What should the punishment be for cheating by a “Test-Center”?

Submitted by Randy Muller on Thu, 07/24/2008 - 2:25pm.

In my last few blogs I have talked about the different punishment standards recently introduced by Microsoft for individuals and test-centers. A test-center (CPLS) only faces a suspension, where as the individual faced a life-time ban. I think we need to further address the punishment for cheating by CPLSs – uh “test-centers”

If you are remotely curious as to how prevalent cheating is in the IT field – just do a search on the Internet for “braindumps” and you will be surprised at the results. There are dozens – literally dozens of places that will be more than glad to sell you a “study guide” for a test. These study guides are the tests that we all have to pass. The study guides have the test questions and answers. All you have to do is memorize the answers and go take your test and trust that the answers they have presented are the correct ones.

What is more amazing is that there are places that will actually take the test for you – just give them your details and voila! You are now certified (and most likely a “victim” of ID theft as a result – but no sympathy on my part – this is one of those times where justice is served!).

Now let us look at the test-center. Yes, must of these are CPLSs and Microsoft partners. But my question is, where are the braindump sites getting their test questions and how are they able to do this? I find it hard to believe that there are that many people with photographic or near photographic memory taking tests just to turn around and sell the test questions and answers (not to mention how the diagrams and illustration are EXACTLY the ones seen on the tests. Now this is just my opinion, but I believe there must be some collusion between one or more unethical test-centers and the brain dump sites. There almost has to be some collusion occurring to account for the sheer number of tests, test answers and the fact that tests seem to appear on the dump site with amazing rapidity for new releases.

Now what should the punishment be for a test center? I think at the very least the test-center (CPLS) should immediately lose their partnership with Microsoft and all access to software, download capabilities, etc. They should also face a three year ban and seek reinstatement. Any individuals at the company who are involved with this cheating scheme (owners, managers, test administrators etc) should also face a three year ban and have to seek reinstatement. Since both the individuals AND the CPLS face the same ban – we adhere to the “cheating is cheating across the board and should be treated the same” – at least that is what one person at Microsoft has espoused as official policy (see my last blog on this statement). Just want to keep an honest field is all...

Now here is a thought – why not post the names of the individuals and CPLSs that have been caught cheating? There might be some merit to have an IT version of the public stockade where people could come by and through virtual rotten tomatoes at offenders...here is one at ya buddy....learn the material AND then test!
The problem
Submitted by Robert Williams on Thu, 07/24/2008 - 11:34am.

To answer your initial question, Randy, I think it would be beneficial to know the exact offense. I mean, was the proctor acting independently and accessing the unauthorized information or was the owner of the test center involved in obtaining the information? You wouldn't give a thief the same penalty as a murderer. Either way, at a minimum, IF it is suspected that the exams were leaked through any one specific test center, that center should be immediately shut down for further investigation. I know Microsoft does (or did) this because I've helped them do it.

From there, it should be proven that the test center (not an individual working for the test center) is the source of the leak. If so, the test center and all of it's equipment should be turned over to the certification vendor (in the case of a CPLS) or a group such as the ATP who can use that facility to provide quality training without the worry of further leaks.

If it is merely an employee of the test center that is the cause of the leak, then that offense should be punishable by the standards of the local laws. (Do they still lose a hand for stealing in the middle-east?)

Here is the problem that most, if not all, of the certification vendors have run into: The fact that the test centers which appear to be the source of the leaks are in countries such as India, Pakistan, and China. Controlling the test centers in those countries is not only difficult, it seems nearly impossible. One thing I remember hearing a couple years ago was that Prometric never wanted to get into using their test centers for InfoTech, but they did it anyways because they knew that's where the money was gonna be. Well, in order to keep up with VUE, they needed to "open, open, open" and that's what they did. Many of the test centers they opened in the countries mentioned above were done with very little, if any, credentials. All you needed was two computers and an internet connection and you could open a test center, and that's what many people took advantage of. In the past couple years most of the "broom-closet" test centers have been shut down, but those that made it big are still in operation and it's going to be difficult to shut them down, let alone find out which centers they are. This is where I was leading to in a blog on the solution to the braindump problem. Permutations. To find out which test centers are leaking the exams, calulate which exams are going to which test centers, then when the braindumps are released the vendors would be able to tell (without a shadow of a doubt) which centers they came from.

Identifing and taking action against testing centers
Submitted by Liz Burns (not verified) on Fri, 07/25/2008 - 11:40am.

Randy and Roger,

At EMC we are committed to protecting the integrity of our exams, to the benefit of those individuals who work hard to get EMC Proven Professional certified. Therefore, we are very
active in identifying testing centers who are involved in the theft of our exams. Over a year ago we implemented a process that allows us to identify when, where and by whom our exam files are stolen. We do a monthly analysis and immediately restrict delivery of our exams from any testing center suspected of being the source of exam theft. We pursue each event to the fullest extent possible, often discovering new ways that the owners of the dumpsites have come up with to steal exams. Once discovered, processes can be put in place to prevent future theft. In addition, anything we learn is shared with other test vendors in our industry so that all are aware of how this theft is happening.

Sometimes we find the testing center is directly involved, sometimes we find they simply had lax security practices. It does not matter which to EMC. Any testing center involved in the theft of our exams is banned from ever again delivering our exams. Of course, we cannot close a testing center to all testing as their contract is with one of the testing companies – EMC does not own or partner with testing centers.

My experience over the last year shows that the problem of signing up questionable testing centers in an effort to quickly expand the testing channel is still a significant problem in this industry. There is little to no quality control in the mad rush to have testing centers around every corner. To avoid this problem, protect the integrity of our program and mitigate our exposure, EMC has purposely restricted delivery of our exams in what we consider high risk countries. This has slowed down, but not eliminated, the problem of exam theft for us.

Liz Burns
Principal Program Manager
EMC Proven Professional Program