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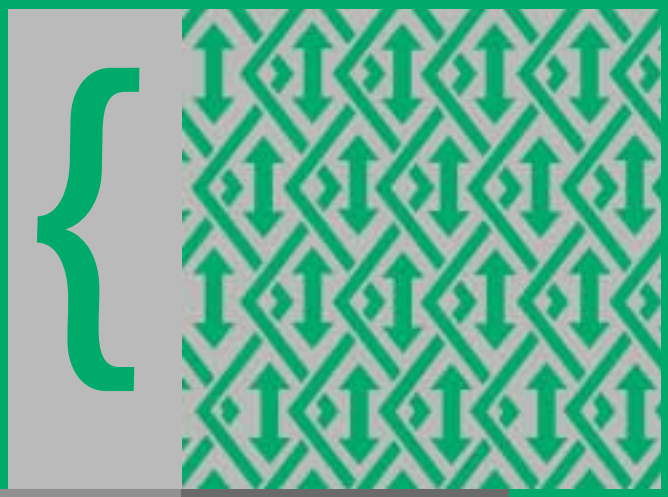
THE MAGAZINE OF USENIX & SAGE

October 2000 • volume 25 • number 6



inside:

SAGE NEWS

USENIX & SAGE

The Advanced Computing Systems Association &
The System Administrators Guild

SAGE news

SAGE Code of Ethics

by Barbara Dijker

SAGE President

<barb@sage.org>

and Lee Damon

Lee Damon is chair of the SAGE Ethics Working Group, and was one of the commentators on the original SAGE Ethics document.

<nomad@castle.org>

For a professional body, an ethical code is an important part of defining that profession. For more than four years, a Code of Ethics has been posted on the SAGE Web site. It was the result of years of collaboration among SAGE members interested in that effort. At each LISA conference since 1994, an Ethics BoF has been held to inform members on the status of the project, get comments, and attract new blood to the ongoing Ethics Working Group and its associated <*sage-ethics*> mailing list.

System administration is a task that is ubiquitous in a computerized world. SAGE has encouraged and supported the development of SAGE groups in other parts of the globe. There are currently three formalized SAGE organizations outside the US. There are others in the making and yet others either loosely organized or comingled with other bodies. The global expansion of SAGE is expected to continue.

Ethics, one would hope, transcends law and culture. So it would follow that there should be one code for all system administrators, or at least all regional SAGE groups. The existing SAGE Code of Ethics was developed independently of the one developed for SAGE-AU. The result was two documents. Even before the code was effectively completed in early 1997, those involved with the project recognized the need to rewrite it from scratch.

The SAGE and SAGE-AU documents are effectively the same or as different as night and day, depending on whom you ask. Either way, it quickly became clear that neither side was likely to abandon its code and adopt the other without significant revision.

At the direction of the SAGE Executive Committee, the Ethics Working Group then began work on a new global code. The start of this rewrite was first discussed in detail at the Ethics BoF held at LISA '97. The next Ethics BoF at LISA '98 was hosted by Hal Miller, who shepherded the first ethics document, and Geoff Halprin, of SAGE-AU. At that BoF, Lee Damon was asked to coordinate the effort of drafting a new global Code of Ethics.

A new ten-stanza draft ethics document was presented at the Ethics BoF at LISA '99 in Seattle. The first six stanzas were reviewed, discussed, debated, voted on, and approved at that BoF. When time ran out, the discussion of the remainder of the new draft was moved online. All of the people at the '99 BoF were asked to sign up for the mailing list, and along with the attendees from the '98 BoF, became the new Ethics Working Group. The working group continued going over the remaining stanzas one at a time, rewriting sections and voting on each stanza in turn.

At press time, the working group is voting on the last stanza of the new draft code. The final report of the Ethics Working Group, including the proposed new code, should be available in the December issue of *;login:*. In the coming months, the drafted new code will be reviewed by representatives from each of the regional SAGE groups. A process for adopting the code will be developed by each regional group. Information about this project will be posted at <*http://www.sage.org/ethics/*>.

We would like to thank the 34 stalwart individuals who took so much of their time to help craft the initial draft of the new global document.

SAGE Certification Process Proceeding

by Phil Scarr

Phil Scarr is a senior systems architect at Certainty Solutions (formerly GNAC, Inc.). He's been involved with USENIX and SAGE for several years and is co-chair of LISA 2000.

<prscarr@greymouser.com>

The sun was shining brightly in Seattle (for a change) on August 1st for the SAGE Certification Policy Committee meeting.

Many of you may be wondering why I was there since I have been a strong objector to the certification process. I was one of the nay sayers at the "Great Certification Debate" at LISA and I still maintain a strong sense of skepticism towards the value of certification in our profession. However, since the certification ship was getting ready to sail with or without me, I decided the prudent thing to do would be to try and help steer it through the shoals in the hope that SAGE will deliver a strong certification program tightly coupled with a strong educational program and not just another rubber stamp certification.

The attendees at the Seattle meeting were:

Lois Bennett, Stephen Berry, Mark Burgess, J. K. Chapman, Barb Dijker, Bradley Donison, Tim Gassaway, Richard Jaross, Mark Langston, Phil Scarr, Mark Stingley, John Stoffel, Leeland G. Artra, Gale Berkowitz, USENIX; Ellie Young, USENIX; Geoff Halprin, SAGE Executive

Committee; Michael Hamm, Consultant; Gordon Waugh, HumRRO.

The committee nominated J. K. Chapman as the Committee Chair.

The primary goals of this meeting were to deliver a plan of action for the development of a business plan, develop policies and procedures, and define criteria for the Exam Development Committee.

The committee reviewed and debated many aspects of the certification question. But a general consensus was achieved that there is sufficient interest among the members of SAGE and USENIX to provide a certification program for the members. This was borne out by the feasability study commissioned by SAGE.

In order to deliver this program, there are numerous details to be worked out by the Policy Committee. For instance, there must be an administrative framework to manage and deliver the examinations. This framework includes both professional staff as well as volunteers from the ranks of SAGE and USENIX. The exact composition of this framework is still being analyzed.

Through the process of defining the characteristics of a certification program, we were asked by Michael Hamm, a consultant specializing in professional certification programs, to review several important planning questions. Among them were: The motivations for a certification program, objections to such a program, levels of certification, competition, cost, and the key question of recertification. Here are summaries of the answers to these questions.

What are the motivations for a certification program? There are several, among which are: The ability to objectively measure skills; a response to both member and market needs; to advance the profession; to "set the standard" for system administrator certification; to foster a philosophy of personal and professional development in the field; and to help focus the educational programs within SAGE/USENIX. This last point is one that is key to delivering a sound certification program.

What are the objections to a certification program? Again, there are several, among them are: It simply can't be done; the field is changing too rapidly for a certification program to keep up; it legislates mediocrity; it can lead to exclusionary behavior.

What are the levels of certification? The program will follow along the lines of the existing SAGE Levels for System Administrators.

Who is the competition? The committee identified several key competitors in this field. Among them are the ACM, Universities, and SANS. But in the field of general system administration, there are few non-vendor programs. However, one of the big educational companies, Learning Tree International, is very interested in using the SAGE/USENIX certification exams in their own courses and to have SAGE evaluate their coursework for completeness. There is nothing formal, but it could be an interesting project.

What is the cost? There was a lot of debate on this question and nothing conclusive came out. This issue will be raised again in October at the next meeting.

What about recertification? It was generally agreed that the credentials would have an expiration of no more than 3 years and that "points" (like Continuing Education Units) could be used to provide that recertification. These points would be awarded for the completion of training courses, teaching classes and giving talks. However the mechanism for achieving this remains undefined.

SAGE, the System Administrators Guild, is a Special Technical Group within USENIX. It is organized to advance the status of computer system administration as a profession, establish standards of professional excellence and recognize those who attain them, develop guidelines for improving the technical and managerial capabilities of members of the profession, and promote activities that advance the state of the art or the community.

All system administrators benefit from the advancement and growing credibility of the profession. Joining SAGE allows individuals and organizations to contribute to the community of system administrators and the profession as a whole.

SAGE membership includes USENIX membership. SAGE members receive all USENIX member benefits plus others exclusive to SAGE.

SAGE members save when registering for USENIX conferences and conferences co-sponsored by SAGE.

SAGE publishes a series of practical booklets. SAGE members receive a free copy of each booklet published during their membership term.

SAGE sponsors an annual survey of sysadmin salaries collated with job responsibilities. Results are available to members online.

The SAGE Web site offers a members-only Jobs-Offered and Positions-Sought Job Center.

SAGE MEMBERSHIP
<*office@sage.org*>

SAGE ONLINE SERVICES
list server: <*majordomo@sage.org*>
Web: <*http://www.usenix.org/sage/*>

Finally, the committee reviewed the plans to create the exams themselves. Gordon Waugh from HumRRO described the process of creating and managing the exams. They will all be multiple-choice exams (to begin with) and we will be developing the first one at the very basic level. There will be two forms of the test and 150 items per exam.

There was a lot of debate on the question of multiple-choice versus more hands-on approaches. There were several people who felt that without a hands-on component, the certification process would be incomplete. However, the cost (to both USENIX and to the participants in the program) of such a hands-on exam is prohibitive. However, as the certification program expands to cover more senior system administrators, such a scheme will be revisited. Most people agreed that to deliver a certification with the clout of the Cisco CCIE, hands-on examinations were required.

The formation of a Test Development Committee is underway. This committee will be responsible for delivering the questions for the question pool. Membership requirements for the Test Development Committee were reviewed and will include Subject Matter Experts, people who are analytical, have diverse experience, experience evaluating system administrators, self-critical, clever (to help write wrong answers) and at least 5 years of sysadmin experience. John Stoffel will chair the search committee with Tim Gassaway and Louis Bennett helping to coordinate the search and Gale Berkowitz as the staff coordinator.

A tentative timeline for the entire process was worked out:

Mid-August 2000: Receipt of Business Plan from consultant

Late August 2000: Certification Committee to review draft of business plan

August 22, 2000: Submit names for potential Exam Development Committee members

September 8, 2000: Selection of Exam Development Committee

October/November, 2000: Convene first meeting of Exam Development Committee to conduct training

October 21, 2000 (San Diego) (tentative): Convene next meeting of SAGE Certification Committee

November, 2000: Item writing takes place

December 2000 (at LISA) (tentative): Convene second meeting of Exam Development Committee to review questions

May 1, 2001: Selection of pilot test questions

June 2001: Pilot testing takes place

Fall 2001: Rollout of first exam

While this is just a tentative timeline and things may change, delivery of the first exam should take place in Q3 or Q4 of 2001.

SAGE STG Executive Committee
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Vice-President:
Xev Gittler <*xev@sage.org*>
Secretary:
David Parter <*parter@sage.org*>
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Bruce Alan Wynn <*wynn@sage.org*>

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Taos: The Sys Admin Company
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SAGE Volunteers Needed!

Want to get involved in SAGE, but don't know where to start? Here are a few places where SAGE can use folks with some time and energy.

SAGE Annual Awards

<www.usenix.org/sage/people/awards.html>
Volunteers are needed to help decide the recipient(s) of the SAGE Outstanding Achievement Award, to be given at LISA in New Orleans.

SAGE Elections

Early in 2001, elections will be held for the SAGE Executive Committee. If you want to be on the Nominating Committee, or are interested in running for office, please contact the SAGE Nominating Committee.
<nomcom@sage.org>

Mentors

The mentoring project
<http://www.usenix.org/sage/mentor/index.html>
needs people who are willing to be mentors. This is a great chance to give back and have a hand in the future of the profession.

The USENIX Conference Office Has Moved!!!

Please note the new address and phone number for USENIX conference management services:

USENIX Conference Department
2560 Ninth Street, Suite 215
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