

Don't be fooled by suspicious test preparation Web sites (Sep 08)

Microsoft lawsuit alleges test-prep site illegally distributed exam answers

Jon Brodtkin , Network World , 09/03/2008

Just a few weeks after Microsoft unveiled stiff new penalties for certification exam cheaters, the company won a court victory against one Web site Microsoft claims is a braindump.

Pass4Sure.com, according to Microsoft, was illegally selling exam answers, helping certification-seeking IT pros cheat their way to a passing score. A preliminary injunction issued by a federal court in Connecticut ordered the site to stop publishing Microsoft test materials.

But Pass4Sure, as of this writing, was still advertising test preparation materials for Cisco, Oracle, IBM, HP and Nortel exams. The Pass4Sure controversy raises at least one interesting issue for test-takers, who may think that buying exams from Pass4Sure is a risk-free enterprise.

Pass4Sure promises "high quality IT exam practice questions and answers" on its Web site. "Especially, Cisco CCNA CCDA CCNP CCIE, Checkpoint CCSE, CompTIA A+ Network+ certification practice exams and so on. We promise that you can pass any IT exam at the first try using Pass4sure Testing Engine, or else give you a FULL REFUND."

Microsoft considers buying exam answers from Pass4Sure to be a form of cheating and will punish violators harshly, even if they claim they didn't know they were breaking any rules. A few weeks ago, Microsoft announced lifetime bans for all certification exam cheating offenses.

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"If you commit fraud, break the NDA, break any of our policies, it's going to result in a lifetime ban from the Microsoft certification program," Peggy Crowley, the anti-piracy program manager for the Microsoft Learning department, recently said. "We used to have a year-long ban for some things and a lifetime ban for other things, and then we decided that cheating is cheating across the board, and why delineate between the two? So we decided to do a lifetime ban for all forms of cheating."

Any Web site that guarantees you will pass the exam is likely a braindump, Crowley warned. Pass4Sure certainly made such a guarantee. But some Microsoft test-takers seem to have been oblivious to this red flag.

Pass4Sure is mentioned numerous times in public forums hosted by Microsoft. In the forums, test-takers have advised others that Pass4Sure products are "useful as a last test before the exam," while others credited Pass4Sure with helping them gain a certification.

On July 31, a poster named Sean wrote "hey guys i pass my first MCDST exam yesterday, 70-271. Got 950 it was kinda easy, thanks to pass4sure."

It occurred to me that employees at braindump Web sites might post on these community forums, pretending to be test-takers, as a sort of sneaky way to advertise their products. But if we assume these comments are posted by actual test-takers, it would seem they are buying test answers from a Web site that Microsoft has accused of illegal distribution of exam materials, and are thus risking lifetime bans from the Microsoft certification program. It would also seem they aren't aware that they are doing anything wrong.

“Even inadvertent cheaters -- those who didn't know they used illegal preparatory materials -- can be caught, but they are not distinguished from people who cheat intentionally,” fellow Network World writer Linda Musthaler noted recently in an article titled "Exam preparation can put your career at risk".

Test-takers should probably keep a healthy sense of skepticism in order to protect themselves. If a test preparation product looks suspicious, there's probably a good reason for it. And before taking any exam, familiarize yourself with all the rules and regulations.

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