all know, truck rolls and countless customer service calls are expensive, time-consuming and frustrating. Levels of customer satisfaction rise when the numbers of network issues they experience are minimised and, if a service visit is necessary, a competent response by a well-trained and efficient engineer will help maintain customer confidence in the service provider.

The importance of customer satisfaction cannot be over emphasised and can only be achieved by a well-managed company with competent staff. A better quality of experience for the customer will result from reduced (near zero) downtime on the network. Multiple home visits and calls to the operator's service centre, due to network faults, can only cause customer frustration and dissatisfaction.

Benefits for broadband engineers

Good training of engineering staff in a cable or broadband company encourages loyalty and pride in its engineering departments. Upon the successful completion of one of SCTE India's high quality professional training programmes, an accredited cable engineer can look forward to much improved career prospects, as well as an increased standing in the community.

Accreditation and training also enhances knowledge and skills, enabling the engineer to cope with the majority of issues that may arise on the network. Training provides the engineer with a better understanding of products and systems, enabling him or her to adopt a logical approach to problem resolution. It also gives engineers the confidence to apply these skills to other issues and think 'outside the box'.

Training also engenders a sense of loyalty in the engineer to the idea of quality in the network, a principle that will remain uppermost in his or her mind when dealing with issues that may arise. Training encourages forward thinking, anticipation and preventative maintenance which can, ultimately, reduce an engineer's day to day workload and 'troubleshooting' duties.

Preparing for the future

Since the introduction of SCTE training courses in the mid-1990s, over 7000 candidates have successfully passed SCTE training examinations and have been awarded professional certification. SCTE India will be overseeing the management of accredited SCTE training courses in India, run by experienced franchise training partners. Broadband Training Ltd was set up in 2012 to update and market courses and organise training using SCTE accredited materials.

After passing secure on-line exams, the trainee receives an accredited certificate from the SCTE. All successful candidates are registered by the SCTE and can be fully verified by any potential employers. ●