

# Playing the Certification Game (No Straitjacket Required)

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a.k.a How to Become  
Certified Without Becoming  
Certifiable

# a.k.a. The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of System Administration Certification Exams

Let's start with the Bad and the Ugly, then work our way towards the Good... (don't let the bad and the ugly scare you off, stick around for the good, it does exist!)

# The Bad: “Paper” (MCSEs)

Click to **LOOK INSIDE!**

**100% Technical Accuracy**  
Backed by Sente Corporation

**Microsoft Certified Professional**  
Approved Study Guide

# MCSE TCP/IP FOR DUMMIES<sup>®</sup>

2ND EDITION

## Certification for the Rest of Us!

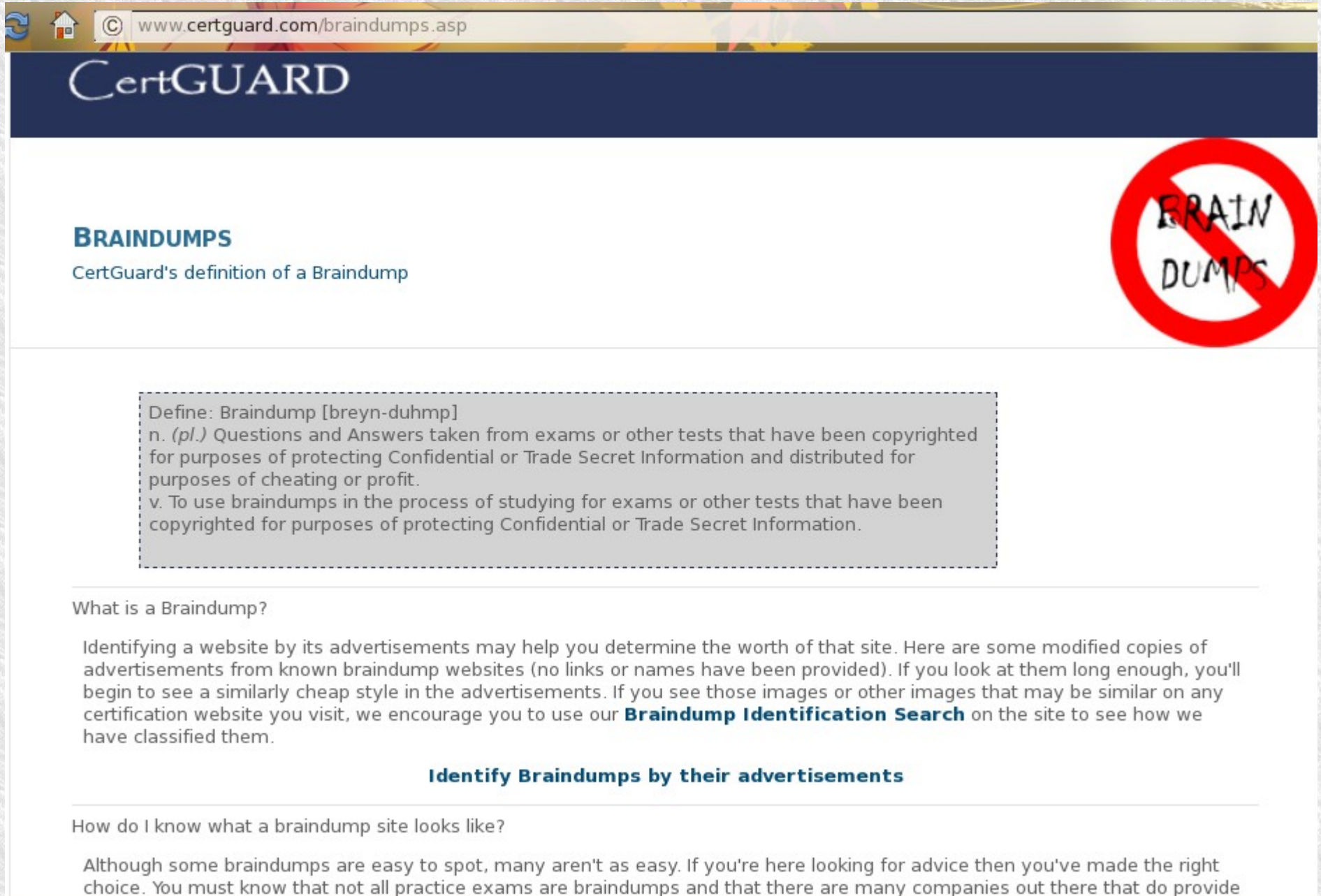
by Cameron Brandon, HCSE

**Adaptive Testing Information on CD-ROM!**

### Pass Exam 70-059

- Authoritative**  
Targets All Exam Objectives in Plain English
- Exclusive**  
Customizable Test Engine Creates 100s of Practice Questions
- Interactive**  
QuickLearn™ Game Style Test-Taking Speed

# The Bad: Braindumps




The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying 'www.certguard.com/braindumps.asp'. The page header features the 'CertGUARD' logo. The main content area is titled 'BRAINDUMPS' and includes a sub-header 'CertGuard's definition of a Braindump'. A red prohibition sign is overlaid on the right side of the page, containing the text 'BRAIN DUMPS'. Below this, a dashed box contains a definition of 'Braindump' with its pronunciation and two numbered definitions. Further down, the text asks 'What is a Braindump?' and provides a paragraph explaining how to identify braindump websites by their advertisements. A bolded section title 'Identify Braindumps by their advertisements' is centered below. The final section asks 'How do I know what a braindump site looks like?' and provides a concluding paragraph.

www.certguard.com/braindumps.asp

**CertGUARD**

## BRAINDUMPS

CertGuard's definition of a Braindump



Define: Braindump [breyn-duhmp]  
n. (*pl.*) Questions and Answers taken from exams or other tests that have been copyrighted for purposes of protecting Confidential or Trade Secret Information and distributed for purposes of cheating or profit.  
v. To use braindumps in the process of studying for exams or other tests that have been copyrighted for purposes of protecting Confidential or Trade Secret Information.

What is a Braindump?

Identifying a website by its advertisements may help you determine the worth of that site. Here are some modified copies of advertisements from known braindump websites (no links or names have been provided). If you look at them long enough, you'll begin to see a similarly cheap style in the advertisements. If you see those images or other images that may be similar on any certification website you visit, we encourage you to use our **Braindump Identification Search** on the site to see how we have classified them.

**Identify Braindumps by their advertisements**

How do I know what a braindump site looks like?

Although some braindumps are easy to spot, many aren't as easy. If you're here looking for advice then you've made the right choice. You must know that not all practice exams are braindumps and that there are many companies out there that do provide

# The Ugly: “Official” Training Required to Pass Exam

Information needed to pass the exam is only available from the certification vendor's “official” training program

Of course, said training costs several thousands of dollars in addition to travel costs

Training doesn't provide knowledge or skills, but rather how to answer the exam questions (in other words, an expensive braindump)

# The Ugly: Who Needs Psychometrics?

Choose all that apply (from a list of a-n)

Read through three screens worth of irrelevant information in order to find the fragment of a sentence which contains the actual question being asked

Decipher the meaning of a grammatically impossible question written by someone whose first language was obviously not English

Questions are technically inaccurate and sound like they were written by the sales team

# The Ugly: “Hot” Sells

Sought after certification programs are rarely about content but rather about the current hot trend

Certificants often end up taking exams that do not increase their skillset, force them to memorize irrelevant info, or to learn yet another new marketing spin on old terminology or another set of meaningless acronyms



# The Ugly: Costs

Psychometrics is expensive to achieve and *not marketed as a value*

Exams are expensive to maintain which can result in one version of the exam and/or questions that rarely change

Many programs force you to re-certify (ka-ching, ka-ching) in order to maintain certified status. New product versions with new certifications provide a never-ending “what features do I have to memorize this time” certification path

# Recognizing the Good: Value of Certification

There is value (to both employers and certificants) in quantifying the tasks that comprise a skillset

There is value in learning about the bigger picture and in learning the skills you missed along the way because your experience thus far didn't require them

There is value in being a member of a community that shares a proficiency in a well defined skillset

These values are the hallmark of a well designed certification program

# Recognizing the Good: What to look for in a certification program

Are the exam objectives available? Are they skill based?

Does third-party information about the program indicate that the exam adheres to the published objectives?

What forms of training and study materials are available? (hint: a lack of materials is not necessarily a bad thing)

# Playing the Game: how to gain from any certification

Know your end goal: are you trying to pass the exam, learn new skills, or a little bit of both?

Recognize that few training programs are geared towards skills, even if the exam itself is

Recognize that your own lab setup is a given

Gain a network of skilled friends and look for user groups that provide an environment for learning that specific skill

# Playing the Game: how to gain from any certification (even the bad and the ugly ones)

While the lack of technical merits may grate on the geek in you, some certifications will make your employer, support vendor, or HR happy

Even if the exam concentrates on features and irrelevant info, there is no law preventing you from learning the skills you'll need to wrangle that darn product into submission

# Reinventing the Game

The first generation of sysadmins didn't go to school to become sysadmins:

Instead, they were the ones who were good at “that computer thing” and figuring out how to keep their employer's systems up and running

Skills were learned in the field, on an as needed to know basis

# Reinventing the Game

How will the next generation of sysadmins learn their skills?

Post-secondary education isn't known for its plethora of skill-based sysadmin programs

While certification programs have improved since the 90s, there are still plenty which are vendor-specific, study what we want you to know (as opposed to how the product actually works or in understanding the world that exists beyond a vendor's particular product)

# Changing the Game

Look for and promote/contribute to quality certification programs, they do exist!

Integrate good programs into larger post-secondary programs (they define *skills* which can be taught)

A good certification program provides a tool which can be used to bridge the post-secondary knowledge-skill gap or to bring new hires up to speed



# Additional Resources

Why Certification Exams Suck: Introduction

<http://it.toolbox.com/blogs/bsd-guru/why-certification-exams-suck-introduction-11037>

How to Create a Psychometrically Valid Certification Examination

<http://www.slideshare.net/dlavigne/lavigne-eurobsdcon11>

BSD Certification Website

<http://www.bsdcertification.org>

# Contact & Questions

Contact:

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URL to slides online:

<http://www.slideshare.net/dlavigne/lisa2011>