

How to Become a Certified Fiber Optic Technician

This article discusses how one can become an industry recognized, certified fiber optic technician. Since 1999, BDI DataLynk has had the opportunity to train many individuals from all over the United States, Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands, Africa, Russia, Germany, and the UK, as well as individuals living on Islands in the Dutch Antilles. Some students are attending our courses to either change their current occupation or add to their growing list of personal, industry-accepted, certifications. Many of our students have absolutely no experience in any telecommunications related field. Some are cooks, fireman, policemen, pilots, military, and ex-military, while others do not speak the English language. Our talented and experienced instructors are providing training that is easy to understand, low cost, and, most importantly, they are providing training that is sanctioned by an industry recognized fiber optic training authority - the Fiber Optic Association (FOA).

The first item of concern when attempting to obtain any technical certification is to write down a business plan for yourself. It matters not if you intend to become an employee or an independent. In either case you are in business for yourself. Your ideals, goals, financial and physical capabilities are yours and yours alone and only you can decide how to best use them. Be advised, there is someone out there always trying to get your job, so you must place yourself one step ahead of them and continue to educate yourself. Never ever stop learning. Even after taking a BDI DataLynk class – after taking any course actually, one should never take the position that they have all of the education they need to succeed in that particular industry. The minute you do this someone will pass you by taking your job with them. Learning is a continuous process. Develop good study habits and keep them honed.

Never assume you can learn a new trade or enhance an old one by viewing tons of video tapes. Let me tell you right now installing, testing and learning to properly maintain a copper or fiber optics network is 99.9% hands on. One CANNOT learn to install a fiber optics connector or RJ-45 UTP (Unshielded Twisted Pair) connector by watching a video. You must have the tools and parts in hand to be familiar with how they feel, function, and assemble. So it is very important that you DO NOT spend tons of money on expensive “how to” videos. Take this money and attend a fiber optics class that puts the tools and procedures in your mind by doing – not by watching. More importantly, you must have an experienced instructor guiding you in person, correcting you in person, and certifying you in person. There is no other way for a certifying entity that is internationally recognized to insure you are, in fact, a truly certifiable fiber optics technician after the class.

You should avoid attending large classes where there is an instructor lecturing and half a dozen “training technicians” teaching. In many cases the instructor and the training technician have had little or no practical hands on, in the field experience and teach opinions rather than procedures. Avoid classes that move you from table to table attempting to teach every connector and termination procedure in the world, as well as every piece of equipment from every manufacture under the sun. You will not remember most of them and instead of learning you will be swimming in your own confusion as well as everyone else’s confusion. Also – one CANNOT learn enough about the basic theory of fiber optics network installation in a one or two day class. Most of the training companies offering these one and two day classes are providing “certifications” that are worth near zero in the marketplace. Also, you should obtain an industry-recognized certification that is sanctioned by fiber optics people (FOA) not a certification that is sanctioned by electronics people (ETA). Makes lots of sense doesn’t it?

Forget about on the job training (OJT). Many of the so-called “trained and experienced” technicians that have been doing it for years could be teaching you old and outdated techniques. Many of these “experienced” technicians may be teaching you opinions they have developed over the years (right or wrong) and not procedures. Besides, in order to obtain a certification that is actually industry recognized, you must pass a written and practical exam. Do you think the “training” from the old salt is going to prepare you to pass these exams? Not a chance! We continue to get some of these “experienced” old salts in our classes. It is not a pretty picture. Learn to do the right things right the first time.

Once you have decided to properly educate yourself in fiber optics networking technology thoroughly investigate your training company. Here are some questions to consider:

- Do they offer a curriculum that is written, maintained and sanctioned by college professors or by experienced fiber optics technicians with years of experience?
- Do they provide a certification that is sanctioned by electronics (ETA) people or by fiber optics (FOA) people?
- Do they intend to support you in the field by email or phone, or do they disappear after they take your money?
- Can they provide you with a list of satisfied students and customers that you can contact for reference?
- Do they attempt to sell you tools, equipment and “training” videos that you do not need?
- Is their program over priced?
- Will you be able to contact the sanctioning entity (FOA or ETA) and talk with someone that is industry savvy about the certification?

- Can you contact your instructor and ask questions about the class or, better yet, can you contact your instructor after class when you get to the field and ask questions about specific problems?

Once you've decided on the fiber optics training company of your choice, what are you going to do about marketing your new certification once it's obtained? You have something very important to share now, how do you intend to get the word out?

You should find out which companies in your area are installing fiber. Keep in mind that many of their technicians have no formal fiber optics training. By statistics, based on the attendees of our courses, this is a proven fact. There are, in fact, companies out in the industry right now that have fiber optics technicians that have had little or no formal fiber optics network training. I received a call from one of these companies just this past week. The individual called me and introduced himself and his company. During this introduction he mentioned that his company was a Fiber Optics Contractor.

The individual on the phone told me that his company had just completed the installation of a fiber optics network for a Texas Municipality. The Municipality had also purchased a Power Source and Light Meter so they could test their own network which, I might add, is a good idea. The company representative said that he failed to read the small print of his contract he had received from the municipality and found that, as part of this contract, his company also had to provide training on how to use this equipment. He asked if BDI DataLynk could provide this training for four or five of the city network technicians. I was surprised by this request as the gentleman mentioned in his initial introduction that his company was a "Fiber Optics Networking Contractor" which would create the assumption that his company had qualified fiber optics technicians on staff.

The use of a fiber optics power source and light meter (OLTS) should be no problem for a technician that is truly a certified fiber optics technician. Showing a group of individuals (customers) how to set up and test a segment of fiber should be an easy task for a trained fiber optics technician – especially a BDI DataLynk trained fiber optic technician. I explained in detail to this gentleman that any of his truly qualified fiber optics techs should be able to instruct these IT personnel on how to turn on the equipment and perform a simple fiber optics segment test. His comment to me was, "well our guys just know how to pull cable". I responded by saying, "you mean to tell me that you install fiber and do not properly test it?" There was a moment of silence. Finally the guy said, "... look the City wants a complete training curriculum created to completely train their personnel on how to use the equipment". My response was, "... and you actually missed that clause when you read the contract?" I further advised him that one of his trained technicians could spend about an hour and demonstrate how to use the equipment, analyze the results and thus satisfy his contract that he apparently failed to read in

full. As a matter of fact, the equipment actually comes with a very detailed CD that provides information on how to use and set up the equipment. His “trained” fiber optics technician could have made copies of the information and given them out during the short training/hands-on session.

Based on his responses to me, I was convinced that this was yet another Fiber Optics Contractor that was in dire need of training themselves. My final response to him was, “I really do not have the time to drive to Dallas for a 4-hour session on how to use a basic power source and light meter”. I further suggested that we had on-going scheduled training sessions in almost every state in the south, as well as, sessions scheduled for his immediate area. He promptly hung up on me. You can see right away that the individual became very defensive when I indirectly questioned his technician’s ability to perform the most basic task in fiber optics networking and that is the proper use of a power source and light meter.

So you see there are companies out there right now that are installing fiber that desperately need qualified fiber optics technicians. Here’s what you do. Go to the Yahoo Yellow pages and follow these steps:

- On the right hand, top area of the page, change the location to where ever you want to work.
- On the sub menu that appears click on “Computers and Internet”
- Another sub menu will appear. You should click on “Communications and Networking”.
- You will then see a list of every Computer Networking Company in and around your area.
- Pick the first 25 and send a brief cover letter along with your resume and copies of your certificates to these companies.
- But! Be sure you investigate these companies via the internet to find out who the honcho is so you can personalize your letter by sending it directly to him or her.
- Look at the company website and learn all you can about the company because you might get the opportunity to interview and the first impression (first call from them) is usually the most important. It pleases them when someone is familiar with their company.

You are probably wondering how you should set up your cover letter. Here are some simple guidelines that will get your mind moving. Be sure to create a cover letter that is only about a paragraph in length. Never ramble on about yourself with two or three pages. Your job prospect will think you love yourself too much and they really don’t have the time to read it

anyway if they are busy and busy companies are where you want to send your information. If you do not have professional letterhead, make yourself look like a professional by printing in large letters at the top of the page (and centered of course) the following: From the Desk of and Your Name. Directly under that put add your address, phone number and email address. You must get with the program and get you an email address. Some students come to our classes without an email address. Come on – everybody should have an email address so get one. Believe it or not, we once had a gentleman come to our class with no personal phone number.

In the body (information area) of your cover letter you should have something that is written like this: Hello Mr. or Ms. (Whomever), I would like to introduce myself to your company. I have just been certified as a fiber optics technician from an industry recognized fiber optics training organization, BDI DataLynk, LLC. These programs are accredited by BICSI and sanctioned by the Fiber Optic Association (FOA). The subject matter included fiber optics theory, installation and testing of fiber optic networks (both single and multimode) per industry standards and also provided for comprehensive written and practical exams designed to test my knowledge as well as my hands on capabilities. I would like to meet with you at your convenience to discuss how my training could be an asset to your company. I am free Tuesday or Friday of next week if that meets your schedule. Thank you very much and I look forward to speaking with you. Sincerely, your name.

What about a web page? This is an excellent method for letting the free world know who you are and what you do. Download Yahoo Sitebuilder from the Yahoo web site. This is by far the easiest web page builder in the world. Take a look at our BDI DataLynk site and our Fiber Optics Tools.Com site and you will see what I mean. I had no training at all when I started building those sites and now they are very popular in the fiber optics industry. We currently receive over 5, 000 visitors per month on each of our sites. You do not need that many hits on your 3 to 5 page site to be successful, however. Create your own web page. The cost for almost unlimited space (which you will never need) is only about \$12.00 per month which is a tax deductible business expense. Download the free software (free is good) and get busy. There are tons of pre-made index pages contained in that software and if you can copy and paste and type a little bit, you can build you a page that represents you AND what you do.

So there it is - most of what you need to get started in the fiber optics industry or any industry for that matter. All you need now is to make the right decision on your fiber optics education.

Doing the right things right the first time will make all the difference in the world.

Prepare to Learn! --- *Bob Ballard, RCDD, CFOI, Owner*