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## Interview With LPI's Jim Lacey

May 5th, 2008 by James Gray in [Industry News](#)

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*Linux Journal* Products Editor, James Gray, spoke with Jim Lacey, Linux Professional Institute's President and CEO, about Linux certification today and its outlook for the future.



**Linux Journal:** Thanks for agreeing to speak with us, Jim Lacey. Let me start things off by noting that, next year, the Linux Professional Institute (LPI) will mark its 10th anniversary as a certification organization. What changes have you noted in the world of Linux certification since 1999?

**LPI's Jim Lacey:** In the mid-1990s there was an attitude within some business circles that Linux as an operating system was something used by hobbyists or IT enthusiasts but was not really practical for the business environment. LPI was founded to counteract this attitude and to demonstrate the growing professionalism of Linux and Open Source users. Since that time, we've seen not only wide spread acceptance of Linux but also a growing demand for the Linux professional. LPI, as a vendor-independent certification, was very much part of this early effort to see Linux and Open Source accepted and adopted.

Since 1999 we've also witnessed a number of vendor-specific Linux certifications come into the market. We welcome these players as there will always be a need for vendor-driven certifications within the industry. However, there appears to be a growing appreciation of vendor-independent Linux certification and, increasingly for us, an adoption of our program as a foundation or a prerequisite for other vendor certification programs.

**LJ:** You have been President and CEO since November 2005: what would you say were some of the significant milestones the organization has achieved since then?

**Jim Lacey:** I've been a member of the Board of Directors of LPI since 2001

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so I was pleased to take on the challenge of directing LPI's future in November of 2005. At that time we announced that we had delivered 100,000 exams worldwide. We are now at 180,000 exams and over 56,000 certifications awarded around the world. These milestones demonstrate the credibility and industry acceptance of our program. The total numbers themselves have been driven by a tremendous growth in our network of support: we've doubled the number of our affiliates in the last few years and more than doubled the number of our training partners. We currently have hundreds of training partners in many countries around the world with multiple training locations to service the growing need for this level of education and skill.

Another important milestone has been the launch of our enterprise-level LPIC-3 program last year. This initiative was in direct response to industry needs. We heard frequently from enterprise customers and other Fortune 100 IT companies that this senior level Linux certification was important to the industry. We responded by developing an LPIC-3 "core" certification with a plan to develop electives to round out the vertical nature of the expertise at this level. We have already produced and launched the first elective "Mixed Environment" alongside the core exam and are in the process of developing our second elective targeted at security issues.

**LJ:** As you mentioned above, last year LPI announced the LPIC-3 certification program designed for the enterprise-level Linux professional. Recently, you also announced a refresh of LPIC-1 (junior-level) and LPIC-2 (advanced level) Linux professional programs. Can you first describe these three programs a bit more, as well as tell us what you expect to see as your future initiatives in certification?

**Jim Lacey:** LPIC-1 is our junior-level or entry-level certification program for the Linux professional. Increasingly, it is seen as the world's entry-level standard for Linux professionals and is being rapidly adopted by a number of vendor-specific professional certifications. Our programs target the Linux Professional which incorporates a wide distribution of job roles and skills. We believe that developers, consultants, system and network administrators, help desk, sales representatives and power users all benefit from our program. LPIC-1 is for IT professionals who are comfortable working at the command line and have the skill set to perform regular maintenance tasks and configure a workstation. LPIC-2 is for more advanced professionals who would be responsible for setting up and servicing networks and servers. Finally, LPIC-3 is for the enterprise level or senior IT professional who has responsibility for large complicated systems and networks. We also have an elective for the LPIC-3 certification around "Mixed Environment" which tests for skills in servicing multiple operating systems within an enterprise level work environment. As stated before we are now in the process of developing a "Security" elective for the LPIC-3 program.

Through our Strategic Advisory Council and other industry consultations with multi-national corporations we've been looking at a number of exam electives for the LPIC-3 program. These discussions have included proposed electives for "High Availability" and/or Virtualization, Web servers and Intranets, and enterprise-level Mail programs.

However, we've also been re-examining our LPIC-1 and LPIC-2 programs. The skills required for IT professionals at these stages of professional development have changed since we first introduced our programs and as a result we are refreshing these programs to keep them relevant with today's workforce needs. I believe this thorough attention to detail, coupled with a careful matching to real world in-demand skills allows us to build substantive dialog with global companies. For instance, HP recently announced with us that it was accepting LPIC-2 as a prerequisite for one of their professional industry-server programs. I would note that LPIC-1 is also an accepted prerequisite for the Oracle Linux certification program. We expect to be announcing other similar industry adoption of our core program this coming quarter.

This kind of cooperative work with industry is integral to LPI. For example, we helped bring to market and deliver the The Ubuntu Certified Professional program. The Ubuntu Certified Professional program has a mandatory prerequisite of our LPIC-1 certification. We will always work with vendors on developing truly professional certification programs for Linux.

**LJ:** Could you comment on Linux certification for the desktop?

Currently LPI is focused on updating our existing certifications and concluding our commitment to develop the LPIC-3 series. Nevertheless, we continue to invite input on a desktop program through such avenues as our Strategic Advisory Council and Technical Advisory Council. We at LPI have always concerned ourselves with fundamentals. This is why our LPIC-1 is recognized by so many vendors. Our focus on technology fundamentals also enables us to develop enterprise programs like LPIC-3. Nevertheless, it is notable that those distributions that are popular on the desktop also recognize the importance of our LPIC-1 as a basic prerequisite of professional certification

**LJ:** What other changes do you see happening in the future of LPI? Linux certification? IT certification in general? The world of Linux and Open Source?

**Jim Lacey:** The Linux Professional Institute has always been and will continue to be a catalyst for growth and adoption of Linux Professionalism on a global scale. To that end, we work with the industry to create technologically sound measurement programs that ultimately assist in the growth of Linux professionals and the adoption of Linux within business, government and educational institutions. The future of LPI continues to be rooted in these areas, where companies and individuals alike can rally around our vendor-independent nature and grow with us as an organization.

Since the early 1990's, alongside many others that have been part of this industry, I have witnessed tremendous value shifts in certification. For some time, especially in North America, the certification market was impacted through inflated expectations and issues surrounding relevance, credibility and value. In addition, vendor-independent programs (such as ours) began to take hold in this environment to address the concern that the focus of technology-related vendor programs was on the software product, not the job task or skill needed to perform that task. I was recently asked to join the ITCC (Information Technology Certification Council) to address this issue with many of those that share the same concerns.

In terms of Linux certification specifically, we are working everyday with the ever-expanding Linux Community to ensure we produce a program that is globally produced, valued and respected. My position is to welcome all those that are interested in the technology. At LPI, you can derive value from our program regardless of which distribution you favor. Our strategy is to lay a valuable foundation for the industry to build from our program. Many companies such as Oracle, HP, IBM, Ubuntu and others have agreed to involve LPI as an accepted part of their program due to the vendor-independent nature and philosophy of LPI certification.

The world of Linux and Open Source is of course quite dynamic. I recently returned from the Linux Foundation Summit meeting where there was a great deal of discussion around a number of topics including new "form-factor" mobile devices, the computing cloud, new innovative companies, Linux on the desktop, and of course the promotion of the professional within Linux and, finally, the constant drive to strengthen the ever-growing Linux ecosystem.

**LJ:** I noticed that LPI is a member of the industry group Information Technology Certification Council. Why was this organization formed, who belongs to it and what is its role?

**Jim Lacey:** I alluded to this group above and would be happy to provide additional detail. Part of the value of any certification is its credibility with its peers in the industry. LPI was specifically invited to join the Information Technology Certification Council (ITCC) due to the reach of our program and our insight into the world of Linux and Open Source certification. This council is made up of such leading IT corporations as HP, IBM, Microsoft, Novell and Sun; test development and delivery vendors Pearson Vue and Prometric; education providers, like Kaplan, and other vendor-independent certification organizations like the Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA).

The council was formed to provide a collaborative effort to promote IT certification for new growth and ensure a skilled and qualified workforce to support the IT industry. The organization will also examine other issues facing the IT certification industry, including exam security, certification ROI, and training-to-testing ratios. Again, part of this is to confront some of the challenges I outlined earlier and to restore broader consumer and industry confidence in IT certification.

**LJ:** What other kinds of services do you see LPI bringing to the Linux professional and to your certification holders.

**Jim Lacey:** We are entering an exciting and innovative phase in LPI's organizational development. As I stated before, we have been part of the greater community success around the adoption of Linux and Open Source. With the help of our affiliate organizations, training partners and the industry, we have managed to build a highly respected and celebrated Linux certification program for IT professionals. To date, we have given more than 180,000 exams around the globe and have built a vitally important alumni of Linux Professionals.

Our next step is to consistently develop programs that expand Linux adoption and deliver added value to those who hold our certification. For example, you will see additional LPI electives as part of our Level 3 program. Security is the latest exam we are working on with a scheduled release at the end of February 2009. In addition, there are other member-related programs we are investigating. This will involve additional efforts on member, alumni, partner and industry consultation. We've always

maintained a distinct level of transparency as we engage with our supporters to determine valuable offerings We will be reaching out to our candidates in the near future to determine what programs we should develop for the LPI of the future. We invite everyone to become part of that process.

**LJ:** Thanks for your time and for your interesting perspectives on Linux certification. Good luck to you and everyone at LPI!

**Jim Lacey:** Thank you, it has been my pleasure.

**Jim Lacey** is former President and CEO of Bradford Learning Incorporated—one of the first organizations to provide LPI Approved Training Materials. Jim's past positions include: General Manager of Linuxcare University (Linuxcare Corporation), Director of Operations for the Technology Training division of CompUSA, Regional Training Director for the Ohio Valley for CompUSA and Territory Sales Manager with Serono Diagnostics. Jim graduated with a B.S. degree in Civil Engineering from the UnitedStates Military Academy, West Point, N.Y.

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