



got certification?

Discover why SAVTA certification makes business and professional sense.

by Don Sadler

In today's challenging economy, businesses in every industry must do all they can to maintain a competitive edge — and the safe and vault technician industry is no different.

Greater awareness of security issues among the general public has raised the bar considerably for the security profession. Employers, contractors and government entities are all taking additional steps to ensure that they're working with the most skilled and knowledgeable individuals in the business.

One of the best ways to set yourself

“Every professional in our field should obtain a minimum level of expertise that can be measured by certification.”

and your company apart from your competitors is to obtain SAVTA certification. Professional certification from SAVTA works as a screening tool that helps clients determine which security professionals have the training and experience required to perform the job. In addition, many states are including the same requirements as those for SAVTA certification in their licensing regulations.

“Certification ensures customers that the technicians they hire possess a certain level of expertise,” says SAVTA President Ron Snively, CPS. “Plus, it helps give technicians a good gauge of what they know.”

“I've been involved in SAVTA certification since it was first offered,” says SAVTA Education Manager Mike Oehlert, CMST. “I didn't take the exams to get some initials after my name, but as a personal challenge and gauge to see where my skills are and areas where I need to improve. Certification has definitely helped my career.”

Types of Certification

The SAVTA Safe Technicians Proficiency Registration Program (STPRP) consists of two levels:

Certified Professional Safe Technician (CPS) — A CPS has successfully demonstrated proficiency in a number of different safe- and vault-related categories, including lock identification, vault and safe locks, troubleshooting and dialing diagnostics, safe and safe lock installation, safe deposit locks, and safe-related electronics.

The CPS test consists of a 325-question written exam covering a total of 17 differ-

ent safe- and vault-related categories. A minimum score of 70 percent is required in order to pass the exam.

Certified Master Safe Technician (CMST) — This is the highest level of certification for a safe technician. A CMST has successfully demonstrated advanced proficiency in a number of categories beyond those required for a CPS designation, including vaults and vault doors, advanced borescope techniques, time locks, night depositories and advanced dialing diagnostics.

You must pass the CPS exam before you can sit for the CMST exam, which consists of 267 questions. A minimum score of 70 percent is also required in order to pass this exam.

Both exams were designed by qualified test development professionals and according to internationally accepted procedures. Safe technicians and physical security professionals determined the

questions and content of the exams to ensure that they would accurately reflect the knowledge and skills required in the safe and vault tech industry.

For a schedule of upcoming exams, visit www.aloa.org/education. From here, you can download registration forms, which must be submitted at least 15 days prior to the exam date. Exam fees are set by the sponsoring group and may vary based on the sponsor hosting the sitting.

It's important to note that SAVTA certification and licensing aren't the same thing. Licensing is done on a state-by-state



basis, with licenses required in some states in order for technicians to practice their trade legally. Certifications typically aren't required by law; rather, they inform the public that a technician has been professionally recognized by a credentialing agency (such as SAVTA). It's also a sign of support for the profession and the standards set by the credentialing organization.

Preparing for the Exams

Oehlert took the test for the CPS designation as soon as it was offered in 1994, and then passed the advanced CMST exam about eight years ago. As a SAVTA instructor who has taught classes to help technicians prepare for the exams, he stresses the importance of both book study and field experience in passing the exams.

“You should take all the classes and read all the books you can, and study for these exams like you would any test,” he says. “But you shouldn't expect to pass if



“Certification ensures customers that the technicians they hire possess a certain level of expertise.”

you don’t have field experience. The tests cover a wide range of topics, so you have to put the time in and work hard to earn them, because certification should mean something.”

SAVTA member Andy Dennison, CPS, CML, who teaches locksmith and safe and vault classes for MBA USA in Nicholasville, Ky., agrees. “They are written exams, so study hard and be prepared. There are plenty of study and reference materials available to help you.” This includes the *Safe Technicians Reference Manual*, which can be purchased at the ALOA online store at www.aloa.org/store or by calling (800) 532-2562, ext. 105. Also, SAVTA conducts comprehensive safe technician training at the SAFETECH convention each year, and both SAVTA and ALOA offer ongoing continuing education (ACE) classes. You can access the ACE schedule online at www.aloa.org/education.

Dennison, who is also an ALOA Certified

Master Locksmith (CML), says he was one of the first technicians to receive the CPS designation when the test was first administered in the mid ’90s. “I was very eager to get certified because it designates a certain level of professionalism,” he says. “If there have ever been any questions about my abilities, having the SAVTA certification has answered them. It demonstrates that you have more than just a passing interest in the field.”

Benefits Beyond New Business

According to Oehlert, his SAVTA certifications have helped him in his career and have helped him gain new business, but the benefits go beyond that. “Some technicians don’t think certification is worth it because they’re not sure it will make them any extra money, but to me, the biggest benefit is self-knowledge,” he says. Also, SAVTA certification will help you with state licensing and other industry certifications — they all go hand in hand.”

Some have also voiced concerns that with more technicians obtaining certification, the value of certification may be diluted. However, this will not be a concern, Oehlert says, as long as the knowledge measured and scoring parameters remain

consistent. “The most likely effect of more technicians getting certified will be greater public awareness of the meaning of the designations and greater recognition of its value among security professionals.”

“If you’re serious about your career as a safe and vault technician, then you should get certified,” Dennison says. “When you take your car in for repair, there’s probably an ‘ASE certified mechanic’ sign in the repair shop. SAVTA certification gives our customers the same level of confidence in our abilities.”

“I think every professional in our field should obtain a minimum level of expertise that can be measured by certification,” Snively says. “It’s an investment in our careers, livelihoods and futures. And the more of us who are certified, the more beneficial it is for our industry and our reputation.”

TOP 6 BENEFITS OF SAVTA CERTIFICATION	
1.	Demonstration of your advanced knowledge as a safe and vault technician
2.	Instant professional credibility
3.	Career advancement
4.	An edge over the competition
5.	Higher earning potential
6.	Preparation for licensing when it comes to your state



Don Sadler is a freelance writer and editor based in Atlanta. He has written on all aspects of business and management since he began his journalism career in 1985, including access control and security.