DIGITAL BADGE REVIEW 2014

A WORKFORCE SKILL ATTAINMENT PERSPECTIVE

Convened At

LOS POSITAS COLLEGE
Livermore, California
May 16, 2014

synED

ABSTRACT

On May 16, 2014 a group of professionals representing various stakeholder viewpoints in workforce education gathered at Los Positas College to discuss the vision and issues relating to giving recognition for skills acquired in both tradition and non-traditional learning venues. It was held as an information sharing session on the topic of Digital Badges with attendees representing a workforce digital badge 'ecosystem'. Digital Badging is an evolving approach that is being explored by many commercial and public entities and was the main topic of conversation at this gathering.

Attendees seemed engaged in the potential for this approach throughout the presentations and lively discussion sessions. There were many ideas discussed about how the digital badge approach could work however, while there was interest, there insufficient time to discuss a pilot program and what should be included.

Given the fact that there was much enthusiasm about this approach, it appears that there is momentum to continue this conversation with this group and groups throughout the State of California to coax a pilot plan within a workforce ecosystem or sector that will evolve as essential stakeholders become involved.

BACKGROUND

While there appears to be a significant discrepancy between workplace needs and the training provided by traditional educational institutions[1], technology has simultaneously given individuals access to knowledge and skill attainment learning activities like never before in human history.

In response, there is a developing need and a growing response to the challenge of validating and communicating discrete and meaningful workforce skill attainment without regard to where the skill was obtained. One such response is Digital Badges. Digital Badges specifically, or micro certifications in general, enabled by the Internet, promise more flexible skill currency for the user - student or business.

Educational entities, technology providers and businesses that have interests in this transformation as users or as providers need to be aware of how digital badges can bring value and how to avoid mistakes.

---

1 Ready or Not by Allie Grasgreen, Inside Higher Ed. February 26, 2014
  http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/02/26/provosts-business-leaders-disagree-graduates-career-readiness#ixzz34BWtrBQn

  2013 Gallup and Lumina Foundation Report - "What America Needs to Know About Higher Education Redesign"
  http://www.gallup.com/strategicconsulting/167552/america-needs-know-higher-education-redesign.aspx

ATTENDEES FROM

AT&T	Las Positas College
i-Gate Innovation Hub	Foundation CA Community Colleges
Badge Alliance (formerly Mozilla)	Lynda.com
ITCC - Google	CA Dept. Education
GoverNet (CurricUNET)	Antioch University
Pleasanton Unified School District	Cisco
Chabot-Las Positas CCD	WEstED
Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory	Pearson
Wadhawani Foundation	Sandia Labs
Workforce & Economic Development, CA Community Colleges	Innovation Tri-Valley Leadership Group - Livermore Chamber of Commerce

WHAT HAPPENED

The Digital Badge Review meeting was designed for statewide subject matter experts in related fields, e.g. education (corporate, public and private), technology, business, educational services, non-profit economic and workforce development as well as government, to learn how they all play a role in the effective implementation of Digital Badges. Since the meeting location was in Livermore, specific attention was given to include regional business and community representatives to relate the topics to actual regional implementation.

The starting premise was that few in the room knew very much about Digital Badges. The meeting proceeded with four presentations interspersed with round-table discussion. This established basic badge understanding then expanded to enterprise, user and implementation situations.

Presentations and discussions were energetic and foundational to supporting decision-makers. We were impressed by the dynamic responsiveness of the 35 participants to adsorb, synthesize, share and engage in the topic. It was an effective and productive meeting. This report will serve as a reminder and a call to action for next steps.

THE PRESENTATIONS

Badging Background and Evolution:
Carla Casilli, Director of Design + Practice, Badge Alliance

Carla was there at the beginning with Mozilla when the Digital Badge idea was hatched. She has nurtured the concept over the past two years and is as surprised as anyone at the avid and diverse interest. From her presentation, we get a sense of a pure concept that is devoid of commercial purpose or gain, that utilizes advances in technology, the vast reach of the Internet and the pending changes in education to enable a reinvention of tracking one's life-long learning.

In a simple badging example, you learn a skill and it is verified that you have learned it…you are then issued a personal badge which, in the graphics of the badge, is encoded with details of the awardee, the verified learning, place, time, and standards used. This colorful graphic image of a badge can be copied and pasted anywhere, including an accessible website, and retains the encoded details.

Key points from Carla's presentation:

Badges are…
- Personal social currency.
- A representation of achievements, learning, skills, interests, competencies.
- Stackable lifelong credentials.
- They are part of a map of learning pathways.
- Formal and informal learning through a shared infrastructure.
- A universal standard.

The original Mozilla effort and now the Badge Alliance (http://badgealliance.org), which Carla represents, is not interested in controlling the validation methodologies or scope of badging. Instead, it is seen as an evolutionary technology for which interested ecosystems of users will self-align and bring a shared understanding of the value of their badges.

While the Open Badge Alliance actively advocates for the use of badging and the growth of the ecosystems, they are careful to keep the rules open and supportive of very creative uses as well as more refined or controlled badges by certain industry ecosystems.

Enterprise Badging:
Peter Janzow, Sr. Director Business and Market Development, Pearson VUE

As a leading global provider of computer based testing solutions, Pearson VUE is deeply involved in the business of validating learning. Peter Janzow's role is to find the delicate balance between the idealism of the Open Badge Alliance and the pragmatism of enterprise accounts. This effort includes the Acclaim Open Badges initiative (http://www.pearsonvue.com/sponsors/acclaim/) targeted toward enterprise applications which emphasizes the following additional badge characteristics:

- Recognized Brand
- Rigor behind it
- Representation of Marketable skills

> **In order for badges that represent work skills to be trusted by employers, badge issuers will need to focus on the quality of the achievements that badges represent. Higher quality badges will be more trustworthy because they are backed by recognized brands, they apply some assessment or educational rigor, and they represent market-needed skills. This focus is what distinguishes the needs of enterprise-class badging from other general badging applications.**

From Peter's personal experience with enterprise accounts adopting digital badges, he was able to shed light on the refinement and bottom line priorities of workforce education needs.

IT Certification Badging Considerations:
Gary Fluitt: Chair ITCC / Certification Manager Google

As Chair of the Information Technology Certification Council, ITCC (http://www.itcertcouncil.org), Gary works with a consortium of technology companies that evaluate prospective employee qualifications in areas where third party or private certifications play a significant role (e.g. IT Certifications may include Cisco, Microsoft, PMP, VMware and others).

While there are hundreds of IT certifications, interest in validated digital badges is evolving among these ITCC member technology companies as they may have advantages over the existing certification methodology. In order to respond to rapid changes in technology certification exams and training materials would need to be updated more frequently, which is problematic due to the intricacy and high cost. Furthermore, widespread use of computer based multiple choice exams, which poorly test skill acquisition, are also plagued with widespread abuse by web based services that provide exam answers for many certifications.

While certain certifications, like Cisco's CCNA, require instructor validation of student skills, few others match this "gold standard". Digital Badges, which focus on verification of applied skills, could be creatively developed, refreshed easier, outsourced to multiple qualified validators and become captured and shared faster.

CA Community College Potential for Badging:
Barry Russell, President Las Positas College

As former Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs for the CA Community College system and now President for Las Positas College, Barry has an unchallenged depth of experience in understanding the methodology and, more importantly, what can go wrong during implementation or even contemplation of implementing something as radical as changing the way we validate student accomplishments in a public institution like the California Community College system.

Even the timing of a Digital Badge pilot at a CCC needs to take into consideration competing college and regional priorities like accreditation reviews, faculty senate inputs and regional business demand for badges.

> **Barry stressed that the momentum for Digital Badges could very well be driven from and grow outside the public educational system; consequently, it is essential to advance the discussion for the benefit of California's Community College students.**

DISCUSSION POINTS

While the group shared an enthusiastic appreciation and recognition that methodologies like Digital Badges are part of the future, the amount of information and implications could only be partially absorbed.

Some thoughts and concerns that were voiced included:

- Need for standardization,
- Need for more detailed identity for the awardee
  (duly noted by Carla of the Badge Alliance)
- Need to include essential ecosystem stakeholders to develop a truly transferable badging system.

Comments after the official breakup of the meeting drew attention to the value and need for an impartial advocate to orchestrate the Digital Badge discussion of an ecosystem. Perspectives and points of view of the different stakeholders need to be understood and balanced from the perspective of the users – students and businesses – to avoid the appearance of a self-serving leadership role. Maintaining integrity in the digital badge development process will be a critical success factor.

A goal of the meeting was to discuss a digital badge pilot, and there seemed to be a consensus that a collaborative pilot would be a good place to start; however, no specific steps were identified in the time that remained for discussion. A continued discussion on the "pilot" and the criteria for efficacy of a particular ecosystem would be advantageous as a next step.

NEXT STEPS

The Digital Badge Review Meeting at Las Positas College in Livermore helped to establish, in the minds of those who attended, that there is probably a digital badge or micro certificate type of revolution that will occur in education for a variety of reasons. A more subtle realization was that it will probably happen and appear on the Internet with or without leadership.

Effective leadership, including community, educational and market leadership, will positively impact our students, the workforce and business. Leadership during this time of change does involve a certain degree of consensus between the different – sometimes competitive or nonaligned – entities within a workforce ecosystem.

Educational entities, technology providers and businesses that have interests in this transformation as users or as providers need to be aware of how digital badges can bring value and how to avoid mistakes.

Points to consider when thinking about a pilot implementation:

Focus on an ecosystem or sub-sector of the workforce.

- Information Technology
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Allied Health
- and many others

Encourage expert input and widespread collaboration (even competitors) including:

- Professional groups
- Military
- Education: Public, Private, Corporate and Non-Traditional
- Community and educational leadership
- Self-learning advocates
- Students - learners

Assure integrity with non-prejudicial ecosystem leadership.

Establish a collaborative ecosystem pilot to test efficacy.

About SynED

Guy Smith, President SynED, and Scott Young, Director SynED, completed this report based upon notes and observations of the Digital Badge Review Meeting at Los Positas College on May 16, 2014.

SynED has no commercial affiliation or product related to Digital Badges.

SynED was asked by Steve Wright, State Director and Sector Navigator of the ICT – Digital Media Sector, CA Community College system to help structure the Digital Badge Review meeting, invite targeted participants and summarize the findings in a report. Steve Wright is on the Board of Directors of SynED.

Part of SynED's non-profit mission is to identify and instigate balanced discussion and thoughtful critique among stakeholders of issues affecting education. SynED can also take the role of an independent project and grant manager for your open education initiatives and pilot programs.

SynED avoids advocating any particular point of view.

More about SynED here (www.syned.org).