An MCSE by any other name

7/25/2002 5:00:00 PM - Microsoft concludes a year-long investigation into the legal and ethical use of the term "engineer" in its certification program. Its decision? To maintain the status quo

by Geoffrey Downey

Microsoft Canada Co. has fired the latest salvo in the ongoing war of words over the use of the term engineer. The software maker announced on Thursday that Microsoft certified systems engineers (MCSEs) will continue to be known as such. Patricia Meta, training and certification manager for Microsoft Canada, says the company spent a year asking MCSEs, its training centres and partners about the term engineer and whether it should continue to use it.

"The feedback we received was overwhelmingly in favour of us keeping the title," Meta says. "We did consider the issues raised by the Canadian Council for Professional Engineers (CCPE) and the engineering associations, and from the collection of that research and speaking to our communities we've come to the position that the term systems engineer is actually a well-recognized title that's been used for many years."

The Canadian Information Processing Society and the CCPE have been locking horns over the use of the term for almost three years. The CCPE, however, declined to comment on the Microsoft announcement Thursday.

Microsoft's attachment to the term may be more financial than functional. Meta says the title MCSE has been in use worldwide for almost 10 years and any change would mean a rebranding.

Meta dismissed the idea the designation could dupe the public into believing MCSEs are professional engineers. She said MCSEs are only allowed to use the full title or acronym and no one in the IT industry mistakes them for professional engineers.

Software developer Edward Bodfish says the sole reason Microsoft won't make the switch is marketing.

"Only certain people with certain qualifications are allowed to use the term engineer and Microsoft is just ignoring that reality. This is a marketing decision on the part of Microsoft," said Bodfish, who added he is not a professional engineer.

"I have also made the decision not to pursue any of the Microsoft designations because I think they are more for Microsoft's marketing efforts than anything else."

Stephen MacLean also disagrees with the decision. The CIO and director of IT for Toronto-based engineering firm Acres International said he isn't opposed to others using the term engineer, but he said they should have completed a properly accredited program.

"I think they're off-base. An engineer implies a certain amount of education and training," MacLean said.

Microsoft says there are over 25,000 Microsoft Certified Systems Engineers in Canada.

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