

AVAYA EXTENDS ACE-FX TRAINING PROGRAM TO FURTHER DRIVE SKILLS

DUBAI: Avaya today announced it is extending its Avaya Certified Expert-Fx program to further drive skills and training in the latest SDN-Fx fabric-based networking technologies. The ACE-Fx Part II curriculum will focus on the advanced techniques required to implement Avaya's fabric solutions that are underpinning digital strategies for organizations globally. As companies look to implement digital transformation strategies and leverage technology trends like the Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing and mobility, organizations struggle to find workers with the required skills to implement these technologies safely and securely.

Lack of skills and resources was cited by 53% of organizations as one of the biggest barriers to implementing digital transformation projects, according to research by International Data Corporation (IDC). The ACE-Fx program was created to bridge this skills gap between traditional, hardware-intensive networking technologies and next-generation, software-defined fabric-based networking. It enables engineers and IT professionals to deliver the transformational networking capabilities



Maan Al-Shakarchi, Head of Networking, AMEA and APAC, Avaya

provided by the innovative Avaya SDN Fx architecture.

Avaya SDN Fx provides a complete next-generation networking solution that delivers, now, on the promise of

SDN, allowing for "connect anything, anywhere" simplicity to more easily add devices and users at the network edge. SDN Fx enables advanced strategies for smart architectures and the IoT. It elimi-

nates the tradeoff between security and complexity by automating the onboarding and access of devices, users, switches and servers to make protecting and managing every-where access effortless.

Progressive structure

With the extraordinary exponential growth Avaya's SDN Fx architecture has witnessed in the last 24 months, ACE-Fx II builds on the progressive structure of the ACE-Fx program, which is structured to provide a continuous journey for networking professionals to develop their career and enhance their skills on an ongoing basis. Since the program was launched last year, over 450 networking professionals have become members of the ACE-Fx community, with the training being successfully delivered in 50 cities worldwide.

The extended program allows individuals to deepen their knowledge and experience of advanced networking technologies under the Avaya SDN Fx umbrella, covering Fabric Connect, Fabric Extend and Fabric Attach, as well as advanced integration of IP Multicast and IP Routing. The intensive five-day

training program includes designing and implementing an Avaya Fabric solution including Fabric Extend and Fabric Attach technologies. ACE-Fx II also recognizes existing network industry certifications from other entities, allowing networking professionals to directly enter the ACE-Fx class without reinvesting in other Avaya courses.

Avaya is continually expanding and refining the ACE-Fx program, with the company introducing virtual training for Part I and Part II training. Professionals who successfully complete the courses become members of the ACE-Fx community, which allows them to attend Avaya industry events, and receive additional support and resources from Avaya. ACE-Fx II was announced at the Avaya ENGAGE event, taking place this week at Atlantis the Palm, Dubai, with more than 1,500 executives, customers and partners from over 70 countries attending. The four-day event is bringing together senior Avaya executives, industry leaders, technology innovators and key decision makers, delivering invaluable insight into key technology trends and the opportunities they represent.

SNAPCHAT, THE VANISHING-PHOTO APP MANAGED NOT TO FADE

NEW YORK: Snapchat has managed to build something lasting out of photos that vanished almost instantly. The fast-growing social network for millennials has come a long way since its founder Evan Spiegel dropped out of Stanford University in 2012, three classes shy of graduation. His goal at the time was to create a snappy way for people to send photos, videos and messages - all of which would disappear just 10 seconds after viewing.

Snapchat cut a sharp contrast to Facebook and other social networks, which encouraged people to share and share often - even those spontaneous moments they might come to regret the next morning or at the next job interview. Snapchat, by contrast, let people "show and share things that they do not want to last on the internet as a permanent record," said Ira Kalb, a marketing and branding professor at the University of Southern California.

That feature, however, quickly associated the company with "sexting," the sharing of sexually explicit photos through cellphone messaging. Had Snapchat done nothing else, it might well have faded quickly itself, as such fads often do. Instead, Snapchat showed a knack for evolving as its users did. It's now a full-featured messaging service popular with millennials and big brands alike. It even rebranded as Snap Inc. and now calls itself "a camera company."

Now it's hoping to make itself into a big winner on Wall Street as well. According to news reports, Snap is readying for a public stock offering that could value the company at \$20 billion to \$25 billion. Snap declined to comment.

Refusing to disappear

The company has worked hard to roll out new features so users don't get bored. "Stories" allows individuals and brands to create a narrative from messages, videos and photos from the past 24 hours. It's so popular that Facebook's Instagram now has a version of it, and Instagram just rolled out disappearing photos, too. A "Discover" section serves as a wide-ranging news section, featuring material tailored for millennials by a select group of publishers.

"Lenses" lets people add different animated overlays to photos and videos; the feature has proven to be popular both with young adults and advertisers. "Snapchat has steadily introduced new features ... and in terms of user engagement it seems like users are spending quite a bit of time in each," said eMarketer analyst Catherine Boyle.

Amanda Peters, 22, a dance instructor in Fairfax, Virginia, wasn't sure how much she would use Snapchat when she got it as a college freshman in 2012. But she's grown to like it more with Lenses. "I like the goofy filters," she said. "They're always changing them up, which is nice. Every day you can go to see what's new."

Snap's ad revenue has jumped from \$59 million in 2015 to nearly \$367 million in 2016, according to eMarketer. It's on pace to have more monthly active users than Twitter - which counts 317 million - by the end of the year. Of course, that is still dwarfed by Facebook, with 1.79 billion monthly active users as of Sept 30.

Learning to grow

But while Snap is popular with the coveted 18- to 34-year old audience, it will eventually have to broaden its appeal to grow. "It's a great base to start with, (but) ultimately they need to become a little bit broader in terms of appeal to users in order to become broader in terms of appeal to advertisers," Gartner analyst Brian Blau said.

Twitter went public in 2013 to high acclaim, but it hasn't succeeded in growing its membership at the rate investors want. It recently laid off 9 percent of its workforce. As part of belt tightening, Twitter also killed its Vine video app, which was wildly popular with teens but didn't have a reliable way to make revenue. It's clearly a fate Snap - with a similar youthful audience - wants to avoid.

Now you see them, now you don't. For now, though, Snap is managing to remain hip and even has an unconventional distribution strategy for Spectacles, \$130 sunglasses that take video for sharing on Snapchat. You can't just order one online - yet. Rather, they have to find a vending machine or temporary store popping up with just 24 hours' notice. So far, vending machines have showed up near the company's headquarters in the Venice Beach section of Los Angeles, as well as in Big Sur, California, and New York.

Lines in New York stretched for hours when the machines first appeared. Geoff Golberg, who works in marketing in New York, waited three hours in line. An active livestreamer, he livestreamed himself on Periscope as he bought the Spectacles. "It was a spectacle," Golberg said in a phone interview. "Inside everyone is taking video, posting content to Instagram and taking Snaps. They created so much buzz around this product by limiting supplies."

Even so, Blau said Spectacles are a niche product that likely won't be a major growth driver. And Snap needs growth - as well as even more ways to evolve to keep its existing users engaged. Savannah Russell, 16, a student in Minneapolis, is a devoted Snapchat user, building up "streaks" of daily Snaps with her friends. She said that without Snapchat, she "would show up to school on Monday and be very out of the loop." But she said she doesn't know how long she'll stick with it. "The happiness comes from being able to interact with my friends (not the app)," she said. "If something that comes up that's better I could see myself switching to that." —AP



CUBA: In this April 1, 2014 file photo, students gather behind a business looking for an Internet signal for their smart phones in Havana, Cuba. — AP

GOOGLE TO GIVE CUBANS FASTER ACCESS TO CONTENT 'WILLING TO GO A LITTLE FURTHER WITH GOOGLE'

HAVANA: Google and the Cuban government have struck a deal giving Cubans faster access to the internet giant's content, two people familiar with the agreement said Friday. Eric Schmidt, chairman of Google's parent company, will formally sign the deal Monday morning in Havana, the two people said. They spoke on condition of anonymity because the agreement has not yet been publicly announced.

It allows Cubans access to a network called Google Global Cache that stores content from Google-run sites like Gmail, Google Drive and YouTube on servers that sit within relatively short distances of their end users around the world. Cuba suffers from some of the world's slowest internet speeds due to a range of problems that include the convoluted, and thus slower, paths that data must travel between Cuban users and servers that are often in the US.

Cuban officials appear to be accelerating their approvals of deals with US companies in an attempt to build momentum behind US-Cuba normalization before President-elect Donald Trump takes office next month. The

Google pact will be announced less than a week after Cuba gave three US cruise companies permission to begin sailing to the island next year. Officials familiar with the negotiations say other deals, including one with General Electric, are in the works. The US and Cuba have struck a series of bilateral deals on issues ranging from environmental protection to direct mail since the declaration of detente on Dec 17, 2014, but business ties have failed to keep pace.

Weak links in the chain

The Cuban government has blamed the US trade embargo on Cuba. Many US businesses say Cuba has been moving on most proposals so slowly that some suspect the government has been deliberately limiting the development of economic ties. The Google program to be announced Monday could provide ammunition for US advocates of closer ties with Cuba. Both pro-detente forces and those arguing for a hard line on President Raul Castro's single-party government have been pushing for Cubans to have better access to information.

If the Google deal proves to truly improve

internet access for a significant number of Cubans, it ties information access to US-Cuban detente in a way that could prove politically difficult to undo for anti-Castro officials in the incoming Trump administration. It wasn't immediately clear if the Cuba server or servers would be on the island itself, or just closer than current ones. Neither was it clear how much faster Cuban users would be able to see Google content - home internet connections remain illegal for virtually all Cubans, forcing them to use public WiFi spots that are often shared by dozens of people at a time and run at achingly slow speeds.

"There are many other weak links in the chain," said Larry Press, a California-based expert on the Cuban internet. He said that while the technological impact of the deal remained unclear, it was a significant development for a country that has shied away from any ties between US companies and a telecommunications infrastructure that is closely guarded against real or imagined threats to national security. "It's also a sign that they're willing to go a little further with Google," Press said. — AP

GOV PROPOSAL ENVISIONS PHONE CALLS ON FLIGHTS

WASHINGTON: Airlines could let passengers make in-flight phone calls using Wi-Fi under a proposal from federal regulators. Flight attendants and others have complained that the calls could be disruptive. But the Department of Transportation said Thursday that it envisioned allowing the calls if airlines tell all customers about the policy when they buy their tickets.

That way, customers could make other travel arrangements if they feared sitting next to passengers chatting on their phones. There is a 60-day comment period, and the proposal leaves the door open to the possibility that federal officials could still impose an outright ban. The Federal Communications Commission prohibits passengers from making cell phone calls during flights, but not Wi-Fi calls.

"Today's proposal will ensure that air travelers are not unwillingly exposed to voice calls, as many of them are troubled over the idea of pas-

sengers talking on cell phones in flight," Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx said in a statement. In 2014, the department issued a request for public comments on the possibility of permitting the calls and the response was overwhelmingly negative.

Sara Nelson, president of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, said anything short of a ban on calls is "reckless." Flight attendants have said previously that they fear the calls could lead to fights between passengers who want to make calls and passengers who don't want to listen to the conversations. "It threatens aviation security and increases the likelihood of conflict in the skies. It threatens safety for crews and passengers," Nelson said.

However, the US airlines' trade group opposes a government ban on in-flight calls. "We have long held that this was not a matter for DOT to regulate, and we believe airlines should be able

to determine what services can be safely offered in flight and make those decisions based on what is in the best interests of their passengers and crewmembers," a spokeswoman for Airlines for America, Kathy Grannis Allen, said by email.

Southwest Airlines and Alaska Airlines said they have no plans to allow voice calls. "Our customers have expressed concerns regarding the potentially disruptive nature of in-flight voice calls," said Southwest spokesman Brian Parrish. Alaska Airlines spokeswoman Bobbie Egan said the carrier surveyed passengers a few years ago and got "a strong reaction" that they didn't want calls. A Delta Air Lines spokeswoman noted that the carrier has opposed voice calls for several years. United Airlines said it was reviewing the proposal and would listen to the views of customers and employees. American referred questions to the trade group. JetBlue did not have an immediate comment. —AP



NEW YORK: In this Monday, Nov 28, 2016 photo, a vending machine containing Spectacles stands in a closed store, in New York. —AP