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The engineers strike back

7/31/2002 5:00:00 PM - update Microsoft may have cleared the way to keep the MCSE designation intact, but now the Canadian Association of Professional Engineers are talking enforcement

by Geoffrey Downey

MCSEs who choose to keep using the term engineer could find themselves in court, according to at least one provincial engineering organization.

Microsoft Corp. issued a press release last Thursday stating Microsoft certified systems engineers (MCSEs) should continue to use the word engineer after a year-long discussion with industry groups and experts in the field.

The Canadian Council of Professional Engineers (CCPE), which opposes the use of the word in the MSCE designation, responded Wednesday, stating that various provincial and territorial licensing bodies are required by law to enforce the legislation.

"It creates a situation that nobody wants. This is not a pleasant situation for the engineering profession at all," said Marie Lemay, CCPE CEO. "The reason for it is all protection of the public. So that when somebody says they're an engineer then people know that it's somebody who has adequate training -- university level -- the ethics and the experience."

Spokespeople for Microsoft Canada Ltd. in Mississauga, Ont. did not return phone calls at press time.

Lemay says the decision came as a surprise, given it had been working with Microsoft on an amicable solution. "They seemed to understand what the problem was. What's happened since then I'm not too sure."

Microsoft certified training centres are pleased with the decision. Elaine Chong, training coordinator at Northwest Digital in Burnaby, BC, says Canadians would be put at a disadvantage if they weren't allowed to use the term.

"I think part of the reason they do sign up is because it is really transferable to other countries," Chong says. "A lot of people who come to our school are planning on working in the States and the rest of the world, so there might be some confusion."

"It would be a negative impact, for sure," says Doug Thompson, president of Calgary-based New Era Technology. "The people who have certification as an MCSE would no longer have any meaning in Canada, where in the rest of the world it would."

Regional manager, pacific region for Polar Bear Corporate Education Solutions Gary Jones says it is unlikely losing the term engineer would hurt the business, but he sides with Microsoft. "I think it holds a lot more weight to be an MCSE if it is an engineer, because it is a standard for the world and not just Canada. Engineer holds more weight," Jones says.

It may also hold a stiff fine. Al Schuld, deputy registrar for the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta (APEGGA), says "we would be in contempt of our own legislation if we did not enforce improper use of title." For the most part, enforcement constitutes sending a letter to an offending party asking him or her to cease and desist, but the APEGGA will and has sought court injunctions.

Alberta isn't the only provincial association keen to protect its good name. A Maple, Ont. resident was fined \$56,250 in April for misrepresenting himself as a professional engineer after a complaint by the Professional Engineers Ontario.

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