

The Benefits of Online Skills Measurement Through the Eyes of Five Knowledge Workers

In the knowledge enterprise, managers and other decision makers are creating skills inventories to achieve a variety of competitive advantages. They are differentiating their skills assets, identifying and addressing skills gaps, and maximizing performance by making more informed hiring, development and deployment decisions. But what about the individual? An effective skills inventory initiative requires acceptance and strong participation by employees to achieve consistent and repeatable skills measurement.

For the skilled professional, simply taking an assigned assessment in a particular field typically will not be enough to fuel skills improvement. An effective measurement system must provide tangible benefits for the employee. It must be easily accessible. It must be challenging, and it must deliver detailed objective results that can track learning and improvement. Online skills measurement systems can now deliver all these advantages, and today's highly skilled professionals are not waiting to be shown the way.

How are individual knowledge workers using skills measurement to help them improve performance? A brief glimpse through the eyes of five skilled professionals provides a wealth of insight.

Henko TerBlanche

IT Consultant, Server Engineering and Architecture

“Each assessment question is tough, and I have to make my answer quickly. That’s what I do on the job. It’s not just about knowing the answers; it’s about knowing where to find the answers, and finding them quickly.”

For the past two years, Henko TerBlanche has been working as an IT consultant at Merrill Lynch. His work includes participation in a Windows 2000 clustering project, engineering and architecture development and 3rd level support. He has worked at several dot-com startups, and he has prior experience at another large financial services company.

“Variety of experience is part of the IT world,” says TerBlanche. “You have to use new skills all the time. The question is, how do you know when you’re ‘good enough’ at a skill to put it to use in a work setting? An online assessment gives me the answer and the confidence to do my job better.”

For TerBlanche, that confidence comes from what he calls the “real world” challenge offered by an online system. “If you think about some of the other IT tests out there, such as the ones that come through vendor certifications, you’ll see that most of them are closed book—you have to have all the answers in your head.”

“An online test from Brainbench is different. I can take it in my office. I can look anywhere I want for the answers. But each question is much tougher, and I have to make my answer quickly. That’s what I do on the job. It’s not just about knowing the answers; it’s about knowing where to find the answers, and finding them quickly.”

Stephen Ashmore

Oracle Database Consultant, Author

“Knowing where to look—that’s the challenge. Any techie worth his salt has an office full of books and needs to know how to use them.”

As the author of a series of Oracle DBA 'How To' books ('So You Want To be an Oracle DBA?', available at www.amazon.com), Oracle database consultant Stephen Ashmore reflects on the “real world” benefit offered by online assessments.

“In the world of an Oracle DBA, there are things that everyone has to know. But in a real world situation, you have to know where and how to use things that you know. A Brainbench assessment takes that into account. If you’re taking a test,” says Ashmore, “be prepared. It gives you three minutes to get the answer to a question. Knowing where to look—that’s the challenge. Any techie worth his salt has an office full of books, and needs to know how to use them.”

John Shen

System Administrator, University of California

“This is really a day-to-day learning tool. It shows me which skills need to be developed, and whether I need to study up on the concepts used in a particular skill or applications of those concepts.”

As a system coordinator and system administrator at the University of California Office of the President, John Shen relies on online skills assessments to fuel personal skills development. His department is primarily responsible for teacher education and professional development, and his skills as a system coordinator must evolve to meet changing technology needs.

“I’ve worked in a variety of IT related jobs,” says Shen. “I worked at Internet startups in the late '90s and for the past two years I’ve been here. Knowing how to improve your skills is extremely important. I could take an Oracle certification course, for example, and I would either pass or fail with little feedback, or I could take a Brainbench online test.”

“The online test is actually tougher than the textbook learning tests from vendors, and in the score breakdown it will show me which skills need to be developed. This is really a day-to-day learning tool. It shows me whether I need to study up on the concepts used in a particular skill or applications of those concepts. I use the feedback to build on and update the skills I use.”

Andrew Velichko

Systems Analyst, Ontario Ministry of Health

“I got the results, studied and learned, and came back to increase my score by 20%. But it’s not just on paper. The learning was very real.”

Andrew Velichko is a systems analyst in the Ontario Ministry of Health. For him, the value of an online assessment is in the tangible reward—in this case, the Brainbench certification. “For an IT employee the result behind that certification—the objective skills score—is extremely important.”

“When you’re a contractor, your skills needs will change, and you need to have the knowledge right there on paper. You need to prove to an employer or to yourself that you know what you know. And once you’re into a test, you’re committed to getting it right.”

“I have taken assessments that showed me where I needed to improve. Oracle 8i was like that. I got the results, studied and learned, and came back to increase my score by 20%. But it’s not just on paper. The learning was very real. You can’t get that learning from just one book. Employees and employers appreciate that.”



Jonathan Crawford

Senior Software Engineer

“A skills assessment score is concrete. It’s objective, and it’s more than just a claim.”

For 16 years, Jonathan Crawford has depended on his IT skills to navigate a career rich in opportunity and challenge. From work on an advanced NASA Earth Observing System, to applying e-commerce for government functions and developing software for developers, Crawford’s experience has taken him through multiple corporate environments.

“I’ve been on both sides of the interview table,” he says. “And there’s a lot of padding with resumes. It’s almost part of the culture. You have to have key words on the resume to get in the door. The interviewers know that, and they need a way to filter out the truly qualified candidates. The candidate needs a way to prove that the qualifications on that resume are true. As for me, I’m more comfortable with the concrete than with the abstract. A skills assessment score is concrete. It’s objective, and it’s more than just a claim. Objective skills validation gets everyone in agreement quickly.”

Online Skills Measurement Solution Delivers Results for Today’s IT Culture

Experience from employees like the professionals featured here and those at leading knowledge companies such as IBM and Wells Fargo is showing that skills measurement delivers business advantages. Companies are accelerating the hiring process, pinpointing training or improvement opportunities and making smart deployment decisions. But in today’s workplace, it’s just as important that the measurement solution delivers on user expectations.

From concrete objective skills metrics to assessments of real-world capabilities, today’s online measurement systems can deliver what knowledge workers need. For company decision makers, these benefits to the user deliver major advantages. Employees are motivated. They are taking personal responsibility for their skills improvement. They are tracking current skill requirements, and they are ensuring that their skills continue to evolve.