

My thoughts (and yours?) on Uniface Training and Certification

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I have worked in Uniface training for more than 20 years – yes, I know, you'd think I'd be better at it by now wouldn't you; I've heard them all. For all but the last two years, that training was instructor led classroom based: Either a public course, with attendees from many different customers, often held at Uniface offices, or private, usually onsite, training for a group from a single customer. In the last two years Uniface has been delivering instructor led training over the Internet, through a combination of WebEx – for voice and visual training aids – and CloudShare, for a student individual virtual machine in which to complete the exercises. As we begin creating the training for Uniface 10, I wish to review the current methods and, perhaps, provide an opportunity for discussion on the future. The benefits of classroom training are, in the main part, obvious: For public, offsite courses:

- The instructor usually has control over the environment. It should be clean, quiet, well lit and comfortable. It will be equipped to a standard to meet all the needs of the training with dedicated, course specific machines and good visual and audio aids.
- The delegate is away from the workplace with time that is dedicated to the learning; at least, that used to be so: With mobile phones and email, work often follows the student into the classroom.
- Students benefit from interaction with other delegates: Students often learn from one and another as well as the instructor - sharing knowledge and experience. Perhaps even providing a network after the training ends.
- The instructor can overlook student exercises in progress and spot mistakes at an early stage.

The same benefits can apply to onsite courses although, in some cases, the environment is not a dedicated training area and students can, too easily, be "pulled" from the room to deal with workplace issues. The disadvantages might be:

- The course schedule may not suit the student
- The student (public) or the instructor (onsite) has to travel with the consequent accommodation and transport expenses.

Online instructor led training certainly saves on cost but it is, of course, subject to the vagaries of internet connections. There have been occasions where a single student has a poor connection that slows the instruction for the remainder of the group and can frustrate in the completion of exercises. Recommended speeds can be set but broadband speed tests can be somewhat hit and miss and we have no way of checking that the student "tick in the box" for this pre-requisite has been met. However, this has been the exception rather than the rule and remedies have been found for most problems. The feedback from online training has been very good, particularly where groups of students are working together from the same location. It, perhaps, can be a little lonely working entirely alone for 5 days! For Uniface 10 there will be instructor led training, both classroom and online; the decisions that have to be made are in regard to self-paced, computer based training, either downloadable or in the Cloud. It has been suggested that we should break the training down into short modules by topic, with the use of video snippets to support the text base. Whilst that is possible it is not necessarily easy to administer; care has to be taken not to lose the coherence of the learning path. Taking modules out of sequence may cause issues because of the incremental nature of the information. There is also the problem that there is no instructor available to resolve difficulties with exercises, although this may be resolved through support from 'guides'. Uniface is a sophisticated product. Foundation training is currently two 5 day courses, although not all students attend the Advanced Training. My concern is that downloadable video snippets by topic will be appealing on a number of grounds, not least cost and convenience. But Training requires validation and part of that process is checking the exercises, as we currently do in both the classroom and online. One way to resolve the disconnect between training and validation is by Certification. My own opinion, (I stress these are my personal thoughts and not any official Uniface policy or thinking) is that I would like to see this take two forms:

1. Certified Professional. An online test, of the type used in other programmes.
2. Certified Practitioner. A very thorough examination of the candidate's Uniface skills, probably through attendance at a workshop that would set a task to design, build, test and deploy of a small application.

Certification would be version based with a What's New update to move to the next level.

I don't, at this stage, wish to discuss what benefits would be offered to certified individuals but there would, no doubt, be advantages to joining such a club.

So, how about it Unifacers? Do you have any thoughts on Training for Uniface 10? Or, indeed, Uniface Training in general? What about certification?

Let's see your comments.

For any Uniface Training related matter **other than comments on this blog**, don't hesitate to contact me on Uniface.training@compuware.com

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