VCDX Tips for Candidates

Updated: September 26, 2012

VMware Certified Design Expert (VCDX) Tips for Candidates

This document gives VCDX candidates hints for success on each component of the VCDX certification process:

1. **the application:** in which candidates submit an enterprise architecture design for review
2. **the defense**: in which candidates discuss their submission, and virtual infrastructure design in general, with a panel

Tips for the Application	Avoid naively using templates. Instead, customize your work based on your customer's requirements.
	Avoid naively using templates. Instead, customize your work based on your customer's requirements. No particular template is a recipe for success. If you use a template prepared by someone else, you must cite that template as a contributor.
	Do not plagiarize. Claiming the work of others as your own is grounds for disqualification. The VCDX process explicitly permits the submission of designs to which others contributed. You must document all contributors and indicate their work, and you must be prepared at defense to explain and justify all work on the design, whether it was yours or not. If others contributed work with which you disagree, say so in the application, explaining instead how you would have handled it.
	Always say why. Present the reason for each decision. Show alternatives and how they were decided among. Merely citing "best practices" will suffice for neither VCDX-caliber design work nor the VCDX certification process.
	Use fictional components where they will advance your chances. If your actual project did not cover one or more areas of the VCDX blueprint, and you have no alternate project that did, add well thought-out fictional components that illustrate your design skills in the omitted areas. Be prepared to explain and justify these portions just as if they had been actually built.
	Avoid merely citing products. Instead, show the path from the customer's requirements to the final design. You are not measured on how many VMware products your solution can involve. Instead, you are measured on a sensitive, well thought-out response to a sophisticated set of business requirements. Ill-considered references to VMware products with which you are not familiar may expose you, during your defense, to difficult lines of questioning.

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Avoid the submission of too-simple designs. Instead, submit designs that will allow you to demonstrate your design skills.
If you have a choice between submitting a simple design that may not cover all areas of the VCDX blueprint or a complex design that may have errors, choose the latter. In your submission and in your defense, explain the errors and how they could have been corrected.

Avoid merely listing choices in the submitted design. Instead, present a case for one of those choices, and show its superiority to the alternatives.
Every instance where you say, "We just allowed the customer to pick here" is a missed opportunity to show your design process. Always include the rationale for each decision.

Avoid padding.
Longer applications are not necessarily better.

Seek peer review.
Invite a colleague you trust to examine your application with a critical eye. Ask the colleague, "Can you find areas that would cause you concern, if you were a skeptical customer?" These areas are also likely to serve you poorly in the VCDX process, and improving them before submitting would be in your interest.

Do not aim for mere competence. Instead, show how your work is superb.
If your target is to simply show that you can do design in a minimally competent manner, and you fall short of the mark, you will fail. It is in your interest to include in your application components that you feel are superior to your colleagues' work and to industry practice in general.

Tips for the Defense

Know your own design thoroughly.
Be prepared to explain and defend all parts of your design, including parts contributed by others and fictional parts.

Do not assume that you will be able to rely on any reference material during the defense.
You will not be permitted to bring any such matter into the defense room.

Do not spend a lot of time introducing your own experience or résumé.
The VCDX Handbook and Application makes clear that your prior work history is not necessarily a qualification for the credential. Therefore, excessive discussion of it in the defense is a waste of your limited time.

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Always think out loud.
Any time you are silent, you are scoring no points. Take every opportunity to show your thought processes.

Always say why.
Be prepared to explain each design decision, using simple and clear language. Explain how the chosen alternative was selected. The phrase "because it's best practices" will not be taken at face value.

Use graphics frequently.
Graphical portrayals can be much richer than words alone. Ensure that important diagrams from your design are included in the slide deck you bring (perhaps as backup slides, appended at the end). Employ the whiteboard often.

Manage your time proactively.
Your time with the panel is your only opportunity to explain your design and show your design skills. Do not wait for the panelists to ask you questions about areas you are particularly proud of. Furthermore, if you see time drawing to a close and you're aware that not all areas of the VCDX blueprint have been discussed, suggest a topic for discussion.

When the panelists pose hypothetical scenarios, pay attention to all the requirements.
Each requirement in such scenarios was included for a reason. Try at least to touch on each.

Say "I don't know" when you don't know.
Verbal stalling tactics waste your time and score you no points. Making wild guesses is unlikely to succeed and may cause you to appear more uninformed than simply saying "I don't know" would have. A better strategy is to say, briefly yet specifically, where you'd look to find the required information.

Turn errors into opportunities.
Suppose a panelist asserts that your design has a particular flaw. If you disagree, say so, and explain why the disputed component is in fact correct. But if you concede the error (perhaps because your customer insisted on it, or because you have progressed in your career since then), say so, and explain what you'd do differently now, and why.

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Do not make useless generalizations.
An example, "VMware vCloud Director is not ready for prime time." A wise candidate might say instead: "This customer has a requirement to aggressively control disk-space consumption. Because vCD 1.0 does not support linked clones, we did not consider it for this project."

Do not be afraid of making recommendations.
The panelists want to know about how you think through a design problem. Do not refrain from making a specific choice among alternatives, for fear of picking "the wrong answer." Instead, argue in favor of one choice, and show your reasoning.

Do not argue with the ground rules for the defense exercise.
The rules are the same for all VCDX candidates. Requesting that they be modified in your case on an ad-hoc basis will not succeed and will waste your limited time with your panel.

Do not attempt to draw conclusions from your panelists' tone of voice or gestures.
Your panel will probably include native speakers of languages other than your own. They may have entirely different sets of cultural assumptions. Simply respond to your panelists' words; assume that they are unemotional, and respond unemotionally.

Do not spend needless time discussing customer politics, in an attempt to engage your panel or to appear seasoned.
Discussions of politics are only relevant to your score in how they illuminate the path from the customer requirements to the completed design. If customer politics (or other extraneous forces) caused one aspect of your project to lack detail or rich development, consider substituting a fictitious component (as a savvier customer might require) that better highlights your skills.

Always ask questions of the panelists if something is not clear.
Your questions reveal your thought process.

Beforehand, stage a mock defense.
Gather colleagues who understand VMware virtual infrastructure and ask them to read your design. Have them ask you questions as if they were skeptical customers, being asked to pay for the design and to build it out. *Caution:* do not seek out VCDX panelists for this activity; they will not be able to take part.