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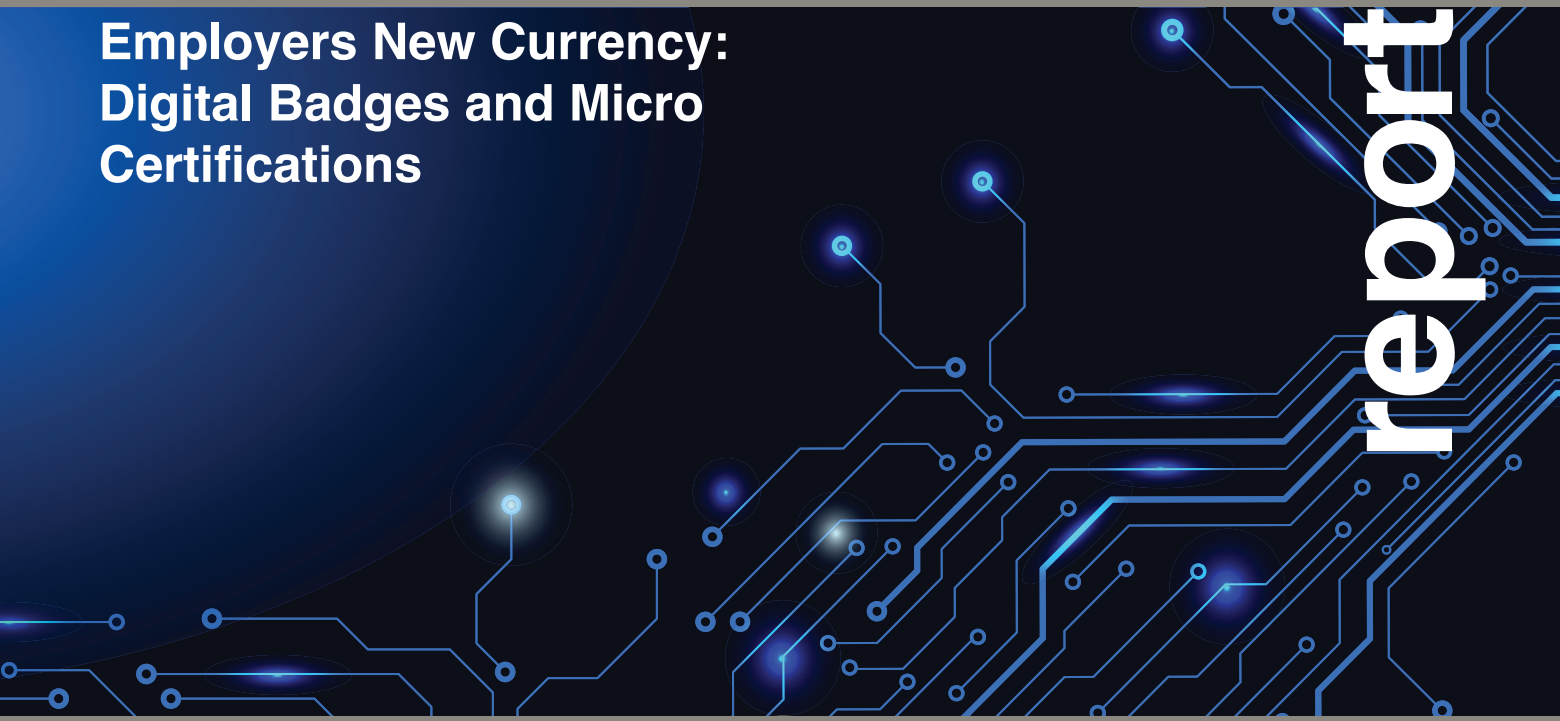
Employers New Currency: Digital Badges and Micro Certifications



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This volume of ReportOUT focuses on the accelerating adoption of digital badges and micro certifications and its impact on employers and prospective employees. But the long view of education and the dilution of undergraduate degrees, argues for a significant increase in the use of micro-certifications in technical and soft skills. It's not that the "non-degree" credentials are rare; more than a quarter of the employed U.S. population holds a license or certification, on top of any degrees they may hold. Certifications can be precisely tuned to industry needs, and they hold the promise of reducing the need for employers to rely on imperfect proxies, like college degrees. In certain occupations, certifications outline career ladders that define industries and give employers and job seekers alike guidance about what skills are necessary to advance. Those occupations, however, are the exception, and if the nation is to close the skills gap, perhaps they should become the norm.

Digital Badges Are Now an Essential Tool for Employers and Candidates Alike

By Brandye Barrington

The estimated fully-loaded costs of an unqualified hire can add up to a staggering sum. The effects of a bad hire are difficult, but not impossible, to quantify.

“Nearly 40% of UK companies have spent more than £10,000 re-hiring staff after employing someone who was not properly qualified”

In an increasingly competitive jobs market rife with candidate fraud, digital badges are the breakthrough that allows companies to immediately verify candidate qualifications and avoid the costs, inconvenience, and business risk of unqualified hires. Digital badges also enable genuine job applicants to benefit from instant credibility and avoid losing out on career opportunities to unqualified fraudsters, whose numbers are currently on the rise.

Job Applications in a World of Increasing Competition

With the technical skills gap widening, salaries in the IT field are growing as companies struggle to find the qualified talent they need. Consequentially, the rise in IT wages has produced a more competitive IT job market, as increasing numbers of recession-hit candidates apply for IT positions with the promise of interesting, in-demand work, a competitive salary, and the enhanced job security of the IT domain.

The allure of such positions is leading many candidates to push the boundaries of truth on their CVs, studies reveal, with numerous applicants being outright untruthful about their qualifications. Companies, meanwhile, in the rush to hire seemingly qualified IT

staff, are making the mistake of rushing through the candidate selection process and not verifying candidate qualifications, ending up with a potentially bad hire.

Why Qualifications Matter: Calculating the Cost of an Unqualified Hire

The effects of a bad hire are difficult, but not impossible, to quantify. According to a survey by AXELOS, a UK-based global best practice solution provider, in the past three years, nearly 40% of UK companies have spent more than £10,000 re-hiring staff after employing someone who was not properly qualified, with nearly 10% having spent over 4 times that amount.

But the financial impact spreads far beyond the calculable recruitment expenditure. There are many hidden costs, such as the increased management and colleague time trying to coach the incumbent up to speed, and costs incurred through on-the-job mistakes. There are also missed opportunity costs as the business stagnates through a lack of technological innovation, in addition to the untold negative impacts on the business's reputation – cited by 26% of the HR managers surveyed by AXELOS as the most significant risk posed by under qualified staff. The estimated fully-loaded costs of an unqualified hire can add up to a staggering sum.

Qualification Checks as a Hiring Priority

With candidate fraud on the rise and its costs so high, vetting potential employees needs to be a mandatory step in the recruitment process. And yet, the AXELOS study shows that before employing someone new, nearly half (48%) of UK-based HR professionals do not always check whether applicants' qualifications are valid. This is a recipe for potentially wasting resources on the wrong hire. The candidate qualification check is a must-have.

Common Problems with Validating Qualifications

There are many reasons why qualifications are not checked correctly, if at all, even when the process is advocated.

Firstly, how do you check qualifications? Many firms will ask a candidate to email in a scanned copy of their certificates – but these can be easily falsified, even without IT skills. Asking the candidate to bring in their credentials in person is better, but still doesn't guarantee their validity. Proper verification traditionally requires time and resources.

Secondly, who is responsible for checking qualifications? The hiring manager? Recruiter? HR administrator? The

on-boarding team? The external recruitment agency? While it's in everyone's interest, qualification checking frequently gets passed around with no one owning the issue.

Thirdly, qualification checks are usually the last step in the recruitment cycle and, as time-consuming administrative tasks, too often get pushed to the bottom of the to-do list and forgotten about, as more urgent needs take priority.

The answer to all these problems may be easier than you think: The use of digital certification badges is a massive boost for background checks, enabling employers to:

- Instantly and securely authenticate a prospective employee's skills and competencies.
- Minimize the potential risk to the business of hiring unqualified personnel.
- Reduce the HR administrative and ownership burden.
- Make faster, more confident and, above all, more valid hiring decisions.

Digital Badges Are Essential for Employers and Candidates Now More Than Ever.

Data gathered by the UK's Office for National Statistics reveal that, in just the last three years, 14% of 138,000 HR managers and directors have dealt with at least five instances of employees not holding the qualifications they claimed. That's nearly 100,000 employees, working in Britain, having lied to get jobs they were not qualified to do. To prevent future deceptions, companies must leverage the ingenuity of digital badges today.

Digital badges, such as those offered for free with Oracle Certification, are also a boon for genuinely qualified job seekers, allowing them to:

- Demonstrate qualifications on CVs as well as social media.
- Increase the likelihood of securing a job offer over an unqualified candidate.
- Show professionalism and concern for the employer, by minimizing their time to vet the job application.
- Signify their readiness to perform by possessing the skills required for the role.
- Differentiate themselves from the competition in the job market.
- Get hired faster.

Digital badges are the perfect solution for qualification checks, helping companies to avoid the pitfalls, perils, and price of unqualified hires, while boosting the job and career prospects of honest, certified professionals.

If you are a candidate, earn your Oracle Certified digital badge. If you are an employer hiring Oracle professionals, request a digital badge as confirmation of skills and knowledge.

Summary of Findings:
The impact of certifications is potent but narrow, with employer demand confined to a handful of certifications.

- In fact, the top 50 certifications account for two-thirds of all requests in job postings.
- In career fields that value certifications, they carry a significant salary premium (as much as 18% in our sample).
- Certifications fall into two broad categories, each with its own distinct impact: Door Openers, which help new labor market entrants enter a field; and Career Escalators, which pave the path for experienced workers' upward mobility
- Certifications are most likely to gain market acceptance when they validate hard-to-fill skills or readiness for hard-to-fill jobs, thereby providing a signaling mechanism in markets where employers have struggled to find qualified talent.
- While certifications struggle to gain acceptance in many corners of the job market, we find that, in others, there are indications of under-supply – that is, occupations for which employers struggle to fill jobs despite routinely seeking certificated workers.
- Across sectors, there are particular occupations which show signs of being ripe for broader adoption of certification regimes.
- Even though employers struggle to find workers with adequate foundational or "soft" skills, these skill areas have resisted certification, likely because there is no common agreement on how to define or measure them or because such skills are best assessed within the context of a particular occupation rather than in isolation.

Do digital badges really provide value to business?

By David Leaser

"87% of badge earners say they are more engaged because of the digital badge program."

"A full 72% of IBM managers now employ badges to recognize employees for achievement."

IBM found a correlation between sales and digital badges.

When the Open Badges standard was established in 2012, the mission was straightforward: Create a method for packaging information about accomplishments and embed it into portable image files as digital badges. The use cases were thin and value to business was unknown. But when IBM jumped in and decided to develop its own digital badge program, the value to corporations began to emerge.

In the summer of 2014, we began to explore the value of digital badges for a single use case: How can we increase the engagement of software developers who use our data products? We had launched a successful online learning platform called "Big Data University," now called Cognitive Class, where we hosted valuable free training developed by our top developers and data scientists. The site was receiving good traffic, but the engagement was lagging: Students were not completing courses and taking the final exams. What if we introduced digital badges as an incentive to encourage engagement?

Early success for the IBM Digital Badge Pilot began with online learning.

The IBM Digital Badge Program began in earnest during the early months of 2015 and was ready to launch as a pilot for online learning by spring.

Within weeks, we began to see dramatic results. Student enrollments increased by 129% and the percentage of enrollees who actually completed courses increased by 226%. The number of students passing the end of course exam increased by 694% compared to the six-week period leading up to the introduction of digital badges. It's important to note there were no other contributing factors to this success, like promotions or announcements from IBM executives.

Online training enrollments and course completions increased by double digits after badges were introduced.

The success of the pilot launched a dramatic expansion of the digital badge program at IBM. The program now issues badges for employees, clients, students and partners. We have issued nearly two million digital badges in all 195 countries. Every division in the organization issues digital badges and is capturing value from the program. We've implemented surveys and analyzed the data to find out how:

Increased engagement

IBM's human resources department found a correlation between badges and engagement. Employees who earn digital badges show higher engagement scores than employees who do not. Among IBM badge recipients, 87% said they are more engaged because of the digital badge program. A full 72% of IBM managers now employ badges to recognize employees for achievement.

Increased sales

IBM found a correlation between sales and digital badges. Technical sales professionals who have earned digital badges are more likely to achieve sales quotas than employees who have not earned badges. These studies show correlation and more work can be done to determine causation. Digital badges can also create leads for products. When digital badges were introduced to an online training site with links to product downloads, those downloads increased by 64%, showing training (with incentives to complete the activities) can actually create leads for products.

Increased skills for the company

A survey of IBM business units found 76% said digital badges motivates employees and customers to develop current skills. One third said digital badges accelerate shifts in expertise to meet the changing market.

Single skills registry

IBM's digital badge program has created a collective skills registry. At any given hour of any given day, chances are there is a skills building activity in progress in the IBM ecosystem. But most of these activities employ disparate student registration systems, from learning management systems to simple spreadsheets which sit on a notebook computer. But when the activity issues digital badges, all of these achievements are captured and catalogued in a single "badge wallet system" in a standard format with embedded information about the activity.

Expertise location and staffing

IBM uses a variety of sophisticated tools and programs to identify expertise in the organization. Because digital badges are embedded with specific information about an achievement, IBM's systems can quickly identify expertise at the granular level, including specific skills, relevance and date of achievement. That information allows IBM to match and deploy the right people to solve business problems for its clients and its own business. IBM has incorporated digital badges into many systems, including its learning platforms and company directories. That integration improves project staffing, employee development, incentive programs and resource mapping.

Skills gaps

Readiness in an era where technology is changing quickly presents a challenge to any organization. IBM's business spans the globe and touches nearly every industry on earth. These challenges require a deep understanding of the skills needed to provide business value. It also requires a tool to understand gaps and readiness. Because IBM's badge program generates a consolidated skills registry in all 195 countries which includes its employees, partners and clients, the company can use its analytics tools, like the Cognos portfolio, to identify skills readiness and then create programs to fill gaps. For example, if the company releases a new product in a geography, a business unit can run a report to determine how many skilled individuals are in the area, what skills are missing and what activities should be delivered to create success. The metadata embedded into each badge is machine readable and can be used for many applications.

Social media presence

When you earn a digital badge, you have the opportunity to share it easily and instantly on social media, increasing your eminence and building trust. When a badge earner shares a digital badge, the badge shows up in a social media activity stream. If you search Twitter, for example, and type "View my verified achievement IBM," your activity stream will populate with badges from the latest

earners. Thousands of IBM digital badges trickle in to activity streams all day long. Even at a fraction of a cent per impression, the IBM Digital Badge Program generates tens of thousands of dollars' worth of earned media every week of the year.

Digital badges increase branding and social media presence as they flow into activity streams.

"92% of survey respondents said IBM digital badges improve their employability."

Digital badges create digital resumes

A full 92% of survey respondents said IBM digital badges improve their employability. Digital badges use a "badge wallet" or "backpack" system. The backpack system aggregates a person's digital credentials from a variety of issuers to create a digital resume. Badge issuers can decide whether they want to make that information publicly available, and they can easily share a web link with an employer or client. Because of their transparency and the data which is embedded by the issuer, digital badges provide verifiable, trusted achievements, which contrasts with the self-assertions many professionals promote on sites like LinkedIn.

Credit for college

Northeastern University was the first university to articulate IBM digital badges for credit toward an advanced degree. The digital badge provides extended value to employees as credit toward a degree, and the school can use digital badges to identify good candidates for their institutions. The interoperability of open badges creates a significant opportunity for transfer credit evaluation, too. Northeastern University was the first institution to prove that IBM badges for "on the job" learning can be used as college credit.

Digital Badges have provided value in every area we measure. An internal IBM survey of badge issuers found digital badges impacted every area they measure, from ensuring our employees are continuously reskilling to increasing product sales. Digital badges increase skills and more: IBM badge issuers identified at least 15 areas where badges make an impact.

Badges are part of a broader strategy to rapidly build skills through multiple channels:

- IBM Skills Gateway: Hosts one of the largest IT training programs in the world and a network of Global Training Providers who provide skills development programs at every level.
- SkillsBuild: Provides jobseekers, including those with long-term unemployment, refugees, asylum seekers and veterans, with assessments, training, personalized coaching and the experiential learning they need to re-enter the workforce.
- Coursera: Certificate Programs, like the IBM Customer Engagement Program, develop skills fast to land a good-paying job.
- P-TECH: Extends the typical four-year high school to create a seamless six-year academic experience to earn an industry-recognized, two-year post-secondary degree, as well as a high school diploma.
- IBM Skills Academy: Provides IT training through a network of higher education institutions.
- IBM Apprenticeships: Allows candidates to develop skills and make real-world contributions – all while earning a paycheck.

David Leaser is the senior executive of strategic growth initiatives for IBM's Training & Skills program. Leaser developed IBM's first cloud-based embedded learning solution and is the founder of the IBM Digital Badge program. He is a Fellow at Northeastern University and a member of the IMS Global Consortium Board advisory group for digital credentials. David has provided guidance to the US Department of Labor and the US Department of Education as an employer subject matter expert. He holds a Bachelor's Degree from Pepperdine University and a Master's Degree from USC's Annenberg School.

IBM Summary

IBM has been a leader in the use of digital badges for learning. In the June 19, 2019 article below, David Leaser offers a succinct history both of the Open Badge standard and purpose, and IBM's own digital badge program.

As he describes it, the Open Badges standard was established in 2012, IBM began to explore digital badges in 2014, and the IBM Digital Badge Program launched as a pilot in 2015. The success of the pilot program was dramatic. Now, by mid-2019, IBM has issued nearly two million digital badges in all 195 countries.

Among the markers of success have been increased employee engagement, increased sales, and increased professional development. In fact, he writes that "Digital Badges have provided value in every area we measure."

In addition, the digital badge program created a collective skills registry. One of the surprising benefits has been the ability to generate heat maps that show people by skills. This makes people visible who might not have been visible before. As a result, managers have a wider, more diverse field to create teams.

From the IBM Skills Gateway, learners can earn badges on topics such as:

- Analytics
- Cloud
- Mobile
- Security
- Systems
- Watson
- Watson Customer Engagement


IBM

Microsoft Rolls Out Role Based Certifications in 2019

By Jeremy Aucoin

> **“ With role-based certifications, Microsoft finally acknowledges the thing IT pros have been saying for years. ”**

Last year, Microsoft announced a whopper of a change to its certifications. Until about November, you could browse Microsoft exams and find exactly what you'd expect — a list of technologies, certifications, and what you should know about them.

But with the release of role-based certifications, Microsoft shifts the focus from product knowledge to a skills-based approach based on specific job roles.

Microsoft's Taking the Career Development Approach

With role-based certifications, Microsoft finally acknowledges the thing IT pros have been saying for years. There's a disconnect between the knowledge required to earn a certification and the knowledge required to perform job tasks. Microsoft not only acknowledges that fact but also attempts to fix it.

They announced new role-based certifications as a better way to prepare learners for careers, shifting the focus from technologies to the skills needed for specific job roles.

The first role-based certifications to go live will be Azure job roles: Azure Developer, Azure Administrator, and Azure Solutions Architect.

Microsoft story Summary

In 2018, Microsoft made a huge change in its certifications with a shift to role-based certifications. Instead of product knowledge, certifications are now skill-based around specific job roles.

In addition, Microsoft now issues digital badges for active exams and certifications in the Microsoft Certification program with a few, mostly legacy, exceptions. Microsoft has partnered with Credly's Acclaim platform to manage the badges. People who have passed exams or earned a Microsoft certification go to Acclaim to acquire their badges so that they can use them in their LinkedIn profiles, other social media sites, on resumes, and in email signatures.

Here are certifications by technology or job role. For example, filtering by "Azure" shows certification titles, a brief description, and associated badges. Clicking on "Explore" from the Azure Administrator Associate Certification badge description shows what a person who earns this certification would know how to do, what skills are measured, how to learn, what exams to pass, prerequisites, costs, and more.

Azure Administrators implement, monitor, and maintain Microsoft Azure solutions, including major services related to compute, storage, network, and security.

Skills measured

- Manage Azure subscriptions and resources
- Implement and manage storage
- Deploy and manage virtual machines (VMs)
- Configure and manage virtual networks
- Manage identities

Required exam: Exam AZ-103

An optional prerequisite to this certification is Microsoft Certified: Azure Fundamentals.


Microsoft

Non-degree ‘badges’ are booming. Are they really useful?

By Matt Krupnick

“We do have a little bit of a Wild West situation right now with alternative credentials”

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“One kind of popular non-degree credential, the certificate….grew by 31 percent in the 10 years ending in 2016-16.”

When graduate student Atis Degro got an email about a George Mason University course in resilience last year, he had to look up what the word meant.

He was also curious about the credential being offered for successfully completing the course: not a conventional degree or a certificate, but a “badge.”

“I thought, okay, this sounds useful,” said Degro, a 32-year-old doctoral student from Latvia studying applied physics. “I’m always eager to try new things.”

So Degro took the course and earned the badge, which turned out to be a way to list his new skill in an online resume with a digital graphic that looks like an emoji.

Such non-degree credentials have been growing in popularity. But as students invest more time and money in them, concerns grow about credentials’ quality control and value.

While there has generally been consensus about what a college degree represents, there’s confusion over how to define many of these new credentials and judge their usefulness for employers and job seekers.

"We do have a little bit of a Wild West situation right now with alternative credentials," said Alana Dunagan, a senior research fellow at the nonprofit Clayton Christensen Institute, which researches education innovation. The U.S. higher education system "doesn't do a good job of separating the wheat from the chaff."

Thousands of credentials classes aimed at improving specific skills have cropped up outside of traditional colleges. Some classes are boot camps, including those popular with computer coders. Others are even more narrowly focused, such as courses on factory automation and breastfeeding. Colleges and universities have responded by adding non-degree programs of their own.

There's not yet a reliable count of how many programs like these exist. One kind of popular non-degree credential, the certificate, is tracked, and the number conferred by colleges and universities grew by 31 percent in the 10 years ending in 2015-16 — the last period for which the figure is available — to 939,243, the U.S. Department of Education reports.

In addition, some 4,000 colleges and other providers issue industry certifications, according to the Lumina Foundation, but fewer than one in 10 are reviewed by a regulatory body or accreditor.

Bad communication has created a sort of "tower of Babel," in which employers can't interpret what a new credential means, said Kathleen deLaski, president and founder of the Education Design Lab, which has been working with colleges and other organizations on classes that reward students for the skills they learn. Companies need to be more active in designing these skills courses from the outset, deLaski said.

"We have not seen industry step up and say, 'This is what we want,'" she said. "It's got to come from the employer side."

That companies need trained employees is uncontested: More than three-quarters of U.S. manufacturers told the National Association of Manufacturers this year that they had trouble finding and keeping skilled workers.

Despite those hiring and retention concerns, industry appears reluctant to discuss the topic of policing new credentials. The National Association of Manufacturers declined to answer questions, as did tractor maker Caterpillar, which once had an in-house training program called Caterpillar University, and Amazon Web Services, which has teamed up with 19 Southern California colleges to train students in cloud computing.

Like Caterpillar, other big companies have cut back on employee training, boosting the need for third-party courses. Snap-on, the toolmaker, trains its employees on its own machines, but said in a written statement that it "supports a common framework for credentials" to ensure quality.

In northwestern New York State, several colleges have started looking into how to offer training that large manufacturers in the region once provided, said Heather Gresham, executive director of the Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Investment Board.

"Training and development are often the first place employers are forced to cut," she said. "There are a lot of conversations about what we can do to develop the workforce."

Not all the new courses are aimed at increasing clearly defined skills in manufacturing or computing. Employers report trouble finding job candidates who can communicate well and work in teams, which is among the reasons George Mason University administrators say they started the resilience badge class in 2015.

Students can choose to take the five-week course — three weeks in the classroom and two online — to improve their ability to face adversity and work with others, said Lewis Forrest, George Mason's associate dean for university life. Forrest noted the disconnect between what students generally learn in college and what employers need, and said the badge could help with that — but only if employers understand what it means when they see it on a job candidate's resume.

"I still think there's a way to go for employers to see it as something useful," Forrest said. "I don't think employers are at the point where they see badges as the trigger for hiring."

Among the stumbling blocks for badges and other new credentials, also called microcredentials, is how to help employers judge whether a course has actually taught candidates a useful skill.

"Some 4,000 providers issue industry certifications, but fewer than one in 10 are reviewed by a regulatory body or accreditor."

The rush to create new credentials is likely to lead to a flood of useless courses, said Scott Cheney, executive director of Credential Engine, a nonprofit working to compile a database of every educational credential in the country. (Credential Engine is supported by the Lumina Foundation, which also funds the Hechinger Report.)

"Everybody is scrambling to create microcredentials or badges," Cheney said. "This has never been a precise marketplace, and we're just speeding up that imprecision."

Arizona State University, for example, is rapidly increasing the number of online courses in its continuing and professional education division, which confers both badges and certificates. According to staff, the division offers 200 courses and programs in a slew of categories, including art, history, education, health and law, and plans to provide more than 500 by next year.

The university has avoided quality concerns by asking the same faculty responsible for its degree programs to design the new skills courses, said Darcy Richardson, who directs the program.

Companies and educators need to work together to come up with a way to protect consumers, she said.

"If an organization wants to grant a badge, there's nothing stopping them from doing that," Richardson said. "It's important for consumers to do their due diligence."

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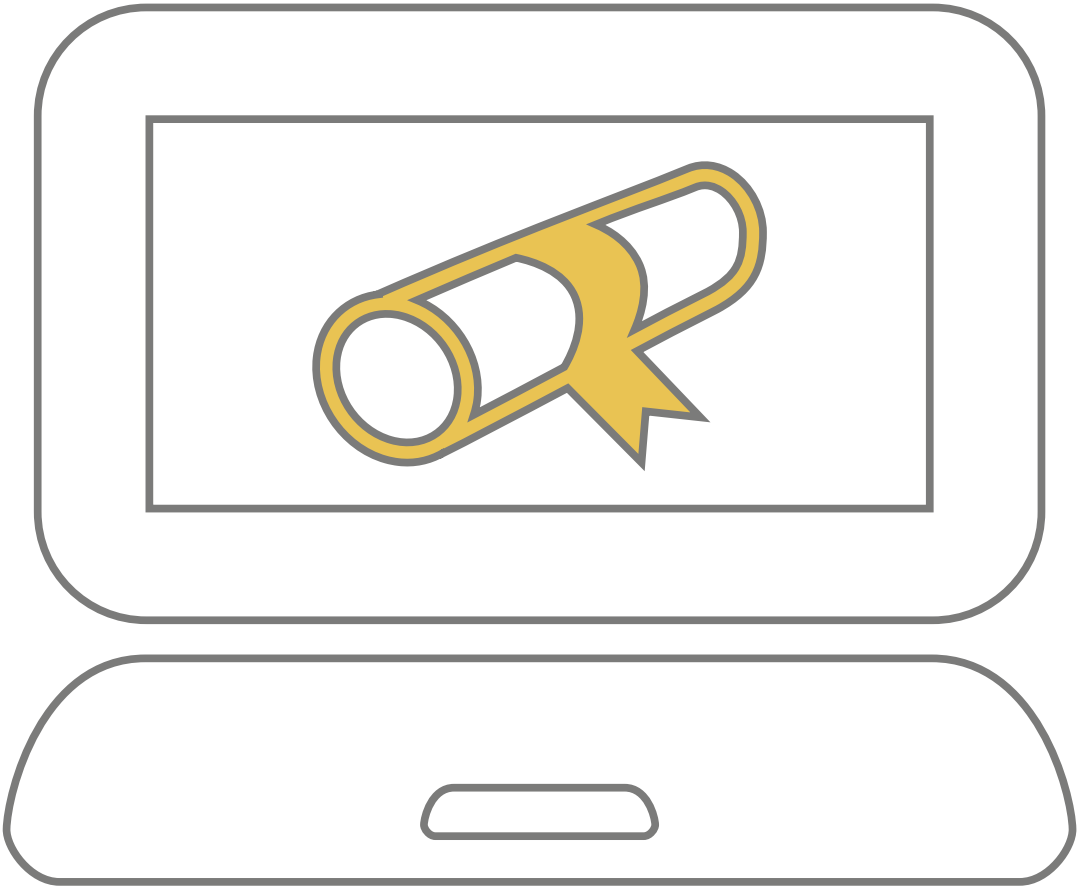
This story about new kinds of college credentials was produced by The Hechinger Report, a nonprofit, independent news organization focused on inequality and innovation in education. Sign up here for the Hechinger newsletter.



Digital, Verified and Less Open

By Paul Fain

More colleges are issuing digital badges to help their students display skills to employers or graduate programs, and colleges are tapping vendor platforms to create a verified form of the alternative credentials.

“One in five colleges have issued digital badges

Digital badges aren’t replacing the bachelor’s degree any time soon. But a growing number of colleges are working with vendors to use badges as an add-on to degrees, to help students display skills and accomplishments that transcripts fail to capture.

Illinois State University is an early adopter. Students in the university’s honors program have earned roughly 7,400 digital badges as part of the experiment, which just began at full scale last year. The university brought in Credly, a badging platform provider, for the project.

Administrators at Illinois State said the badges serve as a form of verified “three-dimensional transcript,” which augments the traditional degree.

“It’s a way for them to organize all of their experiences, all of the skill sets they learn,” said Rocio Rivadeneyra, the honors program’s interim director.

Students control which badges are public, and the credentials are aimed at helping students position themselves with potential employers or graduate programs, said Amy Oberts, the honors program’s associate director, who helped create the badging project.

"Even their diplomas would not necessarily reflect their good standing and ongoing achievements as honors students," she said, adding that the badging platform creates a "collection of iconic badges that actually comes up on their phones."

This form of digital badge, Oberts said, is a visual way of displaying both curricular and cocurricular experiences and achievements. That could include academic achievements, like seminar courses or biology lab work, or noncollege skills learned through internships or volunteer work.

For example, Jackie Durnil, a senior in the university's honors program, includes 60 earned badges on her Credly profile.

Durnil, who is majoring in communication sciences and disorders, displays badges that describe scholarships she earned, a presentation she gave at a professional development night, her role as a peer mentor, her 4.0 grade point average last semester and her independent study in speech pathology.

She also earned a badge for working with a nonprofit that makes meals for malnourished children and for going on an alternative spring break last year, during which she worked with a Georgia chapter of Habitat for Humanity.

Badges earned by students at Illinois State are backed with evidence and the imprimatur of the university. That differs from Mozilla Open Badges -- freely available software and badging standard that is perhaps the most prominent foray into digital badging. Anyone can issue a badge on the Mozilla platform, to anyone, even themselves.

Illinois State's honors program created the criteria for earning a badge. Faculty members and students can submit evidence of their learning or skills, such as PDFs of essays, cloud-based documents like infographics, YouTube videos and PowerPoint or Prezi presentations. Many of Durnil's badges, for example, include uploaded documents and links, such as a PDF documenting research she conducted for an independent study project.

Course instructors typically evaluate the evidence behind a badge application, with exception being when honors program or other university staff can review the evidence, such as for service learning badges or ones that simply draw from a GPA or other student record.

"We chose Credly because their badges offered the option of requiring evidence to be uploaded by students, and we wanted a way to encourage students to create compelling artifacts in response to their different learning experiences," Oberts said via email. "The artifacts created by students become the evidence of learning that is evaluated by instructors and, at the discretion of the student, shared with future employers."

Between the Resume and Google

One in five colleges have issued digital badges, according to the results of a recent survey of 190 institutions by the University Professional Continuing Education Association (UPCEA) and Pearson. And like Illinois State, most institutions that have dabbled with the form of alternative credentialing hired an outside company to get the ball rolling.

The New York City-based Credly, along with Merit Pages and Pearson's Acclaim, is among those making the most headway as a skills-displaying platform in higher education. Other platforms experts say are worth watching include Badgr, BloomBoard and the PD Learning Network.

The platforms vary in many ways, including whether they technically issue "badges." Merit Pages, for example, began working with colleges on its visual, verified profiles of students' skills before Mozilla began its open-badging project. The company now has more than 250 colleges as clients, ranging from small religious colleges to Georgia State University and the University of Iowa.

The company began with the goal to "take all the things that are happening at colleges and put it in one place," said Colin Mathews, Merit's founder and president. College employees in marketing, student affairs or even athletics departments update students' profiles to recognize their participation in study abroad, the college newspaper or intercollegiate athletics. And colleges "record the outcomes as they happen," Mathews said.

One key difference between badging platforms is how easy they make it for potential employers to search for someone's profiles or badges.

Sheryl Grant is director of alternative credentials and badge research for HASTAC (Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory), an interdisciplinary academic social network. She said vendor-run badging platforms exist somewhere on the

continuum between a static resume and a Google search about a job applicant.

Vendors and their expertise make it easier for colleges to create badges, said Grant, who is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Information and Library Science. She praised Credly for encouraging the use of evidence with badges, including from professors, who can recognize learning beyond the grades they issue.

"When you earn it," Grant said of a high-quality, verified badge, "it's going to be meaningful, and you should talk to an employer about it."

Grant and other experts describe digital badges as being related to competency-based education, where mastery of learning concepts, not grades, is the primary currency.

Students in competency-based programs appreciate the "value of credentialing in real time," said Jonathan Finkelstein, Credly's founder and CEO.

Pearson describes Acclaim as a way for "respected brands," including colleges, to "recognize individuals' competencies through digital badges." And there's a big need to be filled, said Peter Janzow, the senior director of business, market development and the open-badges lead at Pearson VUE.

"Once we get out of school, there's no formal way for representing what we know and can do," he said.

Institutions with deep track records in competency-based education have been natural fits for digital badging -- Brandman University and Capella University both have been active in the space. But many community colleges and four-year universities also have hired Acclaim, Credly and Merit Pages.

The most important contexts are searching for a job or trying to get into a graduate program. Credly and Acclaim work with many employers -- IBM uses both, for example.

Finkelstein said companies like Time Warner Cable issue badges on the Credly platform to recognize their employees' skills and accomplishments. Harvard University is also a client, and uses the platform in a similar fashion with its IT employees.

When companies already use badges internally,

Finkelstein said, they're more likely to look at them in the hiring process. And in some cases, such as with the Colorado Community College System and the state's advanced manufacturing companies, employers and colleges collaborate to design the criteria for earning a badge.

"They want to ensure that the badges have market value," he said.

The Lumina Foundation has taken notice. Lumina, which is leading a group project on alternative credentials, earlier this year contributed to $2.5 million in seed financing for Credly. The goal, Lumina said at the time, was to the creation of high-quality credentials that recognize lifelong learning.

Badges, if they take off, have the potential to be earned by people long after they graduate from college. And proponents of badging said that feature will become more useful as the knowledge economy matures.

"People should own the evidence of their own achievements," Finkelstein said. "Skills that have been verified by a third party should be a very valuable currency."

Digital Badging

Representing your skills as a badge gives you a way to share your abilities online in a way that is simple, trusted and can be easily verified in real time.

"Representing your skills as a badge gives you a way to share your abilities online"

Digital Badging

Enjoy the convenience and professional recognition afforded by HFMA's new digital badging program. Improve employee engagement or showcase your own accomplishments.

Share Your Credentials

Now when you complete an HFMA certification or certificate program, you will earn a digital badge. Your badge will contain metadata describing your qualifications and credentials, including how you earned this achievement.

Display your badge in your email signature, electronic resume, and on your LinkedIn profile or anywhere you want to be recognized for attaining a new level of knowledge or a specific skill set.

Increase your credibility

An HFMA credential validates that you have the education needed to succeed in your field. You can easily manage and share your learning achievements.

Position yourself for advancement

Show your manager you are committed to staying up to date in your profession and position yourself for a promotion within your organization.

Differentiate yourself in the job market

Maintain the proficiencies leaders in the field are seeking to meet their organizational goals and share your credentials on a secured platform.

Invest in your staff

Managers can track engagement and monitor how many employees are downloading the badges and how they are being used. A career development program that includes digital badging helps you improve employee engagement and reach organizational goals.

How does my certification get displayed as a badge?

HFMA has partnered with Credly to translate the learning outcomes you've demonstrated into a badge, issued and managed through the company's Acclaim Platform. The technology Credly uses on its Acclaim Platform is based on the Open Badge Standards maintained by IMS Global. This enables you to manage, share and verify your competencies digitally.

Who is Credly?

Credly is the end-to-end solution for issuing and managing digital credentials. Credly works with credible organizations to provide digital credentials to individuals, worldwide.

What are the benefits of a badge?

Representing your skills as a badge gives you a way to share your abilities online in a way that is simple, trusted and can be easily verified in real time. Badges provide employers and peers concrete evidence of what you had to do to earn your credential and what you're now capable of. Credly's Acclaim Platform also offers labor market insights, based on your skills.

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For questions or more information, contact careerservices@hfma.org

HFMA, Healthcare Financial Management Association Summary

The Healthcare Financial Management Association is an example of a professional association that is adding digital badges as a service to their members who earn certificates.

Badges that map to HFMA badges include:

- Patient Access Essentials
- Business of Health Care
- Certified Healthcare Financial Professional
- Certified Revenue Cycle Representative
- Certified Specialist Accounting & Finance
- Certified Specialist Business Intelligence

For more information about these learning paths, see the HFMA certifications page.

Salesforce Trailhead Makes the Paper Resume Obsolete

By Juan Martinez

Who needs 8.5 by 11-inch sheet when you can send prospective employers a URL full of your skills and accomplishments?

“Trailhead has more than 600,000 users, triple the number of users it had at this time last year.”

Trailhead

Want to show off your Salesforce skills? The San Francisco-based customer relationship management (CRM) company has updated its Trailhead program to provide users with a distinct, Salesforce-specific digital profile showcasing skills, accomplishments, and experience.

Trailhead is Salesforce’s free online learning platform devoted entirely to teaching people to use Salesforce. Rather than spending hundreds of dollars on an IT certification or paying a couple of hundred grand to get a degree in IT, Trailhead is designed to democratize learning by providing free access to building Salesforce skills. By using Trailhead, novice users develop Salesforce skills and advanced users become Salesforce experts. You can use Trails, or guided learning paths that are quick, easy, and fun ways to learn about Salesforce, or you can use Modules, which are smaller, bite-sized lessons to learn about a specific task.

Today’s release gives you the ability to create a profile that lists all of the badges, points earned, and tasks accomplished while using the platform to learn Salesforce ($75.00 at salesforce.com) skills. Also, as with a traditional resume, Trailhead profiles will feature

your job experience, personal information, and links to your social media accounts. You can also promote these skills by using a "vanity URL," which is essentially an ungated profile that you can post on traditional resumes, in email bios, or on social media. Additionally, Salesforce has unveiled an easier way for viewers to see what you have accomplished within Trailhead. The Skills Graph presents Trailhead on a personal graph within a user's profile. The graph consolidates a user's entire badge history into one clear and concise visual while highlighting top skills.

Salesforce Trailhead Profile

Prior to the launch, you would have had to send screengrabs of your profile or give someone access to your profile to exhibit your Trailhead skills. Now, you can simply head to the bottom of their profile and toggle profile visibility from private to public. In the same section, you can type in a vanity URL. If the URL isn't taken, then it becomes your new Trailhead vanity URL. If it's taken, then you'll be asked to try again. Once you've chosen a URL, you can begin sending your profile out into the wild.

"When we launched in 2014, we wanted to empower people to learn these skills to get jobs," said Sarah Franklin, the Executive Vice President and General Manager of Trailhead at Salesforce. "But it's also a platform for showcasing these skills. Traditional resumes have become stale and outdated. It's just a bunch of text and a laundry list of job experiences. With the [Trailhead] Profile, we wanted to change the game. It's a more definitive representation of a learner's skills. We wanted to show accomplishments with ranks and badges and points earned, which are all far more indicative of your skills than just plain text."

The Trailhead Story

Trailhead has more than 600,000 users, triple the number of users it had at this time last year. Learners have earned five million badges and completed 20 million challenges on the platform.

Late last year, Salesforce introduced Trailmixes, which are the company's online learning equivalent of Spotify playlists. The way you'd compose a playlist of your favorite songs to share with the Spotify community, you'd compose a Trailmix of your favorite Trailhead activities to share with other Trailhead users. Any Trailhead content can be added to a new or existing Trailmix. For example, check out the "Build Your Developer Career on Salesforce" mix to start from scratch as a

Salesforce developer or the "Build Your Admin Career on Salesforce" mix, which will get you started on your journey to helping companies implement Salesforce. The courses aren't slimy Salesforce ads: the Developer course alone includes 49 hours and 50 minutes of learning material.

Trailhead Trailmixes

Salesforce doesn't charge anyone to use Trailhead and it doesn't cost anything to create a Trailmix. Salesforce is hoping that Trailhead helps Salesforce clients take better advantage of Salesforce tools and services. The company recently started a partnership with more than 70 universities, community colleges, workforce development programs, and educational nonprofits to bring Trailhead into the classroom as an addition to the school's existing curriculum.

Salesforce story Summary

The Salesforce Trailhead is an online learning platform with a series of learning paths that are mapped to Salesforce skills. Along the learning trail, people earn badges to mark their achievements.

For example, at the time of this writing (October 2019), there are 158 trails, or learning paths. Each show about how long it would take to earn, and how many points they are worth.

Superbadges are the next level up from the existing Trailhead badges and can be used as benchmarks for evaluating readiness for certification.

At the time of this writing, there are 15 Superbadges, which focus on the core skills of:

- Lightening Experience
- Apex Coding
- Reports & Dashboards
- Security

Three examples are:

Superbadge: Advanced Apex Specialist

- +6,000 points
- -16 hrs

Superbadge: Apex Specialist

- +5,000 points
- -12 hrs

Superbadge: App Customization Specialist

- +4,500 points
- -6 hrs

By early 2018, according to the PC Magazine article below, learners had earned five million badges and completed 20 million challenges on the platform.

Badges Need Rigor! (Or do they really?)

By David Leaser

Because they are transparent and provide information about the activity, a person viewing a badge can instantly determine the value, unlike resumes which frequently contain falsehoods

“Badges are about connecting people to opportunity. It’s that simple. ”

The debate about Open Badges has shifted from their use as a signal of achievement to a dialog about rigor and the qualifications to earn a badge. In the process, the value of Open Badges may be lost if we prescribe a fixed set of expectations and present assumptions to constrain their enormous potential.

Is rigor important for Open Badges?

Early in the development of the IBM Open Badge Program, we settled on a design point that continues to guide the program: IBM badges represent resume-worthy activities and our badges require an assessment component. We wanted to make sure we protected the IBM brand, provided valuable, trusted credentials with real business value, and we wanted earners to share them frequently to improve their reputation. If they don’t have value, why bother claiming them? We developed standards, badge classifications and governance to guide our program and created process that would scale across the complex, vast world of IBM activities.

But, even with stringent processes, definitions and governance in place, I am frequently asked about rigor. “How much rigor is involved in this badge?” It’s the wrong question, because Open Badges were not designed to be relegated to activities with an arbitrary definition of rigor; they were designed to do much, much more.

Open Badges ≠ Certifications

Open Badges merged as a standard in 2011 when the Mozilla Foundation, with funding from the MacArthur Foundation, developed a method for packaging information about accomplishments, embedding it into portable image files as a digital badge. Now, the standard is managed and improved by IMS Global Consortium and supported by a robust ecosystem of developers and issuers.

From the earliest days, many have considered Open Badges synonymous with digital credentials, like certifications. They have frequently been equated to "mini-certifications." It's easy to understand why. We often look at innovation through the lens of the metaphors of the past. Digital cameras were compared to analog cameras. Early automobiles were called "horseless carriages." But badges are not exams – badges are not even activities. Open Badges are digital representations of information.

Open Badges ≠ Skills

Open Badges are not just about skills, even though they can be. A meeting with inner-city teenagers in Washington, DC opened my eyes to the possibilities. I was invited to participate in a panel discussion at an Urban Institute conference to share a corporate point of view of badges. I described the IBM program, the value it provides and how to earn an IBM badge. After the panel, audience members came to the stage to mingle and ask questions. I expected to find myself engaged by industry and higher education leaders, but a group of inner-city teenage boys approached me first. "How can I earn an IBM badge?" "Do you have badges for music?" "How about sports?"

A lightbulb went off in my head: Badges are about connecting people to opportunity. It's that simple. These boys wanted to find a way to a better life, one where they could use their passions to earn a good living, contribute to society and become the next generation of leaders. How can we use badges to do that? We cannot be constrained by a single use case which limits possibilities.

Badges = Valuable information

Why would we not want to capture passions and interests so we can connect people to careers, and how can we turn oft-dismissed information into something marketable? If I know a person has a passion for fishing and I can provide her with technical skills, I can prepare her for a rewarding future working at Cabela's or in a conservation role. I left my encounter at the Urban Institute realizing Open Badges can — no, must – be leveraged to capture passions and interests, as well as achievements.

And, of course, that was the original intent of Open Badges. You'll learn that first-hand from Connie Yowell, one of the founding architects of the Open Badges standard. Yowell's LRNG uses Open Badges to help the disenfranchised find better lives. By creating "playlists" that incorporate passions like music and fashion with soft skills and business focused education, LRNG connects a person's passions with a pathway to a great life.

Badges = Information you don't even know you need

Open Badges should also capture information about abilities which fall outside traditional assessment, and many of these abilities have real business value. Wayne Skipper, founder of Concentric Sky and an early thought leader in the Open Badge Community, was asked a question at an IMS Global conference I attended. The question was something like this: "So, are you saying you would badge activities without an exam or rigorous assessment?" Wayne answered, "Who's to say that dexterity isn't going to turn out to be the most important skill of the 21st century and all of those video game badges are actually the most important signals of all?" He's right: In a virtual reality environment, is dexterity more important than a PhD in botany? If we capture that information, we can make better decisions and provide more opportunities for growth.

Speaking of the future, who will raise their hands to tell us which skills will be needed in the next workforce? A new study finds 85% of jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't been invented yet. And if the World Economic Forum is correct, the skills for the future look very different from the skills today, and they are changing in front of our eyes:

How many badges are too many? Is there a limit?

How many colleges are too many? How many websites and web pages are too many? Nobody asks those questions because they see value in having high numbers. In fact, people ask the opposite question concerning regarding learning: How can we expand the number of learning options?

As Open Badges have increased in adoption, the number of issuers and badges issued has risen dramatically. While some have expressed concern there are now too many badge issuers and too many badges, Serge Ravet, president of the Open Recognition Alliance, said he believes the opposite is true. Badges, he says, develop trust. Because they are transparent and provide information about the activity, a person viewing a badge can instantly determine the value, unlike resumes which frequently contain falsehoods. "If badges develop trust, how much trust is too much?" Ravet asks.

How do we expand the value of badges as the number of badges proliferate?

As the number of badges has grown, we hear calls to reduce the number of badges and increase the rigor. But, if you believe badges which capture passions and other non-assessed capabilities can provide value, how can we make sense of them and expand their value with out diluting their impact?

Here are a few ideas:

Stop calling credentials "badges." Jim Daniels, senior manager for IBM's Global Learning and Credential Strategy, is re-branding the IBM program to properly represent its activities. IBM issues digital credentials, which include learning activities, skills activities, certifications and certificates. Badges, he says, are a simply the mechanism to represent the activity and make it consumable.

Filter. Nobody complains there are too many web pages. That's because we have excellent search engines, like Google and Bing, to make sense of all the noise. The most relevant pages surface first. With badges, you should be able to identify and isolate the badges that matter to you — without having to sift through badges that may be valuable to someone else.

Differentiate. We must make it easy to identify and distinguish badges for soft skills or self-identified passions from rigorous activities, like certification exams. At IBM, each badge activity type is distinguished by a color scheme. For example, green represents knowledge, while blue represents a certification. It was our way to create differentiation early on, but as the information in badges is now more often consumed by machines, colors won't matter. In the near future, we must find better ways to differentiate and classify badges.

Badges don't need rigor, and they don't need to be arbitrarily limited

Open Badges are simply a digital representation of an existing activity or information. They are not mini-certifications, and their immense value to society cannot be defined by a single, sometimes arbitrary criterion, like rigor.

By limiting Open Badges to a single use case (the representation of an assessed learning activity), we miss the tremendous value they can bring in improving the lives of the disenfranchised and disadvantaged. And we miss the opportunity to connect people to great careers and opportunities.

IBM is democratizing IT with its skills programs

By focusing on skills over degrees and geography, IBM wants to shift mindsets in the IT industry and make tech more diverse and inclusive. We want to bring in people with non-traditional backgrounds who build skills through coding camps, community colleges or modern career education programs like our P-TECH model or apprenticeship program. We want to attract people re-entering the workforce or relaunching their careers, and we want to create more jobs for people in parts of the world where tech jobs are scarce. This is about creating tech career opportunities outside the traditional areas. The big picture: IBM has a program for anyone seeking a role in IT.

IBM has a broad strategy to rapidly build skills through multiple channels:

IBM Skills Gateway: Hosts one of the largest IT training programs in the world and a network of Global Training Providers who provide skills development programs at every level.

Skillsbuild: Provides jobseekers, including those with long-term unemployment, refugees, asylum seekers and veterans, with assessments, training, personalized coaching and the experiential learning they need to re-enter the workforce.

Coursera: Certificate Programs, like the IBM Customer Engagement Program, develop skills fast to land a good-paying job.

P-TECH: Extends the typical four-year high school to create a seamless six-year academic experience to earn an industry-recognized, two-year post-secondary degree, as well as a high school diploma.

IBM Skills Academy: Provides IT training through a network of higher education institutions.

IBM Apprenticeships: Allows candidates to develop skills and make real-world contributions – all while earning a paycheck.

David Leaser is the senior executive of strategic growth initiatives for IBM's Training & Skills program. Leaser developed IBM's first cloud-based embedded learning solution and is the founder of the IBM Digital Badge program. He is a Fellow at Northeastern University and a member of the IMS Global Consortium Board advisory group for digital credentials. David has provided guidance to the US Department of Labor and the US Department of Education as an employer subject matter expert. He holds a Bachelor's Degree from Pepperdine University and a Master's Degree from USC's Annenberg School. Connect with David on LinkedIN and on Twitter. The views expressed here are my own and do not necessarily represent the views of IBM.

Convergence of Credentials: How Corporations and Colleges Are Teaming to Skill Up the Technology Workforce

By David Leaser and Sean Gallagher

“Significantly, 92% of those who have earned IBM badges report that they have been a useful career tool.”

The pace of change in today’s workforce is outstripping the pace of traditional modes of learning. This is especially true in a job market that is increasingly shaped by demand for fast-evolving technology skills in areas such as coding, cybersecurity, data analytics, and cloud computing.

In the past, software was developed and released on a regular cycle. About every 18 months, manufacturers released upgraded products on CDs or disks. However, cloud computing, agile development and the information economy have disrupted the cycle. With cloud-based applications (also called software-as-a-service or SaaS), software companies now release new or updated products every 60 days or even more frequently.

As a result, the shelf life of educational programs — particularly those that are professionally focused — is declining dramatically. Many industry-based providers offering various forms of professional certifications or certificates are rushing to fill this gap. To ensure the relevance of their educational programs and their outcomes, colleges and universities need to both design and refresh their curriculum more rapidly and to think more nimbly, at the level of modules and lessons rather than degrees.

IBM + Northeastern: Digital Badges Converge with Traditional Credentials

With more than 1,100 badge offerings in areas ranging from design thinking and project management to analytics, IBM's Digital Badge Program has generated significant momentum. IBM has issued more than 600,000 badges to its employees and customers who recognize their value as a signal of employability and a way to demonstrate current skills and readiness.

More than 54% of IBM employees have earned badges since the program formally launched in 2016, and the program has created a dynamic talent database in more than 195 countries. Significantly, 92% of those who have earned IBM badges report that they have been a useful career tool.

Northeastern University — a top-ranked global research university recognized for its deep engagement with employers via experiential learning — recently announced a collaboration with IBM that made it the first university to recognize IBM digital badge credentials toward graduate degree programs and certificates, providing a seamless pathway from workplace learning to traditional academic credentialing. This articulation of badge-certified industry knowledge into prior-learning credit followed a rigorous mapping of the IBM badge curriculum against Northeastern's existing course offerings.

Northeastern faculty worked closely with IBM course developers to develop this map by examining topics covered and details about the learning experience and assessment requirements. The IBM + Northeastern program launched with an initial focus on project management badges issued to IBM employees and badges associated with IBM's Cognitive Class, a free online learning center where anyone (IBM employees and others) can enroll in data science and big data courses to earn digital credentials.

For example, Cognitive Class badge holders who earn an average of 85% or higher in the Cognitive Class Analytic Technologies competency modules will be awarded with one elective course (totaling 3 credits) advanced standing in Northeastern University's Master of Professional Studies in analytics program, as well as an expedited enrollment process.

This simple concept provides significant benefits for both the university and the industry partner. Northeastern University can recruit students from a talent pool that

already possesses industry knowledge, a pool that may represent a white-space opportunity for the institution. The university can also point its students to IBM courses to earn badges on the latest technologies. Northeastern University will award those students academic credit as an incentive. IBM — and its customers — benefit from an expanded pool of talent from a top-ranked institution that already has the verified skills that companies are seeking.

Yet there's another significant benefit to graduates: IBM's badges are powered by Pearson's Acclaim platform, which means that every IBM badge contains direct links to job openings. Badge earners can simply click on their badge's embedded skills tags to open a list of opportunities by salary, title, and location and then drill down to individual job listings to apply.

By Verifying Relevant Skills, Badges Boost Employability (or, a Win-Win for Academia and the Workforce)

Current and prospective badge holders and stakeholders throughout the workplace benefit from the impact on employability. Northeastern University students can automatically generate a digital resume showing prospective employers their industry knowledge. Badges serve as a signal to hiring managers that certain candidates are prepared for the job, an important differentiator in a competitive job market. As digital badges become more connected to the data embedded in professional social networks (such as LinkedIn and other talent databases), badge data will also ultimately help enable better job matching and talent search.

As the pace of change in the workforce continues to accelerate and the availability of online learning content and services grows, the boundaries between workplace skills and traditional academic credentials will blur. While universities have been transferring academic credit and engaging in prior-learning assessment for many decades, new attention is being brought to the idea that measures of knowledge and skill should be portable across contexts. This is exemplified by the current competency-based education movement at both the K–12 and postsecondary levels, which is itself a direct response to the need for more relevant academic offerings that lead to employability.

However, digital badges and other forms of industry-based microcredentialing needn't be positioned only as "disrupters" of the degree ecosystem. Instead, collaborations such as that of IBM and Northeastern

University are among the first in a coming wave of creative partnerships aiming to eliminate the gap between learning and work.

David Leaser is the Senior Executive of innovation for IBM's Training & Skills organization and the founder of the IBM Digital Badge Program.

Sean Gallagher is Executive Director of the Center for the Future of Higher Education & Talent Strategy, and Executive Professor of Educational Policy at Northeastern University

How Well Do Soft-skill Badges Work for Job Seekers? New Study Aims to Find Out

By Rebecca Koenig

"The Promise of digital credentials is it can take the focus off of who you know and where you went to school and place it on what you can do"

“One challenge is making career training accessible to college students—and convincing them to participate. ”

To install and repair HVAC systems, workers need specific technical abilities, such as reading blueprints and manipulating tools. These are readily taught in technical and vocational programs at community colleges.

But keeping customers happy while updating their air conditioning units also requires a more abstract quality: empathy.

That’s the kind of deeply human attribute employers say they’re looking for in job candidates as companies try to adapt to modern changes in technology and business strategy. To help colleges teach the character traits and interpersonal skills that companies crave, nonprofit Education Design Lab has worked since 2013 to create curriculum and assessments that culminate in students earning digital badges intended to attract hiring managers.

On Wednesday, the nonprofit announced the start of a two-year research project to study how effective these “microcredentials” actually are in helping students from marginalized backgrounds secure employment. Supported by a grant from the Lumina Foundation, the BadgedToHire project will expand skills-training

pilot programs at the University of Maine, San Jose State University and Central New Mexico Community College.

Because employer buy-in is essential to the success of such badges, each institution has worked with regional players such as Jaynes Corporation and national companies like Enterprise Holdings to learn exactly what skills they should incorporate into academic courses and career-preparation programs.

"The promise of digital credentials is it can take the focus off of who you know and where you went to school and place it on what you can do," says Kathleen deLaski, founder and president of Education Design Lab. "The challenge to bring that big idea to reality is to be able to harness what you can do and apply a language to it that has meaning across many employers and hiring markets."

What Do Employers Want?

Companies want skilled employees, and talented students want jobs. Seems simple enough. Yet members of both parties often struggle to find their perfect partners.

One challenge is making career training accessible to college students—and convincing them to participate. For example, at San Jose State University, many students have family caregiving responsibilities and part-time jobs, leaving them little time to show up for extracurricular professional-development programs.

"We have to prepare students differently for what's next," says Catherine Voss Plaxton, interim associate vice president of student services at San Jose State. "How do we make this simple, clear and convenient?"

Another difficulty is discerning exactly what employers are looking for. Research from multiple institutions shows that character and interpersonal skills (also known as soft skills, people skills and non-technical skills) are currently in demand. Written communication, problem-solving and teamwork skills were the ones most-frequently requested among the 172 employers who participated in the National Association of Colleges and Employers Job Outlook 2019 survey.

With curriculum and badges related to eight such qualities, including critical thinking, resilience and intercultural fluency, BadgedToHire aims to help University of Maine, San Jose State University and

Central New Mexico Community College serve as more-effective matchmakers for their students and local companies.

For example, the call for more-empathetic HVAC technicians came to Education Design Lab from TLC Plumbing, a company in Albuquerque. That insight prompted Central New Mexico Community College to add the lab's empathy curricula and assessments to its applied technology program, according to deLaski.

Empathy is one of the harder interpersonal skills to teach, deLaski says. So the program breaks it into four sub-skills that reflect what employers say they want: the abilities to listen actively, provide validation, identify other needs and values, and incorporate diverse perspectives.

Although the BadgedToHire program trains students in timeless skills, it uses modern job search-systems and strategies to help students sell themselves to companies. Digital credentials are designed to be affixed to online job applications or personal profiles on networking websites.

Because recruiters are increasingly turning to online platforms to search for likely job candidates who possess particular skills, earning and displaying digital credentials "makes you digitally discoverable," she says. "The employer can find you without you having to find them."

Rebecca Koenig (@becky_koenig) is a senior reporter at EdSurge covering higher education. Reach her at rebecca@edsurge.com.

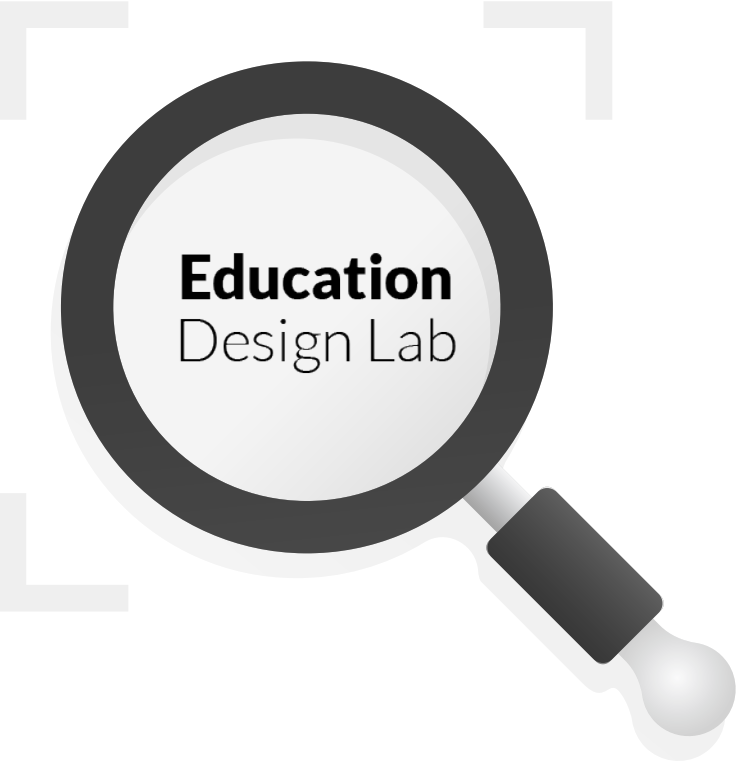
Education Design Lab story: 21st Century Skills Summary

The Education Design Lab worked with industry partners to name one specific problem with hiring: the need for soft-skills. As a result, they designed a digital badge curriculum called 21st Century Skills that focused on the kinds of non-technical skills that are crucial in the workplace.

The Education Design Lab is now following up on how well the program works in a two-year study called Badged To Hire.

As described in the article below, technical skills, such as how to read a blueprint and use tools, are readily taught in technical and vocational programs at community colleges. But keeping customers also requires a more abstract quality: empathy.

This 2019 study aims to find out whether badges on abstract skills can help people find and keep jobs.


Education
Design Lab

Online Badges Help Refugees Prove Their Academic Achievements

By Corinne Ruff

“Online open badges are becoming a more popular way for people to market specific credentials to employers…”

As Europe’s refugee crisis intensifies, a university in Berlin has created a pilot program to support migrants who have a college education and help integrate them into the German work force. Of migrants flooding into Europe to escape war, persecution, and poverty, almost half seek asylum in Germany. In 2015 the country received more than 500,000 asylum applications, although officials there estimate its refugee population to be more than a million. And for many college graduates who are migrants, documentation has been lost or simply doesn’t translate to a European degree, so the program is using digital badges to fill in the gaps and provide them with evidence of their applicable skills in information technology.

Online open badges are becoming a more popular way for people to market specific credentials to employers, which is particularly useful for those entering a new labor market. Beuth University of Applied Sciences’ pilot program, called Beuth Bonus, helps migrants earn badges that confirm their competencies in information technology, teamwork, and communication, among other skills. Though it wasn’t designed exclusively for refugees, the program has so far supported about 30 migrants from countries including Afghanistan, Ghana, Nigeria, and Syria in the year it’s been operating. “Sometimes we had a person who didn’t have any

certificates, a refugee who we could only reconstruct his educational path based on what he was telling us he did in his country," says Ilona Buchem, a professor of digital media at Beuth and director of the program. Such degrees often fall somewhere between a bachelor's degree and a master's degree, she adds.

That information, combined with observations instructors make during coaching sessions, allows the university to grant students a badge for knowledge they already have as well as for knowledge they pick up while studying at Beuth. Students can choose to enroll in the program for one month, one semester, or one academic year. Those who qualify for the program — which requires that they have adequate German-language skills and hold a degree from a college outside of Germany — attend free of cost. The program is supported by grants from the German government and the European Social Fund, the European Union's main program for promoting employment and social inclusion.

"People also need some support, language learning, and updating their skills they brought from their countries because often it's been a long time since they studied," Ms. Buchem says, "or what they studied isn't really up to date or state of the art in Europe." Program modules are entirely individualized, so students select which skills they want to learn and are given private coaching. Students choose from courses already offered at Beuth, taking most of their courses online but meeting in person with their coach. Students don't earn an overall certificate at the end signifying a master's or doctorate.

Instead, they pick up digital badges after each skill is achieved or confirmed. The program's primary focus is helping the students become more digitally savvy with

Western media and building up their online portfolio, Ms. Buchem says. Coaches help students apply for jobs, practice for interviews, write resumes, and create digital portfolios.

A Novel Idea in Germany

The university worked with three technology companies in Berlin to create the competencies that the industry is seeking — skills like leadership, innovation, and teamwork — and continues to ask those advisers for feedback.

For now, the badges don't hold the same weight as a traditional degree, but that could change if businesses latch onto the idea, Ms. Buchem says. "It is very hard

in Germany to create this value because really no one knows about the badges" in the business world, she says. More than anything, she sees the badges as a way for individuals to enhance their online portfolios.

James E. Willis, a research associate in the School of Education at Indiana University at Bloomington, studies how digital badges can be useful in different academic settings. Mr. Willis, who is aware of the Beuth program, says that there is nothing comparable in the United States but that the program has many lessons that American colleges and businesses can take away.

"You have people that are going across international borders that, depending on local or national license, aren't able to take those skills with them," says Mr. Willis. Badges have the potential to collect all artifacts of an individual's intellectual abilities, achievements, and certifications in one place, he says.

Ms. Buchem says Beuth is also working to start a separate badge program for refugees without experience in higher education who wish to take courses in a broad range of subjects, not just information technology.

Please submit success stories, case studies, innovative ideas, as well as questions, feedback, gripes, and concerns to: reportout@syned.org

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