

ICE Digest: 2015 Q1 Edition

Message from the Executive Director

[Growing and Thriving](#)

By Denise Roosendaal, CAE

Features

[Key Legal Issues for Certification Bodies: An Ever-Changing Landscape](#)

By Jefferson C. Glassie, JD, FASAE, and Donald A. Balasa, JD, MBA

[Reconciling Gamification with Defensible Assessment](#)

By Greg Sadesky, Gillian Lemermeyer and Jason Suriano

[Be On Guard for Cybersecurity Breaches](#)

By Jefferson C. Glassie, Esq., FASAE, and Stacey L. Pine, Esq.

[Customer Engagement: The \(Often\) Missing Ingredient in Certifiers' Success](#)

By Lenora G. Knapp, PhD

CEO Profile

[Shannon Carter, MA, CAE, of Competency & Credentialing Institute](#)

Special Thanks to the Industry Partners Who Made the 2015 Q1 Edition Possible



Growing and Thriving

By Denise Roosendaal, CAE



The Institute for Credentialing Excellence is growing and thriving. If you attended the 2014 ICE Exchange in November of last year, you've heard the news about the many new programs developed in 2014 and the plans for 2015. I have outlined many of those highlights here. Of all these new programs, nothing is more important than hearing from members who truly see ICE as a community for credentialing specialists and executive directors and report that membership has been a valuable experience.

Before you read the highlights below, I want to emphasize the quality of this Q1 issue of *ICE Digest*. The publication has grown and thrived over the past year as well, and exciting things are on the horizon. Some of the features in this issue include an article on the key legal issues for certification bodies in today's changing landscape; one on the relatively new field of gamification; and a profile of CCI's CEO.

Professional Development

[Cert 201](#) and the [Certificate for Credentialing Specialist](#) programs were both launched in 2014. The certificate program has already attracted over 50 participants, and this first class has officially closed. It will be reopened again in July of this year. Another professional development focus for 2015 will be on certificate fundamentals with a Certificate 101 online course and a Certificate track at the ICE Exchange.

ISO 17024

Based on the positive feedback received through the pilot program and from attendees at the ICE Exchange, the ISO 17024 will be pursued as additional/voluntary component for a NCCA accreditation. Some credentialing organizations feel the need to acquire the ISO 17024 accreditation for competitive or other marketplace demands. Through its partnership with International Accreditation Services, ICE will pursue a permanent program will allows for simultaneous application to NCCA and ISO 17024 accreditation.

Standards Revision

The organizations with NCCA accredited programs voted to approve the [Standards Revisions in November 2014](#). The changes will take effect Jan. 1, 2016. The NCCA commission and staff will take the next year to offer educational opportunities to you and your staff team on these changes. This will assist programs to understand the impact of the changes and allow for time to adjust for the next renewal period. Association life is certainly not without its challenges, however. ICE continues to respond to several important items that could impact you and your organization.

Government Affairs

ICE continues to be vigilant on monitoring those legislative or regulatory attempts to alter how accreditation is viewed or to help support/promote credentialing concepts. We continue to be concerned about some attempts throughout the country to license non-degree seeking training (e.g., certifications, certificates).

Lawsuit, Legal Action Fund

A lawsuit filed against ICE for an unsuccessful renewal application was ruled in favor of ICE in June 2014 by a California court. However, the case has now proceeded to an appeal level. ICE has created a legal action fund based on inquiries from members to assist with the case. More information can be found [here](#).

For more information about ICE's progress in 2014, read the [Annual Report](#).

Key Legal Issues for Certification Bodies: An Ever-Changing Landscape

By Jefferson C. Glassie, JD, FASAE, and Donald A. Balasa, JD, MBA

The importance and awareness of certification continue to increase in the United States and throughout the world. With this recognition come increasingly complex legal issues. The purpose of this article is to alert the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE) community to some recent developments in the legal environment for certification organizations.

Heightened Undue Influence Standards for Certification Programs

The new National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs (Standards) (effective Jan. 1, 2016) contains provisions regarding undue influence on, and impartiality for, certification programs. Governing bodies of certification entities must be vigilant to protect against undue influence. For example, the new NCCA Standards state that undue influence can be caused by a lack of balanced representation on the board or a significant number of directors appointed by a parent organization. Directors of certifying boards can best protect their programs from undue influence by fulfilling their fiduciary duties of care, loyalty, obedience and confidentiality, and by conscientiously carrying out their responsibilities as board members.

New Trademark Language in 2016 NCCA Standards

The following is a new Essential Element of the 2016 NCCA Standards:

“If a certifying body issues a trademark, service mark, or certification mark (‘mark’) to recognize achievement of a particular credential, the certifying body must have in place policies to ensure appropriate use of any such mark.”

Note also the following Commentary language accompanying this Essential Element:

“Only individuals who have been granted the certification and appropriately maintained the certification may use the mark. Use of the mark may only be made consistent with the scope for which the certification was granted and all applicable use policies of the certifying body, and not in a misleading or fraudulent manner. The certifying body’s policies should provide that it shall take all appropriate steps including legal or other action, such as requiring discontinuation of use of the marks or suspension or revocation of the certification, to protect its rights in the marks from unauthorized use.”

As certification programs prepare to demonstrate compliance with this Essential Element, they should be aware that trademarks, service marks and certification marks need not be registered with the United States Patent and Trademark Office for a program to have legally enforceable rights in its mark(s), though this may be advisable. Common law rights in marks are established by use in commerce over time, and these rights can be a basis for legal action against an infringer. The NCCA Standards provide that certification programs take all appropriate legal steps to protect certification marks from unauthorized use.

Copyright

Contrary to popular belief, test items written by volunteers do not automatically belong to the certification body. Test questions written by employees of certification programs as part of their scope of employment are owned by the program by virtue of the “work for hire” doctrine. However, volunteers are not covered by the work-for-hire doctrine unless there is a written transfer document, and the general legal principle is that the author of a written work (including a test question) owns the work. Therefore, it is imperative that certification programs ensure that they own their items by having volunteers sign transfer of copyright forms prior to writing items. These forms should be reviewed periodically by legal counsel, and signed forms should be kept on file by the certification program.

Cybersecurity

The certification industry is not immune from the computer security breaches that have become so frequent and, in some cases, so devastating. Exposure of all or part of a certifying body’s pool of test questions or personally identifiable information of candidates or certificants can be catastrophic. In addition, breach of privacy claims by certificants and candidates are a distinct possibility, and laws of many states impose additional notification and other requirements. For a detailed treatment of cybersecurity threats to certification programs, and how they can best protect themselves, see Jefferson Glassie’s article in this issue of *ICE Digest*.

Changes on IRS Form 990

Tax-exempt certification organizations should know that Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Form 990, “Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax,” and Form 990-EZ, “Short Form Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax,” were revised in 2014. Tax-exempt entities with gross annual receipts less than \$200,000, or total assets less than \$500,000 at the end of the tax year, are permitted to file the Form 990-EZ. Form 990 contains questions about the governing body and management of the tax-exempt organization, and requires the disclosure of compensation of officers, directors, trustees, and key employees. There are fewer of these types of questions

on Form 990-EZ. Small, not-for-profit certification programs may even be able to file Form 990-N — “Annual Electronic Notice for Small Organizations” — if their annual gross receipts are \$50,000 or less.

The ADA and “Flagging” of Score Reports of Accommodated Candidates

The credentialing community is significantly impacted by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). A persistent question is whether the score reports of disabled examinees can indicate that they were given accommodations. (This practice is referred to as “flagging.”) On May 19, 2014, a federal district court accepted a consent decree in a lawsuit against the Law School Admission Council (LSAC). The LSAC agreed to stop flagging the score reports of examinees who took the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) with accommodations. The United States Department of Justice was a party to the suit, and took the position that flagging test scores of disabled examinees is impermissible under the ADA.

Although a consent decree does not have as much precedential weight as a decision by a court, the testing and measurement industry should be mindful that the current official position of the Department of Justice is that flagging constitutes a violation of the American with Disabilities Act. Of course, certification programs must continue to comply with other provisions of the ADA, such as requiring accommodations to persons with disabilities, and the rules for certain types of disabilities continue to change.

Conflict of Interest in 2016 NCCA Standards

Avoiding and managing conflicts of interest continue to be major legal and ethical considerations for certification programs. The following Essential Element of the 2016 NCCA Standards emphasizes the necessity of signed conflict of interest statements and their enforcement:

“The certification program must have a record of and enforce signed conflict of interest agreements with all personnel involved in certification decisions or examination development, implementation, maintenance, delivery, and updating. The certification program must identify who may serve as a proctor, examiner, or judge for any examinations, and documentation must specify the rules and conditions for serving in these capacities.”

However, there is an important legal distinction between disqualifying conflicts of interest and conflicts of interest in particular situations. The following Commentary language for this Essential Element clarifies this important difference:

“There may not be a disqualifying conflict of interest (either clear, potential, or perceived) in an individual’s overall capacity to serve, but limited situations may arise where that individual’s participation may raise concerns about a potential conflict of interest. In these situations, the organization should follow policies and procedures to recuse the individual from part or all of the discussion and/or vote.”

The Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE) will keep the credentialing community up to date about pertinent legal developments. Questions about this article may be addressed to Jefferson Glassie at jglassie@wtplaw.com and Donald Balasa at dbalasa@aama-ntl.org.



Jefferson C. Glassie, Esq., FASAE, is a partner and co-chair of the Nonprofit Organizations and Associations practice at Whiteford, Taylor & Preston LLC. Glassie represents associations and nonprofit organizations on a wide range of legal matters, including antitrust, tax, certification, accreditation, contracts, employment, merger, intellectual property and corporate issues. He has concentrated on the field of nonprofit membership organizations for over 30 years.



Donald A. Balasa, JD, MBA, has served as CEO and Legal Counsel of the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) since 1990. He served previously as staff attorney for the American Dental Assistants Association. Balasa received both his baccalaureate and law degrees from Northwestern University and his Master of Business Administration in economics from the University of Chicago. He earned his Certified Association Executive (CAE) designation from the American Society of Association Executives in 1985. He served on the NCCA from 2007 to 2013 and as chair from 2010 to 2013.

Reconciling Gamification with Defensible Assessment – The CARNA Jurisprudence Project

By Greg Sadesky, Gillian Lemermeyer and Jason Suriano

Mentioning the word “gamification” in an assessment context is likely to bring up images of laser beams annihilating prime numbers, or performing virtual cardiac microsurgery. Though it’s certainly true that the potential for these kinds of applications exist, a more mainstream application of gaming principles in the licensure/certification context has more to do with assessing knowledge than attaining high scores and performing psychomotor tasks. Using gaming in this way has the potential to provide more engaging learning opportunities for candidates while supporting defensible assessment of competence. Our recent experience in building exactly such a tool is an excellent example of both.

Background

In January 2013, the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA) sought out partners to help it realize the goal of creating a module to teach and assess registered nurses in Alberta about the principles and application of jurisprudence to their profession. CARNA had the specific intent to craft the module in such a way as to engage and support RNs in acquiring this knowledge, while at the same time using performance on the module as a means to determine the competence of the RN relative to required standards. These apparently incongruous objectives, engagement and defensible assessment, were to be reconciled in the same platform. Enter gamification.

CARNA chose to work with two Edmonton-based partners to create the module: RocketFuel Games, specialists in creating educational online games; and Yardstick, experts in the development and delivery of defensible assessment. The plan was deceptively straightforward. CARNA would provide the oversight and direction as well as the provision of subject matter experts in nursing jurisprudence. Yardstick would facilitate the creation of the assessments according to psychometric best practice principles, and RocketFuel would develop the gaming environment in which content would be imported and RNs would be engaged and assessed.

Module Design

Right from the outset of this collaboration, it was clear that arriving at the final design of the module would require many conversations and negotiations about how to reconcile the principles of game design with requirements for psychometric defensibility. We knew that certain principles and requirements were fundamental and were not up for such negotiation. In particular, consistent with principles of gaming articulated in McGonigal (2011) the jurisprudence module would include a goal (completion of all challenges in the module, maximizing point totals); rules (tasks to be solved correctly, and completed in specific sequences); and a feedback system (points for successful completion, attainment of badges).

Similarly, fundamental psychometric principles had to be adhered to as well. In particular, all tasks had to align with jurisprudence competencies. Taken together, the tasks had to follow an examination blueprint; items had to meet industry best practice and statistical standards; and the passing score on the module was to be set using defensible methods. As it turns out, even adhering to these seemingly onerous requirements on both sides left considerable room for flexibility.

Each decision was discussed and weighed as a group, keeping in mind the bottom line of achieving both a valid way to assess competence and an interesting way to educate and support RNs to become curious about jurisprudence. We used a principle-based approach supported by questions such as: How far can we go (with gamification) before the assessment is at risk? What factors must we keep to realize the spirit of gamification? As can be seen below, some negotiations that we thought might be a compromise of either gaming or psychometric principles turned out to better align the module with its purpose to engage and support RNs.

Scene-Based Delivery

One characteristic of games not often seen in assessment design is the division of the overall module into stages or scenes. The overall challenge represented in a game is typically broken into subchallenges such as individual screens, battles or opponents. With the possible exception of adaptive testing, assessments are usually given in one sitting with no apparent progression or sequence. However, the CARNA jurisprudence module was to be created consistent with the gaming principles, in nine separate “scenes,” each of which represented a unique combination of competencies. Each scene featured a unique image that represented these competencies,

such as a statue representing justice, or the CARNA head office. Superimposed on each image was a series of “hot spots” that prompted the user to various actions in a defined sequence. The progression within a scene was as follows. First, users were prompted to read content that described the focus of the scene. Then, a number of hotspots were activated, under each of which there were a number of formative assessment tasks. These tasks, further described below, were there to provide feedback to users on their answers and thus assess their knowledge of jurisprudence without being formally evaluated. Upon completion of the formative tasks, a final set of hot spots would become active whose tasks were used for determining the competence of the user on the competencies featured in the scene.

From an educational perspective, scenes were used in order to align specific instructional and source information documents with the assessment activities. This configuration also worked well from the gaming perspective because each scene represented a discrete challenge to be mastered by the user. However, this configuration required some unique design to ensure the proper representation of blueprinted assessment content. In particular, since each of the first eight scenes could represent only two of six competencies, the scenes were assembled to ensure that all the content across all scenes matched the blueprint. Next, the mapping of cognitive levels of scenes was made so that knowledge-based questions dominated early scenes, while application of that knowledge were more emphasized in later ones. This last decision was made to be consistent with principles of learning; knowledge itself is required before application of the knowledge is possible.

Task Types

Another key decision we had to make concerned the nature of the tasks that we would incorporate into the game. We all recognized that, although they were appropriate for assessment of knowledge-based outcomes such as those in jurisprudence, multiple-choice questions alone didn’t exactly promote the kind of engagement CARNA intended. At the same time, tasks more typical of gaming probably would overshoot the requirements (and resources) of the project.

We found the balance between these competing constraints by selecting tasks from the “Intermediate Constraint Tasks” framework developed by Scalise & Gifford (2006). The tasks in the framework are objectively scored and psychometrically vetted but allow for some expansion of scope in both stimulus and response. From this framework, we selected four tasks for inclusion in the module: a serial multiple-select task and three drag-and-drop item types: classification, ordering and matching. By providing this variation in response format, the experience of using the module felt less like traditional assessment but still adhered to the psychometric requirements of the module.

Formative vs. Summative Assessment

The function of the CARNA module was both to educate and assess RNs in essential jurisprudence knowledge in a way that engaged RNs. Accordingly, each task described above behaved differently depending on whether its purpose was to facilitate learning or assess competence. In the formative assessments, selecting an incorrect response would elicit instant

feedback of up to two varieties. In all cases, selecting incorrectly would result in a disappointed tuba-like sound and the item dragged to the incorrect category or location would snap back to the original location. Selection tasks, like multiple-choice and serial multiple-select would not allow the user to continue to the next question until the correct selection was made and, as a timer counted down, the incorrect answers disappeared, in order to lead the participant to the correct answer. In contrast, during the summative assessments no music, snap back, timer or other feedback was provided to the user after responses were made.

Progression

It was mentioned above that knowledge-based questions outnumbered application-based questions in early scenes, while in later ones, application-based questions dominated. Other characteristics of the ordering of tasks in the module were also made to support learning. In particular, to address the concern that some users might not be comfortable or familiar with certain tasks types, all of them were first introduced to users in the formative environments, often in a prior scene, before required for demonstration of competence. Moreover, clear instructions were provided on how to correctly answer each question type. Also, the final scene comprised questions from all competencies, much like a final confrontation with the “big boss” seen in the final challenge of many video games.

How Do They Like It?

The ultimate intent of all these design decisions was to make the module engaging, user friendly and educationally sound. As a result, one of the key outcomes would be to determine if users actually enjoyed the experience of using the module and learned the content represented within it. From the data in Table 1 below, it would appear that the module clearly accomplished these objectives.

Statement / Question	Response	%
“I felt engaged and interested in the subject matter.”	Agree, Somewhat or Strongly	86.5
“I am motivated to learn more about jurisprudence after this experience.”	Agree, Somewhat or Strongly	78.9
“This experience provided me with new information.”	Agree, Somewhat or Strongly	88.5
“Will what you learned influence your practice?”	YES	84.3

Table 1: User Ratings of the CARNA Jurisprudence Module Impact

Ultimately, gaming principles have many possible applications to assessment. In the present context, the acquisition of knowledge of jurisprudence, our experience shows that through careful attention to design, the creation of a “gamified” module that meets the objectives of a credentialing body like CARNA and that users find engaging and supporting can be achieved.

References

McGonigal, J. (2011). *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*. Penguin.

Scalise, K., & Gifford, B. R. (2006). Computer-Based Assessment in E-Learning: A Framework for Constructing "Intermediate Constraint" Questions and Tasks for Technology Platforms. *Journal of Teaching, Learning and Assessment*, 4 (6).



Greg Sadesky joined Yardstick Software in 2009, following six years working in K-12 assessment for the Alberta Ministry of Education and as a private consultant. As executive VP of psychometrics, he works with a talented team, bringing state-of-the-art psychometric solutions to clients. As a psychometrician, he has a personal mission to demystify psychometrics to clients and stakeholders alike.



Gillian Lemermeyer led the project to develop a jurisprudence requirement for registration with the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta. Lemermeyer's clinical nursing practice was in neonatal intensive care, organ donation and bereavement care for families. Her graduate work focused on relational ethics and its emphasis on ethical action being situated in our relationships with each other and with the community.



Jason Suriano is the founder, CEO and creative director of Rocketfuel Games, creators of Trajectory, a game-powered training and testing software platform. Suriano has more than 11 years of experience, having created over 200 online, mobile and game-powered applications for clients such as Discovery Communications, ATCO Electric and the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta. Suriano is the former executive director of the Alberta ICT Council and volunteered as the co-chair of the Communications for the Advertising Club of Edmonton.

Be On Guard for Cybersecurity Breaches

By Jefferson C. Glassie, Esq., FASAE, and Stacey L. Pine, Esq.

Over the last few years, cyber attacks on businesses have become a regular occurrence. The banking, retail, gaming and health care industries have all fallen victim to cyber attacks. The news media has been replete with stories about for-profit businesses experiencing security lapses or breaches by hackers, but nonprofit certification programs can also be targeted.

Personally Identifiable Information

Today's cyber criminals are attacking in many ways and searching for many forms of data. The personal identifying information of an organization's customers, members and employees is highly valuable. This information can be used to make fraudulent purchases and also serve as the means needed for identity theft. In most states, "personally identifiable information" means a person's name in combination with their Social Security number, driver's license number, bank, credit or debit card number, or taxpayer identification number. In some states, such as California and Florida, the definition of personally identifiable information is even broader. Because certification programs store a plethora of personally identifiable information about those applying for certification and those who have obtained certification, they are a prime target for cyber criminals.

What makes these organizations even more attractive, however, is the cyber criminal's knowledge that nonprofit organizations often do not have robust technology budgets and cannot afford to invest in the same high-tech data security systems found in many for-profit organizations. Breaches can also occur through negligence or mistakes by volunteers or staff inadvertently leaving computers or other electronic devices unsecured.

This puts certification programs at considerable risk for government investigations and fines, and lawsuits seeking damages for invasion of privacy, misappropriation of confidential information, and myriad other issues. In addition to legal risks, there are also the financial and practical ramifications associated with business interruption, providing notification of breaches to all those affected, and trying to protect the certification program's brand and reputation.

Cyber Attack Techniques

A cyber attack can take many forms. For instance, in the well-known Target case, after successfully penetrating an HVAC vendor's systems via a phishing email, cyber criminals then installed malware on Target's computer system and captured customer debit and credit card information. However, in several recent situations involving nonprofit associations, cyber criminals employed simple trickery to gain unauthorized access to organizational data. This trickery entailed cyber criminals pretending to be someone with authority within the association, a practice called "spoofing." In these cases, the cyber criminals created forged emails that appeared to originate from an organization executive and sent those emails to staff responsible for maintaining the association's email lists. The emails instructed the staff member to forward specific member information to the CEO's authentic work email address, along with a fraudulent email address identified as the CEO's personal email account. In each case, the

staff member complied with the request and unknowingly sent the email membership list to a hacker.

These types of attacks have a high success rate, primarily because they target specific staff members within an organization and use real names gleaned from publicly available sources, such as the organization's own website. Often those staff members are junior staff members who do not feel comfortable questioning a request that comes from the CEO or senior management.

Protecting Your Organization

Fortunately, there are some very simple steps an organization can take to protect itself against such an attack. From an Internet technology perspective, the organization should ensure that there are systems and controls in place to screen suspicious URLs and IP addresses and to block malicious materials. At least as important, however, is implementing training programs to educate staff members about such attacks, discussing with them the impact such an attack could have on the organization, and instructing them on how to handle suspicious emails or requests for organizational data. Staff should be instructed not to transmit important data without first verifying the identity of the recipient.

Almost all states now have strict laws regarding security breaches. As a result of this patchwork of state laws, if a certification program has certificants or applicants in multiple states and experiences a security breach with respect to protected personally identifiable information, that organization will be obligated to comply with the data breach notification laws for each state in which it has a certificant or applicant. These laws may impose different requirements on when and under what circumstances notification is required, and on the method and the content of the notification. Further, some state laws (such as those in Massachusetts and Maryland) now require business organizations, including nonprofit certification programs, to design and implement a written information security plan (WISP) for safeguarding organizational data. For this reason, certification programs should ensure they know the laws that apply to them and take all necessary steps, including developing a WISP, to protect their organizational data.

Finally, many organizations assume their general liability insurance policy will protect them from any damage or liability resulting from a cyber-attack. This is an ill-founded assumption, however. There have been various cases throughout the country addressing whether a general liability policy covers damage caused by cyber attacks, and the results are mixed. A recent case is *Zurich America Insurance v. Sony Corporation of America*, which was decided by the New York Supreme Court. In that case, more than 70 million PlayStation user accounts were compromised, and the PlayStation users filed suit against Sony. Sony's insurance company asked the court for a declaratory judgment regarding whether the policy protected Sony from a cyber attack. The court ruled that Sony's policy only covered security breaches committed by Sony, and not third-party hackers.

Conclusion

The lesson to be learned from the Sony case is that your general liability insurance policy may not protect your certification program from liability resulting from a cyber attack. Additionally, cyber attacks can cause damage to the organization's technology infrastructure. In some instances, general liability policies will not cover damage to computer systems sustained as a result of a cyber attack. For this reason, it is important for a certification program to have a discussion with its insurance provider about whether its general liability policy would cover liability as well as damage to the organization's computer system incurred as a result of a cyber-attack.

Readers interested in learning more about the subject of this article or other cyber security issues affecting nonprofit organizations may contact Jefferson Glassie at jglassie@wtplaw.com or Stacey Pine at spine@wtplaw.com.



Jefferson C. Glassie, Esq., FASAE, is a partner and co-chair of the Nonprofit Organizations and Associations practice at Whiteford, Taylor & Preston LLC. Glassie represents associations and nonprofit organizations on a wide range of legal matters, including antitrust, tax, certification, accreditation, contracts, employment, merger, intellectual property and corporate issues. He has concentrated on the field of nonprofit membership organizations for over 30 years.



Stacey Pine, Esq., is an associate at Whiteford, Taylor & Preston LLC. Pine counsels for-profit and nonprofit organizations on a variety of business, tax, regulatory and legislative matters. Prior to becoming an attorney, she was a lobbyist and spent 13 years representing the legislative interests of for-profit and nonprofit entities before Congress and the administration as well state and local governments. Pine earned her undergraduate degree from Methodist University, and also holds a MBA from Fayetteville State University. She graduated with honors from American University's Washington College of Law, is admitted in Virginia, and is pending admission in the District of Columbia.

Customer Engagement: The (Often) Missing Ingredient in Certifiers' Success

By Lenora G. Knapp, PhD

“Engagement” is your customers’ ongoing connection to your organization’s brand, staff and certification. It is developed through every interaction and touch point in the lifetime of your customers’ relationship with you. If these interactions are positive, your customers’ emotional and psychological investment in your certification will be strengthened.

Why does this matter? Research across industry verticals has shown that engaged customers:

- buy more
- have higher retention rates
- have greater trust in the brand
- are more loyal
- are more likely to recommend or advocate for the brand or product

Customer Satisfaction Is Not Customer Engagement

If you have high customer satisfaction ratings you may think you already have engaged customers. Think again. Although satisfaction is a necessary step in the process that ultimately leads to engagement, it is only the first step. These satisfied customers also must have an emotional or psychological investment in your certification. Consider the many products and services you routinely use and with which you are satisfied. With how many of these do you have a connection — one which is strong enough that you tell others about the product/service and you would remain a customer even if a less expensive option comes along? Satisfied customers who lack a bond with your certification are not engaged and have no motivation to spread the word about your certification.

What Is the Recipe for the “Secret Sauce” of Customer Engagement?

Step #1: Pre-heat

Before you mix together the ingredients of the secret sauce for customer engagement, you need to: 1) deeply understand your customers and 2) have a certification that truly satisfies their needs (versus trying to convince them that they should want what you offer). Listen to the voice of your customers, not just through formal market research, but also through speaking with them, tracking what is being said about you in social media and discussion groups, and documenting comments/reactions your call center staff receive. Also, map your customer touch points and walk through each touch point in your customers’ shoes. Look for opportunities to enhance customers’ experience, foster relationships with them and create greater value for your certification.

Using what you’ve learned, refine your offerings so they hit the “sweet spot” for the customer. Hitting this sweet spot is a prerequisite to engagement.

Step #2: Add ingredients

You're now ready to put together the basic ingredients for an engagement process. These ingredients include:

Putting a human face on your certification program. Create the impression that your organization is approachable, friendly and understanding (versus being a "standards cop"). Let customers see and get to know the people who work behind the scenes on your program. Being human goes a long way toward engaging customers and humor — which is so rarely used by certifiers — can be especially effective in this regard.

Co-creating with customers. Develop mechanisms through which customers can work in partnership with you, on an ongoing basis, to improve the certification program and the customer experience and to create greater value for the credential. A customer advisory council is one example of a co-creation mechanism. Two-way conversations help to establish and reinforce customers' bond with the certification. (Note that the ongoing nature of co-creation, the partnership involved, and the two-way nature of the experience distinguishes it from market research.)

Maintaining transparency and communicating effectively. You may already be transparent, but if you are like most certifiers, many of your customers (particularly candidates) still see the certification process as a black box. The terms we use to refer to what we do (e.g., "equating," "scaled scores" and "criterion-referenced standard setting") are foreign and the technical explanations we provide typically sound like hocus pocus to lay persons. Consequently, customers may not perceive your organization to be transparent even though you are sharing everything with them. Experiment to find the best messaging for your program and repeat these messages often.

Step #3: Stir in a dash of strategy

There should be a strategy underlying your engagement efforts. When developing this strategy, consider the following questions:

- What market segments or advocates do we want to engage with?
- What goals are we trying to accomplish? For example, are we trying to create emotional bonds with the certification or are we trying to encourage advocates to promote the credential?
- What is the best mechanism for engagement, given our goals and the groups we are trying to reach?
- What will motivate and appeal to customers?

Step #4: Bring to a boil

During this step you should:

- *Ignite engagement through providing regular and varied opportunities for customer interactions.* For example, this could be accomplished through a combination of blog

posts, co-creation opportunities, educational and networking events, moderated online discussions, and games and contests.

- *Give customers something to talk about and to share.* When people talk about your certification, it's like free advertising, only better, because word of mouth is more effective than traditional advertising and promotions and is extremely influential in purchase decisions. Make customer advocacy and word of mouth easy. For instance, provide bite-sized chunks of content which are easy to share (e.g., video links, tweetable quotes).

Step #5: Stir frequently

Keep in mind that engagement is an ongoing process, not an isolated campaign that has a start and a finish. Make engagement opportunities a routine part of your operations.

Lastly, deliver on your promises. Ensure that customers' experience with your organization remains positive and that your certification continues to meet their needs. The alignment between your promises and what is delivered will continue to fuel engagement.

Lenora G. Knapp, PhD, is the president of Knapp & Associates International Inc., a management consulting firm that has served more than 170 credentialing bodies over the last two decades. The firm's work is focused on helping organizations to maximize the business success of their credentialing programs through innovative marketing and business strategy. Lenora coauthored "The Business of Certification," a best-selling publication recognized by the American Society of Association Executives as one of "Six Books You and Your Association Need." She also founded the Knapp Certification Re-Think Tank™, an elite group of industry influencers assembled to rethink, redefine and reshape the business of certification. Knapp is a recipient of the Institute of Credentialing Excellence's prestigious Industry Leadership Award for innovation in the field of professional credentialing.

CEO Profile: Shannon Carter, MA, CAE, of Competency & Credentialing Institute



"Hire brilliant," is a phrase Shannon Carter, MA, CAE, says often when discussing her approach as chief executive officer of the Competency & Credentialing Institute (CCI). CCI, an organization certifying more than 34,000 operating room nurses, is built on a strong team of experts focused on pushing the competency assessment envelope.

"I see two important functions in my role as CEO," Carter, who has been with CCI for 15 years, said. "First is to recruit the smartest team I can to support the strategic goals of the organization, and second is to provide them with the resources they need to achieve those goals."

Carter might be considered the "communicator in chief," understanding the goal and communicating the progress toward achieving that goal to the board and team members. "I

manage to the outcome,” Carter said. “The team knows what they need to, they do it, and I stay out of their way.”

Carter also believes engagement within the credentialing community and among others serving in a similar role is essential to growing both her organization and the industry as a whole. She is an active member of ICE, currently serving on the board of directors, and is the past chair of the Program Committee.

ICE Digest learned more about her role as CCI’s CEO and an ICE leader.

What is the biggest difference you see at CCI from when you started there 15 years ago?

Our mission now focuses on certification as a point on an individual’s lifelong learning continuum. Certification is a critical point in career development, and we have positioned ourselves to be more engaged before and after that point in the last decade. We have grown beyond one exam and expanded our portfolio of products to include four exams, two certificate programs and a suite of test preparation products.

CCI is a separately incorporated certifying agency. What is your relationship with the membership association for OR nurses and how has it changed?

This is an interesting question that has been answered differently in the past. At times, it has been more strained, while other times we have thrived as partners. The constant is that it is always evolving. Currently, we are actively engaged with the membership association to evaluate our core strengths and competencies to determine the value we individually bring to the community. Our challenge is to define a partnership that allows for autonomy but also builds on synergies. In our experience, success depends on having a champion for the relationship in each group to address questions and keep energies focused on the opportunities.

What three questions or concepts is your organization asking as they plan for the future?

How do we identify and leverage strategic partnerships to deliver learning to our certificants who need it? What is our role as a “learning” organization, and how can we enhance that role? How do we scale our offerings to larger audiences efficiently and cost effectively?

Are there industry trends that you believe we should paying closer attention to as we plan within our own organizations?

We believe consumers are going to demand continued competence beyond initial certification. The challenge we discuss with regards to this is motivating individuals to meet enhanced standards for demonstrating their ongoing competence for a voluntary certification. We also believe research will play an increasingly important role in educating employers about the value

of certification and why they should hire a certified workforce. This is an area where we are focusing more energy.

As an engaged member of the ICE community, what would you like to learn from other certifying agencies?

There are a few key areas where I believe, as an industry, we need to focus. The first is technology. How, as relatively smaller organizations, do we better keep up with the costs, demand and opportunities technology offers? This also holds true for data integration. How are others integrating their data and using it more as a tool to advance and grow their business? Finally, I believe we all have to share the responsibility in building the pipeline of future leaders in the certification industry and how we develop these future leaders.

What is the benefit of your ICE membership?

I have loved sharing in and building a network of leaders through this organization. It is a network that I believe is getting stronger and more organized.