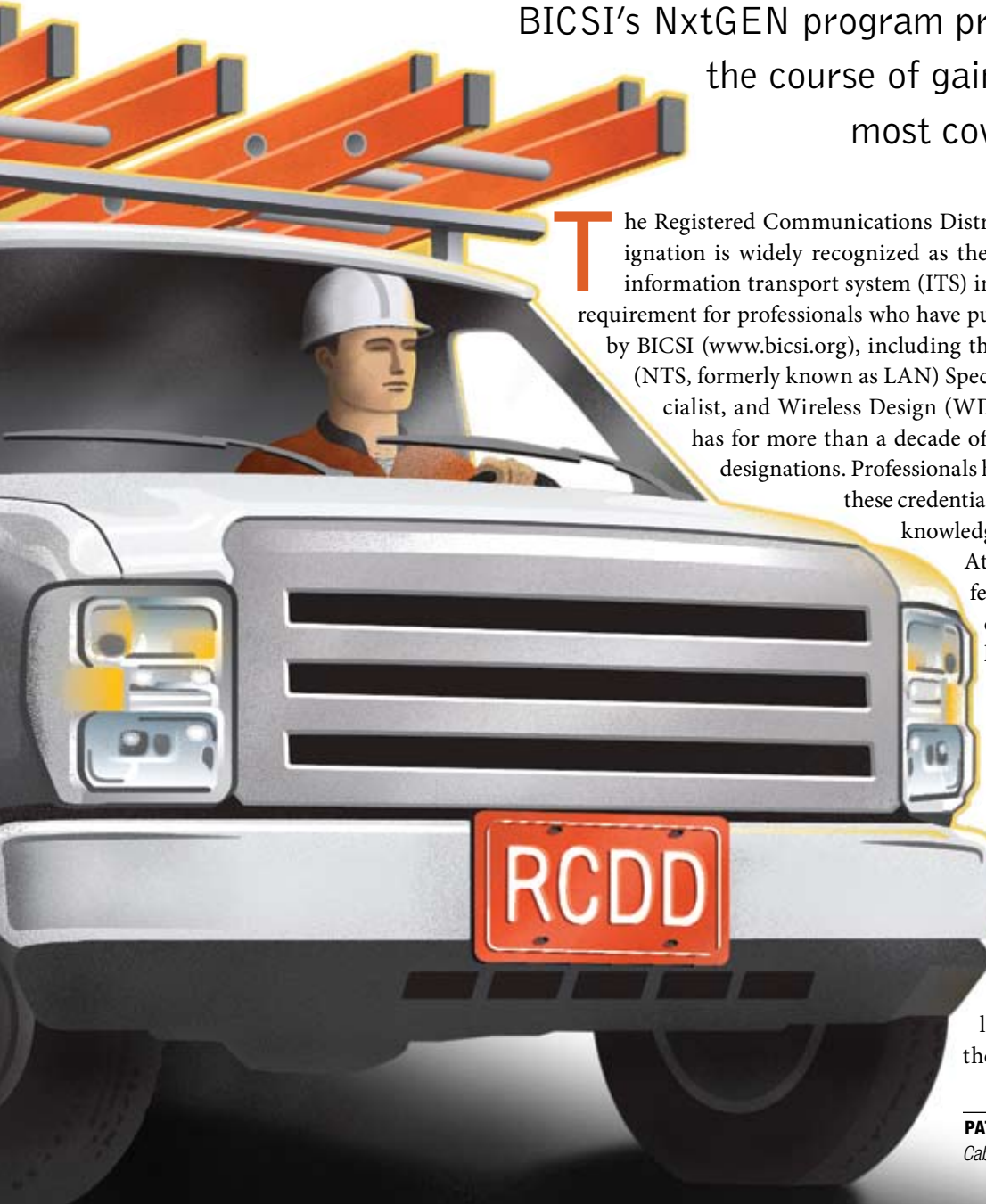


ITS professionals charting new route to credentials

BICSI's NxtGEN program promises to reshape the course of gaining the industry's most coveted designations.



The Registered Communications Distribution Designer (RCDD) designation is widely recognized as the centerpiece credential of the information transport system (ITS) industry, and to date has been a requirement for professionals who have pursued other specialties offered by BICSI (www.bicsi.org), including the Network Transport Systems (NTS, formerly known as LAN) Specialist, Outside Plant (OSP) Specialist, and Wireless Design (WD) Specialist. Separately, BICSI has for more than a decade offered Installer and Technician designations. Professionals have the opportunity to achieve these credentials through work experience and knowledge demonstrated via exam.

At the association's Winter Conference held in January, BICSI's outgoing president, John Bakowski, explained the project that has since been named NxtGEN began more than two years ago and is far from over. "This is a work-in-progress," he said. "We know where we want to go." Incoming president Ed Donelan also commented, "NxtGEN has completed its second stage—discovery—which allows us to move ahead to implementation. The heavy lifting is now ahead of us." As those two quotes indicate, the NxtGEN program likely

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will come to fruition and be rolled out over some period of time.

Recently, *Cabling Installation & Maintenance* held a “virtual roundtable” discussion with several of the major players within BICSI and the NxtGEN program. The individuals involved did not, either physically or digitally, meet in a single place at a single time and discuss the program’s details in one sitting. Rather, we interviewed participants by submitting a list of questions related to NxtGEN. BICSI representatives’ responses to those questions appear in this forum.

As the interview shows, one of BICSI’s objectives with NxtGEN is to build the level of participation in the credentialing program by professionals who are not BICSI members. In that vein, this Q&A-style article is not intended exclusively for BICSI members. *Cabling Installation & Maintenance* offers this roundtable discussion as a reference to professionals throughout the ITS industry.

The NxtGEN initiative

CI&M: *What were the specific circumstances that led BICSI to embark on the NxtGEN initiative?*

Bakowski: NxtGEN was born out of a strategic vision based on discussions within the board, BICSI membership, committees, and volunteers. We saw that in order to maintain our leadership position in the industry, BICSI needed to draw on its industry expertise representatives to chart our past, present and future business models. To provide those details, we assigned a group of individuals having the expertise to do a fast-track study and report back to the BICSI board. Steve Calderon and Bob Erickson championed that team in January 2006.

Donelan: Going back even further, in 2005, the BICSI board of directors began a process to develop a strategic plan for our association. We determined specific objectives, goals, and outcomes. One outcome was the 3 to 5-year credentialing and knowledge-transfer goal, coupled with conditions, trends, and assumptions. These were specific conversations that led us to decide upon a more-open platform to give our customers better access to expanded knowledge and credentials.

Bakowski: Through the Committee’s work in Phase 1, we uncovered that there was a lot more to what our industry needed. We believe that through the NxtGEN initiative, we will be able to deliver this to our customers in a much more meaningful way. Upon completion of Phase 1, Phase 2 was implemented in June 2007, now led by Jerry Bowman and Bob Erickson. During this phase, the project was officially named the BICSI NxtGEN Project. This was the most ambitious and far-reaching project BICSI had undertaken to date, involving almost every aspect of BICSI’s board, staff, committees, and volunteers.

Bowman: We’ve all been in the ITS business in one facet or another for a long time. For some time, we were observing

evolutions in the educational and credentialing needs of our members and customers. These changes involved not only the content, which began expanding to include other disciplines and technologies, but also affected the expectations that the corporate enterprise, ITS professional, and technician had for the credentialing process. As the ITS industry has matured, the needs of those who count on BICSI have also changed.

Erickson: Historically speaking, BICSI was established upon the needs of an industry and workforce that was operating over 30 years ago. Because today’s industry and technology are vastly different, we were forced to realign our programs with the needs of today’s industry and workforce.

Working with other organizations

CI&M: *Over the past several years, BICSI has established partnerships or working relationships with other organizations, some of which offer credentialing programs. Did BICSI examine those organizations’, and/or other organizations’, credentialing programs when developing its NxtGEN strategy?*

Donelan: Absolutely. BICSI underwent a most comprehensive comparison of other credentialing-based organizations in order to better understand the state of the industry. This market study included strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, better enabling us to make decisions based on facts.

Dunfee: BICSI actually investigated 48 associations when we were developing the strategy. Twenty of those 48 associations provided credentialing and were closely reviewed specifically for their industry relevance and credentialing methodology. Some of the parameters investigated were credentialing prerequisites, experience and formal training requirements, the need for verifiable references, the type of exams (e.g., written, simulated, hands-on), the requirement for continuing education, time period of the credential, and cost of the credential.

Bowman: The associations and companies we talked to covered a broad spectrum of ITS, engineering, IT, security, and others. We were looking for a representative cross-section of organizations that would embody the new, expanded BICSI stakeholder and address the full range of technical challenges faced by our members, stakeholders, and customers in their professional lives.

Who holds RCDDs?

CI&M: *Can you share information about the organizations that employ holders of BICSI’s RCDD designation? In other words, is there an equal distribution among design firms, installation contractors, consulting firms, end-user organizations, cabling-product manufacturers, etc.?*

Bowman: One of the key initiatives that came out of the NxtGEN Program during the organizational phase was the creation of a tool that will provide an ongoing quantitative analysis of the value of BICSI manuals, training, and

credentials to the service-delivery organizations and their customers. After reviewing the various categories used for tracking and reporting, the NxtGEN Stakeholders Working Group identified a number of new categories and lines of business that we will begin using going forward. The BICSI Membership & Marketing Committee has been given ownership of the tool and the responsibility of updating it with current information. We are looking forward to the information that the Membership & Marketing Committee provides us using this new tool.

NxtGEN and other organizations

CI&M: *As a follow-on, do you expect that the NxtGEN program will serve all of these organization types equally, or is it likely that some organization types will participate to a greater extent than others?*

Donelan: I'm glad that you asked. This is truly where BICSI maintains a vendor-neutral philosophy when it comes to promotion of any specific segment of ITS industry, product, practice, or process. This essential element of accepting best practices, coupled with our community-based goal of nurturing unique, relevant, dynamic and sustainable professional communities around the world, allows equal and greater access to all organizations.

Dunfee: Of course, there are some organizations for which the BICSI credential may enhance the organization's own credentials. In other cases, BICSI may find that its publications may be of value to another association, or that a combination of publications and training may provide the best mix. BICSI may also find the same potential for its members by aligning closely with the other organizations.

Hansen: How exactly the BICSI NxtGEN program will benefit these organization types will be determined during this next process of careful and calculated implementation of each part of the NxtGEN initiative. We have tasked our Membership & Marketing Committee with continuously evaluating the stakeholders for the organization so that we could better understand how we can serve them.

Bowman: We could only serve them equally if their needs were all the same; however, the diverse and mature ITS market has seen the needs of the various stakeholders move in very different directions. Some of our stakeholders may have a tremendous need for our publications or training, but almost no need for credentialing. In contrast, others may

need the knowledge and skills of one of the Specialties, but not the broad knowledge of an RCDD. One example might be a service provider or contractor with a great deal of outside plant construction activity. This stakeholder may need to mobilize a number of resources with the knowledge and skills of an OSP Specialist, but may not have the time to wait on them to study for and pass the RCDD. In this example, we will be addressing a very real need if we're able to provide the OSP knowledge and skills to the service provider or contractor when they need it.

What is RCDD-E?

CI&M: *One term that has been discussed within the context of NxtGEN is "RCDD-E." Truthfully, I'm not certain whether that is an actual term that BICSI intends to use. As I understand it, individuals may be eligible for the "RCDD-E" designation by demonstrating a certain level of knowledge about structured cabling system design, without necessarily having designed those systems professionally. Can you detail what the "RCDD-E" will be and, perhaps more specifically, how it will compare and contrast to the long-standing RCDD designation?*

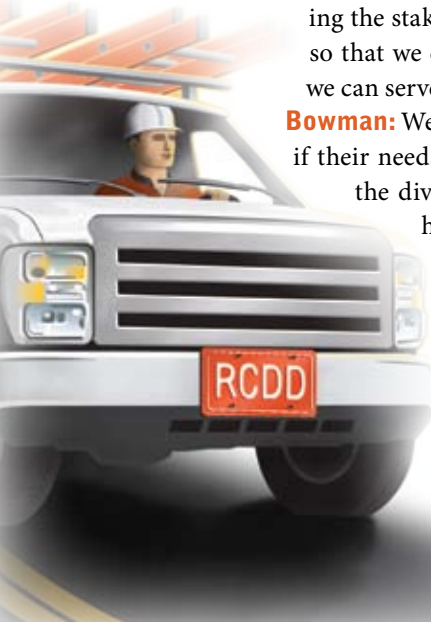
Bakowski: The RCDD-E is a concept under intense review by the BICSI NxtGEN Committee. It would be premature to speculate if that part of the program is feasible or how it would be designed to fit the overall needs of the BICSI membership.

Erickson: The RCDD-E is currently a "nameholder". The term may change as the program evolves.

Donelan: To a certain extent, you are correct in your definition of the RCDD-E. The idea behind this is again to open our doors to more than the select few of the industry. Conceptually, the RCDD-E would be intended for those who want to pursue a career in ITS, but do not have the needed experience. In our industry, there are areas such as project management, manufacturing, wholesale and retail supply, business management, IS administration, and education, where there is great need for people with a fundamental understanding of the technology. Experience, per se, is not necessarily a requirement for them.

Dunfee: Within this program, educational and experience equivalents would be allowed as substitutes for experience. Additional ITS training of sufficient scope will be required to ensure that the individual knows the ITS industry. Since this group has most of the knowledge needed to become an RCDD, but lacks practical experience in design processes and project research, the designation of RCDD-E is recommended; however, the RCDD-E will require further study to determine formal education industry-related relevance. It is anticipated that this program will not be in place until sometime in 2010.

Bowman: We are especially concerned about those potential RCDDs who don't need or want design skills or experience for



their professional pursuits. Professionals in fields such as education, sales, project management, or IT management may use the knowledge they obtain from the RCDD in their work life. Previously, without the RCDD-E, these professionals would not be able to obtain the knowledge or obtain this designation without first obtaining the two years of field design experience—now five years of design experience—and then entering the RCDD program. We feel many talented educational, sales, project-management, IT, and other professionals will be able to enter the RCDD-E program and obtain the knowledge and skills needed to excel in their given professions. The RCDD-E program is one of many examples of BICSI NxtGEN adapting our publications, training, and credentialing programs to the needs of our members, stakeholders and customers.

What about elevating RCDD?

CI&M: *I believe one of the objectives of NxtGEN is to elevate the existing RCDD designation. What plans are in place to do so?*

Donelan: The RCDD is BICSI's core customer and, as such, is very important to us. Our goal is to protect the status of the RCDD while at the same time elevate the RCDD designation by requiring more experience to qualify to sit for the exam. We will require at least five years' experience in the design of ITS, and will change our examination process to be more focused on application-based knowledge. We will be moving away from a memorization-based exam to an exam that tests the individual's core design knowledge. This new process will establish an RCDD credential to be the most coveted designation in the ITS industry.

Erickson: Although this is what we are currently assuming the program will look like, the final changes to the RCDD program will be dependent on the outcomes of the NxtGEN implementation team's work. The team will look very closely at the experience requirements and also at the examination processes to ensure that our customers' needs for the RCDD program will be met.

Bowman: Elevating the RCDD is just another way of saying that we are making it more valuable—valuable to employers who hire the RCDD, and valuable to the end users who benefit from their ITS design skills. Making the RCDD more valuable involves two metrics. First, we must ensure that the processes and programs are in place ensuring that BICSI's curriculum development is in step with what's

going on in the ITS design and construction workplace, and the technology found there. Second, we have to ensure that our qualification, training, and testing methods are current and meet existing and future industry standards. By continuing to ensure world-class content and bulletproof training and testing, the RCDD will be elevated in the eyes of those with the designation and those employing or interacting with them.

I would add that we have to ensure that we fully understand how the RCDD and other credentials are viewed by the ITS community. We have always done a great job of recruiting RCDDs, but we haven't always done a great job of informing the employers and customers of the RCDD of the benefit of hiring or using them. Part of the NxtGEN focus will be to ensure that we get the word out to potential consumers of the RCDD program.

Grandfather clause

CI&M: *How will the existing BICSI credential holders fit into this new program? What does this mean to the BICSI ITS Technician?*

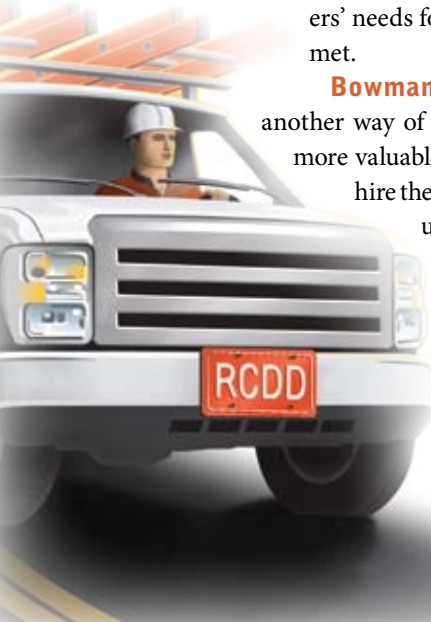
Hansen: The good news for our existing customers is that all RCDDs and Specialty credential holders will be grandfathered into the new program.

Donelan: BICSI has established new career-path flowcharts to assist new candidates for credentials, allowing a better understanding of the application process. BICSI will recognize other credential-based organizations, as well as academic-based organizations toward the qualification for credential process. By acknowledging other organizations, BICSI is continually improving and remaining constantly aware of market innovation, as well as being flexible and adaptable to change.

Dunfee: The NxtGEN program allows the BICSI Technician credential as a qualifier for the RCDD designation. The Installer and Technician are being redefined as one of the major stakeholders of the association. It is recognized that a large portion of this group may remain at the Installer/Technician level; however, the intent of BICSI will be to provide a career path for this group to allow them all to reach their highest potential.

Bakowski: The BICSI NxtGEN program will play a major role in providing new opportunities for current credential holders, including our ITS Technicians. To quote Ed Donelan, "BICSI is about talent and not turf." We are practicing what we preach, so our programs will be looking at enhancing the career opportunities for the Technicians, while providing new venues for all BICSI credential holders who want to grow with the industry.

Bowman: While existing credential holders will be grandfathered, it is also important to provide some level of crossover capability. For example, in the past, there was almost no cross-



over capability between the Installation and the Design Programs. One of the tenets of the NxtGEN effort is to recognize the knowledge and skills gained in any ITS or related credential, and also, importantly, to put in place the processes to allow candidates to leverage their existing credentials to achieve higher professional designations. This is also true of those who hold non-BICSI credentials. BICSI staff will begin the process of evaluating qualified BICSI and non-BICSI credentials, certifications and training to see if they can be counted toward the requirements to enter a new program. This spirit of inclusiveness is unparalleled and will allow BICSI to embrace new professionals and disciplines.

Specialty credential changes

CI&M: *I heard that the first change to the BICSI credentialing program is to remove the requirement of having to be an RCDD to achieve a BICSI Specialty credential. Can you explain the reasons behind this change?*

Erickson: The Specialties will have the RCDD requirement removed. The reason is that our industry has undergone enormous changes in the past 15 years. When the RCDD program started, there were many highly trained communications designers and engineers. These individuals had training and experience in many areas within telecommunications. Many were proficient in outside cable plant, inside cable plant, conduit and underground systems, PBX and key systems, planning, project management, traffic studies, etc. They were “generalists” and the employers had great amounts of resources invested in them.

Today, the industry is too competitive and the workforce too mobile for a company to invest so heavily in its employees. Training is much more focused and not nearly as intense. Much of the work in today’s environment is done by contractors who are much more focused and too small to afford to send its employees off to long or frequent training sessions. The employees who manage to gain recognition and experience in their area of

Speaking for BICSI

The following individuals, listed alphabetically, offered responses on behalf of BICSI for this article:

- **John Bakowski**, RCDD/NTS/OSP/WD Specialist; BICSI Past President (Term 2006-2008)
- **Jerry L. Bowman**, RCDD/NTS Specialist, CIS-SP, CPP; BICSI U.S. North-Central Region Director, NxtGEN Committee Chairman
- **Edward J. Donelan**, RCDD/NTS Specialist, TLT; BICSI President (Term 2008-2010)
- **Richard Dunfee**, RCDD/OSP Specialist; BICSI Director of Professional Development
- **R.S. (Bob) Erickson**, RCDD/NTS/OSP/WD Specialist; BICSI Registration & Specialties Supervision Committee Chair, NxtGEN Committee Vice-Chairman
- **Brian Hansen**, RCDD/NTS Specialist; BICSI President-Elect (Term 2010-2012)



JOHN BAKOWSKI



RICHARD DUNFEE



JERRY BOWMAN



BRIAN HANSEN



EDWARD DONELAN



BOB ERICKSON

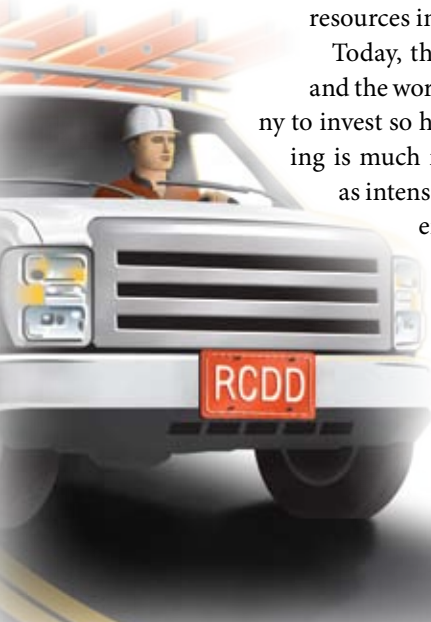
expertise are often lured away by other companies. They are specialists.

In the past, a generalist could specialize in a few areas to make them experts, thereby adding value and prestige to the organization and themselves. The reality of today’s industry is that an individual must specialize in many focused areas in an effort to acquire a greater understanding of the industry.

Dunfee: The first driver is that the RCDD program has become somewhat of a barrier to entry for those who desire the more job-specific knowledge and credential, but are faced with the sometimes daunting task of obtaining the gold standard of the RCDD, before they can even try for a Specialty.

The second driver of the NxtGEN program is the narrow requirements that qualify a candidate to sit for the RCDD. Quite simply, qualification for the RCDD as it exists now is based primarily upon ITS design experience in support of an application, and three references. This eliminates the opportunity for internal candidates, such as BICSI Technicians, from leveraging their considerable overlapping ITS knowledge and applying it toward qualification for the RCDD. A similar condition exists for those who have demonstrated industry experience, secondary education, and ITS-related certifications or credentials but have no way to leverage their education and experience by using it to qualify for the RCDD. At a minimum, this excludes very educated and experienced candidates from even considering the RCDD, and may influence negative feelings within the design, construction, or end-user communities toward BICSI and its suite of publications, training, and credentialing programs. As with the previous driver, this one potentially deprives many worthy candidates of the access to BICSI’s publications and training and, ultimately, taking the RCDD exam.

The final driver rests on the momentum being created as technology begins to converge onto the very communications structure



in which BICSI is expert. Many market sectors, such as security, building automation, audio/video (A/V), and others are evolving into Internet Protocol (IP)-based systems, and those systems along with their analog cousins all require a communications infrastructure. Both the designers of these emerging IP-friendly technologies and the contractor base that installs and integrates them, often find themselves in need of the basic ITS knowledge that BICSI has accumulated and refined for more than three decades. For that reason, many of these industries, their designers, and contractors are beginning to look to BICSI to fill the publication, training, and credentialing void for IP-based ITS infrastructure for emerging and converging technologies. Because many industries stipulate that up to 30% of the overall budget for their respective low-voltage system consists of ITS infrastructure, this means that unless BICSI becomes the source for converged publications, training, and credentials, the increased resources needed simply to train installation personnel could become a barrier to convergence. ITS contractors are already beginning to complain about the requirements from each manufacturer to attend proprietary design and installation training. This problem would increase exponentially if it were multiplied by each new system, subsystem and manufacturer supplying low-voltage equipment for building automation, industrial, security, A/V and others.

Hansen: Several of our members have told us they want to be an “NTS” or “OSP” or “WD” Specialist, but they don’t want to take the RCDD in order to do it. This has been a very consistent message for many years. It only makes sense to open these up to our members without having to be an RCDD in order to get their Specialty.

Communication plans

CI&M: *Has BICSI taken measures to communicate its plans for NxtGEN to current credential holders? If so, what has the feedback been?*

Dunfee: The BICSI President and Board of Directors are committed to informing members about the NxtGEN Program through PowerPoint presentations, regional meetings, conference sessions, *BICSI News*, the BICSI web site, and news articles such as this. To date, there have been relatively few issues or concerns regarding the NxtGEN Program. As the program is implemented, there will most assuredly be more questions to answer. Every question, concern, and issue will be considered important, and will be addressed and relayed to the membership through methods as mentioned above.

Hansen: I have heard only good things from our members at Breakfast Clubs and Region Meetings. They like the fact that they could get their Specialty without having to hold the RCDD, and they also like the fact that we are “grandfathering” in the existing RCDDs.

Bakowski: I agree—feedback has been very positive. Once people hear about what we are doing, inevitably,

everyone realizes this is a good step in the right direction for BICSI. Our members are forward-thinking, and they recognize that our industry is fast-moving. BICSI needs to deliver the industry what it demands.

What about non-members?

CI&M: *One of the effects of NxtGEN will be that non-BICSI members will attain BICSI credentials. For those non-members—as well as BICSI members who are not very familiar with your credentialing program—what should their first step be?*

Dunfee: Most of the success of the NxtGEN program will be dependent upon the efforts of BICSI itself. BICSI has already instituted a general awareness ad campaign through popular magazines and periodicals that will introduce the BICSI name and prestige to other groups. In addition, BICSI is spending the time and resources to clarify its present and future stakeholders, and will be developing strategies to effectively bring these stakeholders into our fold. This will mean developing simple and painless procedures for not only awareness, but to create a demand that will spur on action from these stakeholders. BICSI intends to re-educate its staff to know, believe, and show that customer satisfaction will be the key to its success. This will be the guiding principal for the NxtGEN program.

Bowman: One of the drivers of the NxtGEN effort is to adapt the formats and delivery methods of our publications, training, and certifications. We are exploring new methods of communicating with our members, customers, and credential holders. Consistent with our efforts to do a better job of using diverse methods and media, we also offer a variety of ways for potential customers and/or candidates for credentialing to assess the best credentialing path and the appropriate next steps. In addition to the tremendous amount of information on the BICSI web site about the RCDD, Specialties, and Technician program as well as the supporting classes and publications, we also publish an exhaustive catalog—and for some time have offered real-time one-on-one career counseling via our 800 number. As the media and methods of communication continue to evolve, we will evolve with them. We are already providing a variety of Web-based tools and services, such as our Forums Community, MySpace, YouTube, and other social mass collaboration-type media.

Donelan: The implementation phase is anticipated to take upwards of two years for the entire BICSI NxtGEN business plan to take effect. During this phase, BICSI will provide a variety of media resources to assist the BICSI NxtGEN candidate in determining the next steps toward success in their careers. We remain committed to advancing the knowledge and success of our members, their customers, and the ITS industry. ✕®