The Art & Value of Building Credentialed or Certified eLearning Programs

White Paper

Published 2017
Executive Summary

Credentialing or certifying eLearning content — especially if an organization is at the beginning stages of online learning development — can be a complex process. Even those who have valuable content to offer may be deterred if they aren’t familiar with the scope of work needed to succeed. But, in the long run, offering credentialed and certified content is worth the extra effort and time — offering benefits to an organization and its learners. Because these courses offer more value to learners — including required continuing education for licensure — certified or credentialed eLearning programs tend to be priced higher than other eLearning courses. They also require a higher level of instructional design and content development expertise.

Additionally, there must be technical tools in place to present and distribute the online content in adherence to the industry’s standards, including online certification. The value proposition must be made clear so the learner is motivated to take the course. Finally, the development process must be streamlined to enable the organization to build the eLearning program into a true business and revenue-generator.

Organizations embarking upon this endeavor face several challenges. First, they must have familiarity with the accrediting bodies and their unique requirements, including an understanding of the level of planning and amount of information that must be provided to that organization to verify the credits or credentials being earned.

By detailing best practices, keys for success and a real-world case study, this white paper aims to help organizations determine if creating certificated or credentialed content for their eLearning programs is a worthwhile undertaking. It will also help companies determine if they have the staff, expertise and resources to be successful.
SECTION 1

Credentialing, Certifying, CME & MOC – Making Sense of the Terms
Creating courses for certification or credentialing creates a high-value learning experience. Often, this learning is required for licensure or is a gateway to growing a successful career.

**Key Terms**

**Credentialing**

Credentialing is typically offered by a third party as proof or verification of an individual’s qualification or competence in a broad area, such as association management. It is valuable for career advancement; demonstrates a commitment to an association, community or profession; and helps prove professional competence.

**Certification**

Certification is a more formal process that an individual follows to attain professional qualification or competence on a specific topic, such as a medical subspecialty. Certifications are generally administered by national boards or accredited providers that specify the education, training, competency, and examination requirements to achieve certification and re-certification. Certification may or may not be required as part of the licensure process.

**Accreditation**

There are also certain terms that relate specifically to the medical profession. Accreditation for healthcare is a recognition by an independent professional organization or nongovernmental agency (accredited provider) that a healthcare entity has met predetermined standards. An organization or teaching institution is accredited, not an educational course or program.
Continuing Medical Education (CME)
CME encompasses ongoing learning activities required for physicians and other healthcare practitioners throughout their career. CME helps doctors maintain, develop or expand knowledge.

Maintenance of Certification (MOC)
MOC is a four-part continuing education process for physicians (primarily those certified before 1990). MOC ensures physicians are keeping up with learning and accessing their knowledge of the latest scientific developments and changes in practice and specialty areas.
SECTION 2

The Value of Certifying & Credentialing eLearning Content
Often, an organization will develop online learning, but may be unsure if they want to attach a certification or provide credentialed training. There are some compelling reasons for taking this extra step as a benefit not only to the organization, but also to the learners.

Credentialed and certified content enables an organization to leverage its existing reputation and body of knowledge. It also enhances an organization’s reputation and credibility by establishing it as an expert in the field. Marketed properly, the content can be a revenue-generator by opening previously untapped streams of income through new learners. Finally, credentialing can attract new members to membership organizations. If someone wants a credential in a certain topic area, for instance, they will more likely join the organization that is creating the credential if the organization is membership-based.

For an organization’s staff and membership, credentialed courses validate the learners’ expertise, making them marketable for promotions, advancements and raises. For certain industries and professions, this learning content fulfills requirements for licensure. Because most organizations offer a discount for their members to take their courses, it can be a very cost effective way for members to obtain continuing education. Finally, taking these types of courses gives individuals credibility in their profession. It is a clear way of highlighting a learner’s expertise and enables them to build their reputation and professional profile.

- Enhance reputation
- Validate learners’ expertise
- Generate revenue
- Leverage body of knowledge
- Attract new members
- Build credibility
- Grow professional profile
- Fulfill requirements for licensure
- Expert in field
- Marketable for advancements
You’ve conducted your needs assessment. You know the knowledge gap you’re filling. But now you need to determine if the course content is worthy of the time and effort needed to credential or certify it.

### Six Questions to Ask Yourself Before Credentialing Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What are your learning objectives? Consider the outcome measurements your content will achieve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Who is your target audience and does your course offer value to those learners? Think about the benefits of employment, promotion and public recognition of expertise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Is your content evidence-based? Evaluate if your course deals with real data or real experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Have you identified a faculty member who is an expert in the field? Choose a qualified person to create your content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Is the topic relevant to the organization that is certifying the content?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Does your company or organization have the expertise to handle this project? Consider increased staffing or if hiring a company to help is an option.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION 3

Credentialed & Certified Content Creation – Best Practices
There is a broad spectrum of learning techniques — from very simple to very sophisticated — that can be implemented to create eLearning content that is interactive, engaging, challenging, easy to use and, most importantly, helps enrollees succeed in retaining the skills offered through a certified curriculum.

**Learning Techniques**

**Mastery Learning Methods**
The focus is on students achieving a certain level of performance before moving on to the next unit in the course.

**Adaptive Learning**
Characterized by the modification of the presentation of materials in response to student performance (reminders, knowledge “ticklers” and retention enhancers, such as drip learning).

**Mapping Learning Techniques to Objectives**

For each of these learning techniques, organizations must map the content to learning objectives and map questions to specific content elements. Also, the content needs to be presented in small chunks to build flexibility into the content for each learner; this is known as a microlearning approach.

For many educational programs, personalizing learning experiences relative to specific topics helps expedite training. In healthcare, for example, this method is very effective for board review training. Physicians can very quickly see where their learning gaps are and focus on those areas, rather than wasting time reviewing skills they have already mastered.

For learners who must study for a final exam for a credential, certification or licensure, an online review course is critical. In fact, Scitent has found learners who take review courses are much more likely to succeed than those who do not take a prep course.
Creating Certified & Credentialed Content – Keys for Success
Creating relevant, engaging and successful eLearning content can be an arduous process. Add in the extra effort needed to credential, certify or license content, and it’s easy to become overwhelmed. Here are some lessons learned from Scitent’s 20 years of experience.

**Eight Keys to Success**

1. **Understand that eLearning is Different**
   Many organizations have a lot of content for live learning, but transitioning that content to an eLearning environment can be difficult. The eLearning experience is different for learners, not only in how they engage with the content 24/7, but also in how they interact with it for maximum retention.

2. **Conduct a Needs Assessment**
   Identify the gap the educational activity will fill in the industry. This can be anything from a knowledge gap to new guidelines that need to be addressed.

3. **Create Learning Objectives**
   Detailed learning goals and objectives are like the roadmap for online content. Once these are identified, assessments, subject matter, and eLearning tools can be tailored to support the goals and objectives.

4. **Align Goals & Objectives**
   If the organization isn’t aligned internally regarding what it wants to achieve with its certified eLearning content at all levels — if members of the staff are siloed — it can be challenging to move forward. Get buy-in early and update key staff members often to keep the project on track.
Select an Experienced, Accredited Provider & Author

Before creating content, find an accredited provider who is recognized for quality work and a high level of experience in the industry. Similarly, select a faculty member to author the content who is knowledgeable and well-regarded in the field.

Start with the End in Mind

There will be some additional paperwork and reviews required for accreditation or certification, so map out the to-do’s and timeline before starting to keep the project moving forward. For instance, disclosure is a big element in credentialing. There is also the added step of gathering copyright and references.

Start from Scratch

Certifying eLearning content after the fact is a very painful process. It’s better to start from scratch with new content than to try to adapt an existing course into a certified offering.

Conduct Learner Feedback

Many organizations work successfully with an accredited provider, create compelling content, and train learners, but then fail to close the loop with those who took the course. It’s vital to the ongoing success of an eLearning program to get feedback from learners. Armed with this information, an organization can make data-driven decisions.
CASE STUDY

Medical Cannabis Curriculum, Certified for Healthcare Providers

TMCI Global Spotlight
Recently, Scitent helped a client bring to market the first-ever comprehensive, CME-certified online curriculum for clinical cannabinoid medicine. TMCI came to Scitent with an idea to create different certified courses for healthcare providers. It was very well thought-out, but the client faced many challenges — not just in coordinating the certified content, but also in entering an emerging market — medical cannabis — that isn’t universally accepted within the traditional medical field.

Using our network of contacts in the healthcare industry, Scitent brokered a partnership with a leading medical cannabis clinician association to create the courses.

Providing the value of continuing education credit was tricky, however, due to the sensitive nature of the cannabis topic. So, Scitent tapped into its long-standing relationship with the Postgraduate Institute of Medicine (PIM) to coordinate and manage the accreditation details. A very pragmatic, but critical challenge arose, namely payment. PayPal, Google, and many banks don’t allow purchases for medical cannabis education. Once the course was accredited, this made marketing and monetizing the content very challenging.

Thanks to our extensive in-house expertise and knowledge, Scitent helped the client overcome the challenges and successfully launch the curriculum. Because it has been so well-received, Scitent recently worked with the clinician association and accredited provider to recertify the curriculum for an additional two years. Following the release of the original curriculum, some of the key leaders at the association had transitioned out of their positions. Thus, Scitent has become responsible for knowledge management since we
helped guide the process during the first round of accreditation.

The curriculum has also been very well-received by learners. Not only have we had strong learner purchases, we have also received favorable feedback from learners about the content. Additionally, institutions and hospitals have begun to recognize the value in training their staff on this topic, so we’ve begun to market to an even larger learner pool. The national medical cannabis movement indicates more healthcare practitioners will ultimately need this knowledge, since 28 states and Washington, D.C., have now legalized medical cannabis.

**Summary**

Be honest about your available bandwidth (infrastructure, expertise and staff) to successfully create certified or credentialed eLearning content. This type of eLearning requires many extra steps. Organizations must take a critical look at their staff availability, expertise and knowledge for tackling this project in-house versus hiring an outside technology partner.
About Scitent

We help associations, nonprofits, healthcare organizations and for-profit organizations build successful eLearning businesses that can reach wide audiences and generate solid revenue for ongoing success. Organizations can tap into our in-house experts in instructional design/courseware development, distribution and LMS technology and services, marketing, eCommerce and customer support to help them dream, design, deliver and distribute their eLearning.

OUR SERVICES

- Business and Consulting Services
- Strategic eLearning Growth Plan
- Instructional Design/Courseware Development
- eLearning Sales and Marketing
- eLearning Customer Support
- Custom Software Development
- Hosting
- Finance and Accounting Support

TECHNOLOGY

- PROPEL™ Enterprise + Distribute — Scitent’s distribution technology and services that drive your business into new markets — comes with a built-in learning management system (LMS) or integrates with your existing LMS.
- SmartLink API
- Integrations (SSO, AMS, Salesforce…)
- eCommerce Module
- Online Key Manager for effective course access and distribution
- eLearning Strategies and Tools

www.scitent.com