CREATING A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM WITH
DIGITAL CREDENTIALS

Accredible

FOREWORD

Thank you for downloading the Creating a Certification with Digital Credentials Guide. In this guide we provide actionable steps for creating an engaging certification program supported by digital credentials.

Who we are: Accredible is an industry-leading digital credentialing platform. Founded in 2013, Accredible believes that everyone should be able to prove their credibility with ease regardless of who you are, where you live, or how you gained your knowledge.

Our experience serving millions of credentials globally has enabled us to understand and meet the needs of organizations undergoing digital transformation. As one of the longest-serving digital credentialing platforms, our insight into the space is unique and unrivaled. We provide actionable guidance at every step from research and evaluation, through to launch, growth, and development. Our knowledge informs the best practices for organizations to start, scale, and succeed in digital credentialing.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for organizations getting started in or currently offering professional certification that are looking to create programs supported by digital credentials. The demand for professional certification is increasing but as demand grows, as does the competitive landscape. Professional certifiers need to ensure their courses and certification programs are attractive to candidates and enable them to learn and train around their current work-life commitments. This guide will inform stakeholders and decision-makers of the benefits of utilizing digital credentials to reward, motivate, and incentivize learners.

How to use this guide

Use this guide to:

- Identify learner and employer preferences for training and development
- Research the steps in building an effective certification program
- Create course content that appeals to the target audience
- Learn how digital credentials are used to motivate, reward, market, and scale
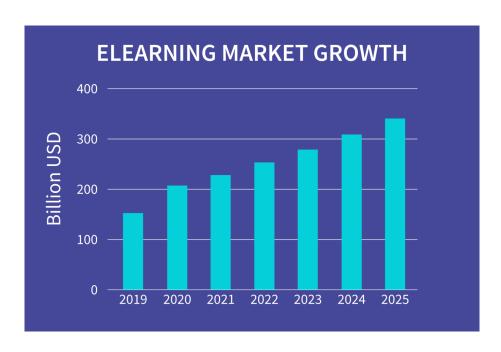
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Job roles are changing. Once a degree would be enough to start and maintain a career but professionals need to specialize more in their skills sets than they needed to previously. A degree no longer provides enough information to make a confident hiring decision. Take marketing for example, once a marketing degree would have led to a marketing position. But roles have segmented, companies no longer hire 'marketers'. Instead they hire social media specialists, content marketing leads, email marketers. Similar to computer science degrees, no-one hires computer scientists anymore. They hire backend Google Cloud platform certified engineers or angular front end developers. Role segmentation isn't just limited to tech. Nursing, although one of the slowest examples of segmentation, has progressed from a single role to over a hundred highly specialized roles available today.

Training and development is now a necessity in today's working world. The skills gap between open roles and job-seekers is continuing to increase. Employers are beginning to realize that the best way to fill their open positions and the existing skill gaps in their departments is to provide training for their employees. Professionals welcome this opportunity to expand their knowledge and experience. Not only does training boost engagement in the workplace but it helps individuals to move the needle on their own careers.

Current Demand

This changing world of employment has led to increased demand for professional certification and a huge uptake in the number of learners pursuing education. Partly influenced by the pandemic, learners are turning to eLearning technologies, massive online open courses (MOOCs) , and mobile learning in their millions. MOOC platforms surpassed 220 active users in December 2021, while the entire eLearning industry is expected to reach $325 Billion in value by 2025.

ELEARNING MARKET GROWTH

DEVELOPING A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM: AN OVERVIEW

Professional certification providers are well-placed to capitalize on the current demand for training and development. This is due to their expertise and ability to create certification programs faster than traditional education institutions. Their certification programs will help to close the skills gap that exists in both hiring and workplaces. They just need to ensure their programs meet the current needs and preferences of both professionals and employers.

What Learners Want

Professionals seeking training and development want accessible education that is fast, valuable, cost-effective, and verifiable. They want to pursue programs that bring value to their resume and improve their prospects for promotion and employment. Most importantly, they want to enroll in programs that are engaging and allow them to gain knowledge and skills around their current commitments. Many learners are in full-time employment or trying to manage household responsibilities. As a result, they seek courses that are broken down into easy to understand and absorb modules that can be engaged with over a coffee break.

What Employers Want

Employers want to fill the skills gaps that exist in their departments and fill open roles with talented individuals, but there is a distinct lack of job-ready candidates. To close their skill gaps, they need access to education that is cost-effective and tailored to the skills that they are missing. Up to 75% of training is considered ineffective - learners either don't have the opportunity to put skills into practice or they gain knowledge that is outside of their role. This creates a huge waste in both time and spend for organizations and creates reluctance to pursue other training options. Effective, targeted training will help employers close their skill gaps while being friendly to their training budgets.
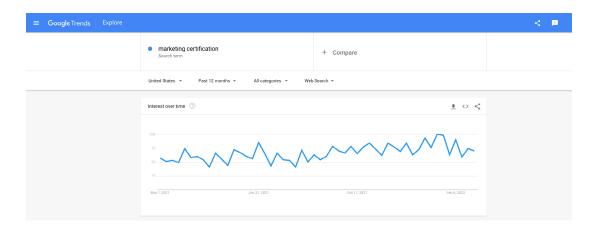
HOW TO CREATE A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Creating a certification program can be done in many ways and there are no one set of guidelines to follow. A necessary consideration for a training or certification program is that it is engaging to learners. If learners aren't engaged, they are less likely to complete the course and have a higher rate of knowledge loss if they do reach completion. Engagement can be encouraged through gamification, the application of game-like mechanics into learning programs that can boost performance by up to 89.45%. Or through breaking programs up into microlearning courses or smaller modules, which boosts the knowledge retention rate to between 70 - 90%.

Cost of Creating a Certification Program

Another important consideration is the cost of creating a certification program. Costs can vary between nothing to thousands of dollars, depending on the type of material being created, how the course is being delivered, and what additional extras are included. Price point is important to consider as this will influence the time it takes for the program to become profitable. There are many platforms available that help to reduce the time to creation and prevent the organization spending more to create something from scratch. With cost and engagement in mind, let's start exploring the steps for creating an effective certification program.
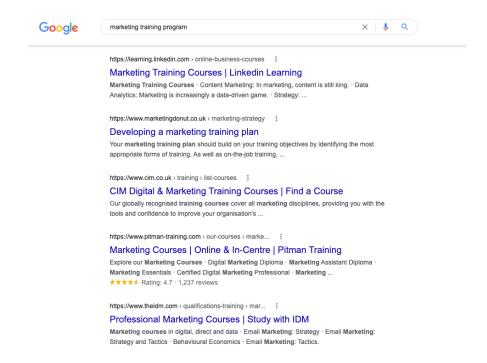
Getting Started

Before any materials are created, it's important to research how much demand there is for the intended subject matter. This can be done by talking to employers, browsing through forums, starting conversations in social media groups, and collecting search volume insights for specific keywords and keyphrases. Employers will be a good source of information for identifying which skills are highest in demand and how willing they would be to invest in the training once it becomes available. Forums and social media groups provide prospective candidate insight and how in depth they would like training programs to be. Keyword search volume will provide a rough estimate of how many people are looking for this type of training and inform what keywords will need to be optimized around when creating future sign-up pages. Insights for search volume can be found through tools such as SEMrush, Google Trends, and Answer the Public.

HOW TO CREATE A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Following demand, research the current offering available for the intended subject matter. If there are hundreds or thousands of courses available on the subject matter, it will be difficult for learners to find and the program will need to bring something unique to the table to stand out. Compare the available courses and make note of how the programs are delivered, what sort of materials are included, and how it can be done better. Where possible, talk to currently enrolled candidates or candidates that have completed the program to better understand what they liked and disliked about the course.

Finally, research the materials that are being used to deliver the program and how popular the materials are. Are more candidates engaging with video material, do they prefer gamified learning experiences, or do in-person training programs get the most sign-ups? In the age of remote learning, it's easier to appeal to a global audience with materials that are accessed online but learning can still be delivered through virtual person-to-person interactions.

Choose a Course Topic

The course topic will need to be refined to a specific area of focus from the greater subject matter. Often a subject area, such as 'marketing', is too broad and can quickly overwhelm learners with huge amounts of knowledge. A focused area can help boost engagement and help to plan an outline for how the course will progress.

Focusing on a specific area will also help to target the right audience, inform the delivery method of materials, how long the course will be, and help to create future or follow-on programs.

HOW TO CREATE A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

For example, if you are wanting to offer programs in marketing, each course can be a specific type of marketing such as content marketing, email marketing, SEO, and marketing automation. This appeals to the needs of employers that are looking for tailored training programs that will help to prevent wasted training spend. Shorter courses with a specific focus also meet the preferences of learners that prefer materials that they can engage with when their free-time is limited.

Marketing

Email Marketing   **Social Media**   **Content Marketing**   **SEO**

Being an expert in a subject area isn't a necessity but can help give weight to the value of the program and establish trust between yourself and the prospective candidates. Credibility and authority will help sell the program in the beginning before testimonials and reviews begin to take over. Even if the course creator doesn't have qualifications within the subject, including the length of time they have been employed in the sector and what they have achieved in this time can go a long way to establishing trustworthiness.

Once you have the specific area of focus, you can start to plan the outline of the program. For example, if you are building a program around 'The Beginners Guide to Email Marketing' the topics you will want to cover include:

- What is Email Marketing
- How Does Email Marketing Work
- Getting Started with Email Marketing
- How to Build an Email List
- How to Send Marketing Emails
- How to Write Effective Emails
- How to Follow Email Regulations
- Analyzing the Results of Email Marketing

Make sure that when it comes time to create course material that you keep in mind how in-depth the topic needs to be. If you are creating a 'beginners guide' it needs to be aimed at candidates that are complete newcomers to the subject area and be easy to follow and understand. Similarly if you are offering a program aimed at intermediate or advanced students, the course topics shouldn't cover too much of the basics so as not to disengage candidates early on.
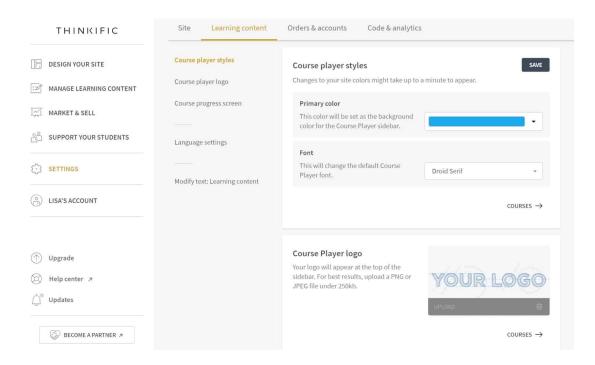
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Select a Platform for Delivery

The platform chosen for delivery can be a dedicated Learning Management System (LMS) such as Canvas, Moodle, or Thinkific. Or course creators can deliver learning from their own dedicated website using website building tools such as WordPress or Webflow. Although it requires more time and effort to create a learning platform on your own website compared to an existing LMS platform, there is greater control over features and the types of materials used. There is also the option to use an existing course delivery platform such as Udemy or Skillshare. Each option will carry different costs and it may be worth testing out platforms using a free trial (where available) or demo to understand how they differ and how they meet your needs.

Learning Management Systems

LMSs are software platforms used in learning environments that make it easy to store, deliver, and manage educational content. LMS platforms can be used for in-person, virtual, and hybrid learning but are also useful for delivering training, selling programs, and onboarding students. They provide the framework for handling every step of the learning process and provide a centralized location for resources. Each platform offers a common feature set and unique features that will appeal to different course providers. They can also integrate with other services such as Accredible's digital credentialing solution to deliver feature-rich digital credentials to candidates that meet the goal criteria.

Thinkific LMS Screenshot

HOW TO CREATE A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

There are two parts to LMS platforms, the administrative interface and the learner interface. The admin side is accessed by course creators, admins, and teachers to create, manage, and analyze learner's work. The learner interface provides a dedicated learner area for enrollment, accessing course materials, and submitting assignments for evaluation. LMS platforms can help course creators get set up faster and some even offer an existing library of content to speed up program creation.

Top Performing LMS Platforms for Comparison

Our blog post explores the top performing LMS platforms including user ratings and reviews, integration support, demo/trial availability, use cases, and user feedback, all in one convenient location for easy comparison.

READ BLOG POST

Course Hosting Platform

A course hosting platform like Udemy is another fast way to get started but also comes with high competition. Although sites like Udemy and Skillshare get lots of traffic, there are many successful programs already being hosted on these platforms. This can cause your program to simply fade into the masses without an effective launch and quality marketing strategy. The upside of using a course hosting platform is the payment gateways are established and secure. If you want to earn money from your certification programs, payment gateways are a must. It's important to research any fees that may be taken by the platform and how often collected fees are paid out to the course owner. Typically these types of course hosting platforms are based around video content so may not be suitable for hosting the materials you plan to use.

Dedicated Website

Creating a dedicated website for delivering programs is going to be the most time-consuming but also offer the greatest level of control. Using your own website, costs incurred will include web hosting, optional paid tools, and any additional extras for integrated platforms. You will also need to handle marketing, attracting students, implementing a payment gateway, and managing assignment submissions. A dedicated website provides additional avenues of marketing such as content marketing and SEO (search engine optimization) and also allows you to present a branded experience. Used in combination with a quality LMS platform, course creators can speed up the process of course creation, retain control over branding and pricing, and have a dedicated platform for delivery and management of resources.

Digital Credential Integration

LMS platforms and course hosting platforms often include the option to issue PDF certificates on completion of specific goal criteria. However, PDFs restrict how recipients can engage with their reward and aren't supported on the majority of social media platforms which impacts shareability.

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They are easily replicated and amended without authorization which dilutes the worth of the issued credentials and can lead to course providers being affiliated with fraud. To combat this, consider integration of a digital credential solution like Accredible that issues feature-rich, secure, and verifiable digital credentials to recipients. Accredible integrates with a variety of different LMS platforms and website building tools such as WordPress using a dedicated integration, connectivity through apps like Zapier, or an easy-to-use, robust API.

Define the Target Audience

Defining the target audience will help in planning which materials to create to best engage learners. Programs that are tailored to a specific audience ensure learners get the most out of the content. Targeting an audience that is too broad can lead to nobody enrolling as they don't believe they are the right audience or lead to unengaged students that drop off before completion. To define the target audience, begin by identifying the key demographics including age, gender, level of education, and employment status.

- Age - the average age of a learner online is 32 which means your audience is likely to contain a mix of graduates, parents, professionals, and career-changers. The course topic you decide on will likely influence this number and will impact the writing and teaching style.

- Gender - on average, MOOCs report a 53% female and 47% male learner base, however this changes depending on the subject. For example, engineering courses tend to attract a larger male audience.

- Level of Education - the majority of learners looking for further certification tend to be graduates, educated to a bachelor's degree level or higher. However, there has been an increase in the number of career-changers seeking accessible learning. Adjust the complexity of the program to match the educational level and consider adding an optional beginner level program for those new to the topic.

- Employment Status - many learners seeking certification are already employed and have less time to spend on training to improve their professional ability. It's important that the course is created with employment status in mind and modules are kept short to encourage completion.

Social media platforms are an excellent source of information for defining a target audience. Approach Facebook group owners for the topic area you wish to teach in. Then request permission to run analysis using polls or to start a discussion thread around what you hope to achieve through the program. Twitter is another platform for thread creation with the benefit of using targeted hashtags around the subject area. Engage with respondents to understand what they want from learning materials, are they looking to improve their employability prospects, expand their knowledge, acquire new skills, or change careers? Investigate what materials they prefer to learn from, for example video content, webinars, one-to-one sessions, written content, or interactivity supported by gamification. Finally, ask about what has been lacking from other courses they have taken or expressed an interest in. Once you have gathered data, analyze the answers to find similarities and use these to inform the course creation process.

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Plan the Learning Objectives and Course Outline

Once the target audience has been defined and there is a better understanding of what materials and formats learners want to interact with and enjoy. It's time to begin structuring knowledge to ensure the program has a logical progression. Learners need a proper structure to follow and a clear understanding of the learning outcomes and what they will be able to demonstrate after completing the program.

Learning Objectives

There are three major components in a learning objective, the key concept that needs to be understood, the level of understanding required, and the criteria used to measure performance. Bloom's Taxonomy is a commonly used framework for writing learning objectives. The taxonomy describes how learners move from less complex to increasingly complex levels of knowledge. There are six levels of understanding in the framework: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, and Create. To apply Bloom's Taxonomy to a learning objective, use action verbs such as "define", "identify", or "illustrate" which make it easier to measure the outcome. Learning objectives are not just a list of action items but instead define the actions a learner can take to show that they've gained something from the program. An example of learning objectives for email marketing might include:

- Identify three of the most commonly used email platforms
- Evaluate the benefits of email as a marketing tool
- Define what to measure to understand the effectiveness of an email marketing strategy

Course Outline

A successful course is structured with a logical flow that takes learners from one topic to the next. Break the program into easily manageable sections that cover a single module from the overall topic. Sections should align to the previously established learning objectives and include opportunities for learners to practice their new skills or apply their gained knowledge. Consider approaching writing the course outline like a story with a beginning, middle, and end.

- The beginning should be a short section that introduces the course presenter, details the presenter's experience, explains what learners will get from the course, and what they will be able to do once they have completed the course. Then introduce the topic and what opportunities are available to candidates that have these skills. Finally offer an engagement activity such as a research exercise or practical task to get learners motivated to continue.

- The middle of the program is the main part and where learners will begin to complete activities and assessments with measurable outcomes. Each section should cover a single learning objective and concept. These sections shouldn't take too long for learners to complete, the average micro-lesson is around ten minutes each. At the end of each section, set learners a practice activity or assessment they can use to understand how they are meeting learning objectives.

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Make a note of accompanying reference materials such as worksheets, PDF documents, checklists, and templates that will need to be created. These will need to be easily accessible and should be brought to attention in each section.

• The end of the program should leave learners motivated to go out and start applying their knowledge or using their skills. Offer congratulations, thank learners for their time in taking the program, and summarize the key takeaways that have been covered. If you have additional courses that follow-on from this program, this is an opportunity to promote these and provide links to enroll.

Once your course outline has been created and aligns to the learning objectives, these will be referred to when creating the accompanying digital credentials. Each section becomes a digital badge or digital certificate. Many issuers choose to use digital badges for individual modules with a digital certificate awarded for completing the entire program. The learning objectives translate into skill tags that are added to digital credentials, helping to improve their visibility, and explaining to third-parties what was gained through the program.

SKILLS / KNOWLEDGE

Understanding Views | Using the Slides Tab | Creating a New Presentation Using a Template

Adding Slides to Presentations | Changing Slide Layouts | Adding Text to Slides | Applying Character Effects

Aligning Text | Adding Bulleted Lists | Adding Numbered Lists | Adding Pictures | Changing the Size of Images

Aligning Objects | Changing the Presentation Theme | Customizing the Theme | Applying Slide Transitions

Deleting Slides from Presentations | Changing the Order of Slides | Copying and Pasting Slides | Checking Spelling

Adding Footers | Starting the Slide Show | Printing Presentations | Printing Handouts | Adding WordArt

Creating Tables in Presentations | Adding Charts | Adding SmartArt | Adding Shapes | Adding Online Pictures

Applying Fill Colors to Drawing Objects | Applying Outlines to Drawing Objects | Using the Eyedropper Tool

Applying Quick Styles to Tables | Using the Picture Styles Gallery | Applying Preset Picture Effects | Customizing Charts

Modifying SmartArt | Changing the Size of Slides | Applying a Pattern to Slide Backgrounds

Applying a Gradient to Slide Backgrounds | Applying Animation Effects | Modifying Animations

Hiding and Unhiding Slides | Adding Notes | Rehearsing Timings | Navigating the Slide Show

Using Presentation Tools | Using Presenter View | Recording a Slide Show | Packaging a Presentation

Dedicated Credential Page - Skill Tags Example

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Create the Course Content

Once the structure is outlined, it's time to start producing content! There are plenty of different content formats to choose from and each one has pros and cons. Take the time to plan and include a variety of content that will ensure learners have plenty of resources to engage with. Let's explore some of the content types:

Video

Video lessons are one of the most engaged forms of content online and are supported across a variety of LMS platforms, course hosting platforms, and website plugins. When producing video content it's important to take time to plan each video, don't just jump into recording immediately.

- Write a script, review it, and test the script for effectiveness, where necessary work with a script writer to ensure it's high quality. Make sure to rehearse the script so not to come across robotic or unengaging.

- Decide a recording location and setting. Take into account surrounding noise, you want to be heard clearly and avoid interruptions. Set up a background or choose an area that is flat and neutral without any distracting features. Try to use an area with plenty of natural light or use artificial lights that simulate natural light.

- Make a note of where you want to include additional on-screen graphics to better explain a concept and work with a graphic designer to ensure these look the part and match your branding.

- Acquire or hire equipment, or find a media company to work with. This should be the last step to take before you are ready to record, especially if you decide to work with a media company to film the content. If you are sourcing equipment yourself, make sure you have a video camera or webcam that supports HD video. If the chosen setting doesn't have natural lighting, make sure to get quality lights that support natural light simulation. Ring lights or freestanding light panels that support variable color temperatures are a good option. Both video cameras and quality webcams support audio recording, however a standalone microphone will ensure better quality audio. Finally, if you are recording videos yourself, use a screen recording software such as Zoom or OBS.

- Get the filming done. You might make mistakes, have to do a number of retakes, or wish to rewrite certain sections, this is a natural expectation of creating video content.

- Once everything is recorded, it will need to be edited, this can be done yourself, working with the media company, or by hiring a video editor to work with you. Editing ensures the video runs smoothly, removing any lengthy pauses or hiccups in the script, and adding in the on-screen graphics.

Filmed sessions don't need to look cinematic in quality but audio quality shouldn't be compromised on and must be clear and understandable from start to finish. Audio that is distorted, too quiet, or constantly interrupted with pops or crackles not only contributes to a poor learning experience but can be infuriating to the listener.

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Webinar

Webinar content is very similar to video content but often includes the live presenter alongside displayed informational slide content. Slide content can be created using a number of programs such as PowerPoint, Google Slides, and Keynote. The content provides visual accompaniment to the topic being discussed. Webinars require a basic screen recording set-up using a platform like Zoom or OBS that enables the presentation and the presenter to be recorded in real-time. The presenter doesn't need to appear alongside the created slides, but this helps to increase engagement. When recording the presenter, the equipment required is similar to that of a video recording; a HD video recorder, lights, and a microphone.

It's important that slide decks also hold up by themselves so these can be distributed to learners for easy-to-review materials. There are plenty of webinar templates available to help you get started and will provide guidance on what contributes to an engaging webinar. A graphic designer can help to create slide content that is both engaging and matches the branding of the creating organization.

Watch our Webinar on Blockchain Security

In the highly competitive market of professional certification, issuers need an effective way to save their career-advancing credentials from the disregard pile. Join Accredible as we talk about how blockchain security solves the problem of credential fraud and supports both issuers and hiring organizations.

WATCH THE WEBINAR

Podcast

A podcast is a recorded audio session that can be distributed across platforms such as Spotify, RSS.com, and Spreaker to name a few. Only certain distribution platforms support monetization options so carry out research to identify the best service for your needs prior to launch. You will need to create and practice a script to ensure everything remains on track. As a podcast is simply audio it can be one of the cheapest ways to build a course, however a transcript should be made available for material review. As audio is the main content, it's important that it's high-quality without any distortion, and will need to be edited to remove any lengthy pauses, uhms or ahs between sentences, and tangents that may distract from the topic.

Interactive Content

Depending on the platform chosen, interactive materials can be created via the LMS or using a supported plugin if hosted on your own website. Gamification is implemented using digital credentials, mini-games, quizzes, and hosting leaderboards - or anything that adds relevant game-like elements to the learning experience. Quizzes used to support gamification can be as simple as selecting true or false statements and memory matching games.

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Or more complex using dedicated mini-games that have been created just for the program, for example the games that are used to improve type speed and accuracy. Mini-games are the most time-consuming and expensive way of creating content and it's important they remain relevant to the topic being taught. It's easy to get caught up in the creation of the game which leads to deviation from the topic and takes away from the value of the program.

Digital credentials are an easy way to add value and gamification to certification programs. Each module or section ends with specific goal criteria such as evidence of applying knowledge or passing an exam. Once the goal criteria is met, the learner receives a digital badge award which includes details of the knowledge or skills gained and enables recipients to share their achievement and add it to their resume and LinkedIn profile.

Written Content

Written content should be used in accompaniment with another form of content as it is the least engaging but very useful for creating supporting materials. Written content is time-consuming to create but when done correctly is of great value to learners as they can keep this for future reference. Written content can be created as checklists, long-form guides, eBooks, and downloadable PDFs. Break content up into easily browsable sections with images, small infographics, and concept graphics that can help to better explain the topic.

Engage Learners

The more engaged your learners are during the program, the more successful your course will be. Learners are engaged through dedicated spaces for community discussion and the exchange of ideas using social media, such as Facebook groups, and online forums. Providing a means for communicating with the course creator also helps learners feel their learning journey is important and helps to support engagement. Peer assessment is another way to encourage engagement with learners. Provide a space where learners can upload assessments for other learners to review, suggest improvements, and learn from themselves. Once your course has a good following, you may also consider building a dedicated membership site for your online course business that provides space for forum discussion and learner Q&A.
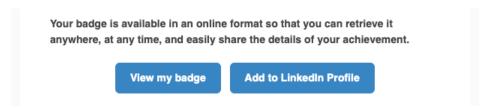
Gamification provides another element of engaging learners. The gamification mentioned previously helps knowledge retention and feel less like a process than having to work through traditional worksheets. Digital badges are used to provide gamification for online learning through incremental awards that incentivize progression and course completion. The added bonus of using digital badges in this way is the ability to provide detailed contextual information on what the learner has gained through each achievement. Digital badges give learners a tangible record of their progress and a representation of the skills they have gained as they progress.

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Progressive Digital Badges Example

Promote engagement using digital credentials by providing information on how recipients can use their digital credential awards. This can be a dedicated webpage on the marketing site with instructions to share and FAQs, or by providing how-to information such as a checklist or video in the digital credential email. Encourage recipients to share their digital credential with clear call-to-action buttons such as 'Share to Social Media or 'Add to LinkedIn Profile'. Make sure when a recipient shares their achievement to social media to engage with the post. A simple 'congratulations!' response can provide huge motivation for the learner to continue with your program.

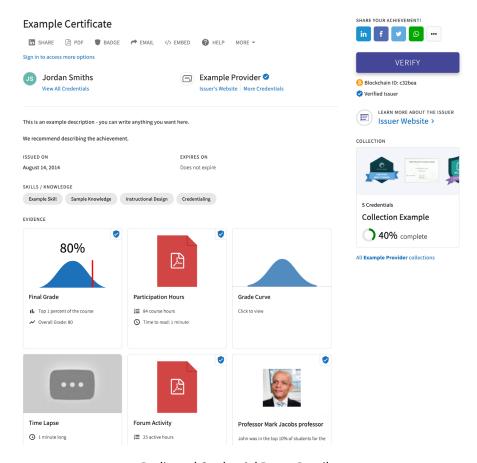Digital Credential Delivery Email CTA Example

The Importance of Rewarding Achievement

Learners want to be rewarded for their efforts and have something easily accessible and shareable that they can use to provide evidence of their earned skills, knowledge, and experience. Traditional education uses physical certificates, such as paper degrees and Master's certificates to reward their learners. More recently, platforms such as LMSs have included the delivery of PDF certificates to provide evidence of course completion. These types of rewards are common but outdated and restrict the recipient engagement after they have completed the program. PDFs aren't supported by many social media platforms, can be easily reproduced or spoofed, and lack the space to convey the true value of the course. Physical certificates face similar challenges. Recipients need to take extra steps to share and often these certificates get filed away and forgotten.

Digital credentials provide a modern-solution to combat the downsides of traditional and PDF certificates. Integration into existing platforms and bespoke platforms automates instant delivery of digital credentials via email so there is no waiting for the physical certificate to be received.

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The dedicated credential page provides plenty of space for providing course detail, evidence of applied knowledge, and test or exam results. Where learning is delivered in-person, learner details can be collected in Excel or as a CSV file for easy upload and bulk issuance of digital credentials.
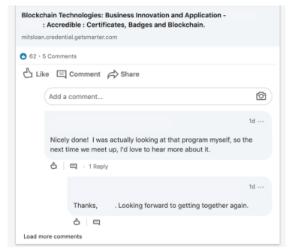

Dedicated Credential Page - Detail

Digital credentials are easy for recipients to share in one-click to social media platforms including Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Recipients can also embed their digital credentials into email signatures or on personal webpages, and add their digital credentials to their LinkedIn profile. Recipients can add their digital credentials to a digital wallet card on their smartphone for use on-the-go when they need to present their credentials on-site, during interviews, or during employment reviews.

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Shared Credential with Engagement

For the course creator, digital credentials provide easy verification without creating additional labor for credentialing teams and allow the issuer to retain full control over validity and expiration. They eliminate the cost of editing and resending certificates that include spelling or design errors. Accredible makes it cost-effective for issuers to deliver multiple digital credentials to their learners with a per-unique recipient pricing structure. Rather than pay per-credential, issuers can deliver as many digital credentials to an individual within the contract year. Whether they issue digital badges for smaller modules, digital certificates for program completion, or the candidates take multiple courses in the year.

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Design Digital Credentials

Once the core content has been created and you know how digital credentials are going to be used as part of the program. It's time to design the digital credential awards. These should be instantly identifiable as belonging to your brand and include the core information of what skills or knowledge were gained.

Digital Badges

Digital badges commonly include the name of the module or level number, the name of the overall program, and the organization name. Digital badges created and delivered using Accredible follow the Open Badge standard and have all the information of the program, the recipient, and the issuer embedded as metadata within the image itself.

Open Badge

Data Inside

The Accredible Digital Badge Designer provides a library of design elements for the creation of digital badges. Simply choose one of the pre-made badge background shapes to get started. There are over one hundred to choose from and each can be customized in the issuer's brand colors. Additional design elements including decorative icons and ribbons are also included in the library and can be modified to appear in brand colors.

Digital Badge Background Examples

Ribbons are used in digital badge designs to highlight essential information, such as the badge name or level, or can be used decoratively similar to a rosette style award. Decorative icons can be used as part of the design but should be used sparingly to prevent the design becoming cluttered. This ensures the key information remains clear and legible.

Designers can upload their own icons, ribbons, background shapes, and custom typography for use in the design. All uploaded images should be appropriately sized to prevent distortion or low resolution in the final design. For reference, the Accredible Badge Designer canvas is sized at 400px by 400px.

HOW TO CREATE A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Custom Attributes
Attributes and custom attributes pull through data automatically on the creation of the digital badge. Attributes are a useful feature for issuing digital badges in bulk with information that changes for each recipient, course, or module within a course. There is a library of pre-configured attributes available to use, or issuers can create their own custom attributes.

Digital badges can be created through the Accredible platform. Navigate to **badge.design** to try out the Badge Builder Studio or **sign in via the dashboard** for full functionality.

Digital Certificates
Digital certificates contain more information, similar to a physical paper certificate. This often includes the name of the recipient, the program name, the issuer name, a stakeholder name and signature from the issuer, the date of issuance, and the expiration date of the credential. Issuers can also enable recipients to print their certificates and can include a scannable QR-code that links to the live credential page.

Digital Certificate with QR-Code Example

HOW TO CREATE A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Custom Attributes

Custom attributes are also supported in the design of digital certificates and help to automate the process of adding further information. Custom attributes are created by the issuer to pull through uploaded data for the recipient, course, or issuer information.

Sizing Elements

Certain information included in the digital certificate design holds greater importance than others. For example, the name of the recipient and the name of the course are two key pieces of information. The copy used to link these elements together is of less importance. Examples of this copy include:

- "Has been awarded the achievement of"
- "Is hereby designated"
- "Has successfully completed all the requirements to be recognized as"

The linking copy and any information of low importance on digital certificates should be a smaller font size and weight (how thick or thin characters appear). This allows key information to be the focus of the certificate and should be displayed in a larger size and/or weight.

For attributes and custom attributes, the font can be set to automatically scale depending on the length of the generated information. This prevents longer names or course names getting cut off for exceeding the design size constraints or overlapping other elements on the certificate. To set automatic scaling, select the text-box of the target attribute, click 'Size' in the design toolbar and check the box for 'Enable Text Scaling'.

High Quality Elements

Logos, decorative elements, and background images are easy to upload into the designer for use in digital certificate designs. All uploaded image files should be correctly sized to ensure the element appears cleanly in the design without blur or distortion. This is particularly important if issuers intend for their certificate designs to be print-ready for display or presentation.

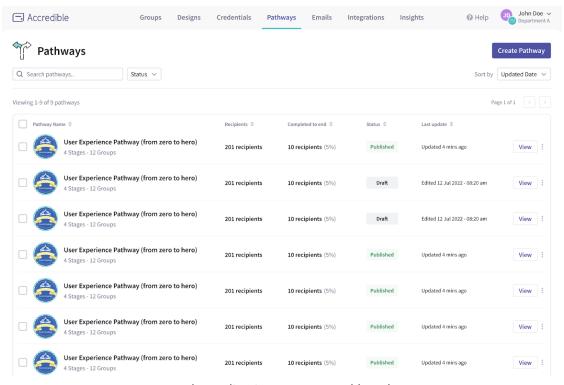Minimum background sizes for documents should be at least:

- 1056 x 816 pixels for US-Letter Landscape or 3418 x 2668 pixels for HQ printing
- 816 x 1056 pixels for US-Letter Portrait or 2668 x 3418 pixels for HQ printing
- 1123 x 794 pixels for A4 Landscape or 3626 x 2598 pixels for HQ printing
- 794 x 1123 pixels for A4 Portrait or 2598 x 3626 pixels for HQ printing

It is not recommended to upload images that greatly exceed the minimum size recommendations. This can lead to loading issues online or cause the PDF render to fail when a recipient downloads their certificate.

HOW TO CREATE A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Monitor Learner Progress Through Learning Pathways

Accredible's Pathways feature enables issuers to build engaging learning pathways and auto-issue milestone completion credentials to keep learners engaged and motivated to continue on the pathway. Pathways removes the guesswork in planning learning journeys, and enables issuers to deliver a clearer, more effective roadmap for learners to achieve career growth and advancement opportunities. Using Pathways, issuers can track how their learners are progressing, whether they have completed the entire pathway (Connect Plan) or have completed individual nodes within a pathway (Growth Plan). Pathways automatically calculates and displays user progress so learners can better understand what they have completed and where they should go next.

Pathways list view on Issuer Dashboard

Visibility of the next step in a course or the next recommended course in a topic is a great way to motivate learner progression. Using digital credentials, course providers can include a link to the next recommended course in the credential delivery email as part of an email marketing strategy or on the dedicated credential page itself. Increased visibility for the next step learners should take also helps to boost revenue, especially when courses are charged on a per-certificate or per-course basis.

HOW TO CREATE A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Market the Certification Program

Once your materials are together and the structure of the course is in place with tools to engage learners and monitor progress, it's time to start marketing your program. It is not enough to simply launch a new program and expect it to start generating revenue straight away, especially if you are delivering a course in an already competitive market.

Pre-sell the program

If you have previously been involved on social media platforms and forums, use this opportunity to pre-sell your course in these spaces. Motivate learners to enroll with early bird sign-up discounts and keep enrolled learners up to date on the expected roll-out date of the program. If you decide to pre-sell the program prior to an official launch, make sure to stick to promised deadlines so as not to disappoint your keen audience. Additionally, to increase interest and begin engaging learners, some course providers offer their first section of the course for free that serves as a 'taster' for the broader program.

Build a website

A website is a great location to host details about the program and what makes you the expert in the space, even if the course is hosted on an LMS platform or course marketplace. The website should include a homepage and dedicated landing page or sales page for each program. The landing page provides a dedicated course page to describe what the course is about, the benefits of your program, what learners can expect to get out of the course, FAQs, and any pricing details. After learners have started to complete the course, this is a good space to gather social proof including customer testimonials, reviews, and ratings. The course page serves as part of a content marketing strategy and should be built around the search terms, phrases, or keywords that the audience are using to find similar services.

Harness the reach of your recipients

Supporting learners with digital credentials to represent their module or course completion will supplement your marketing efforts. Easy-to-share digital credentials encourage learners to showcase their latest achievements to their friends, family, and peers. We recommend including a digital credential informational page on the website that details what the digital credentials are, how they can be used, and provide step-by-step guidance for sharing. Recipients are encouraged to share in the moment as digital credentials are received instantly via email once learners meet the goal criteria, i.e. completion of a module or course. Add an appealing call to action in the credential delivery email that motivates recipients to engage with and share their credentials. If there is a specific social media platform that is a part of your marketing strategy, this can be included as a CTA, for example 'Share to Facebook' or 'Add to LinkedIn Profile'.
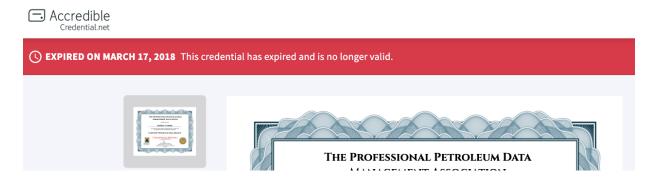
HOW TO CREATE A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Learners often share a large portion of their followers with your target audience which helps to reduce marketing spend - in particular on LinkedIn, the self-proclaimed professional social media platform. Engagement, shares, and referral clicks can be tracked within the Accredible credentialing solution. This allows online course creators to compare the success of recipient shares compared to paid media advertising and reduce PPC spend accordingly.

Scale the Certification Program

Automating parts of your certification program helps to reduce the effort of scaling as learner numbers increase. For example, name changes and typo errors are a common occurrence and correcting edits can create a time commitment which is better spent elsewhere. Accredible's digital credentials support automated corrections for simple one or two character name changes. More complex changes can be authorized with a simple click of approve or disapprove. Broader, retroactive edits can be made in bulk across live credentials should the core information require updating, such as a stakeholder name or signature. This also saves on the cost of re-issuing credentials. If the average cost of issuing and delivering a physical credential is around $5 a piece, this saves at least $500 for every 100 credentials that require edits.

Automation can also encourage recipients to return and reskill by setting expiration dates for credentials. Once a credential is nearing expiration, recipients receive an email notification reminder and a further email once the credential has expired. The credential itself is updated with a visible banner to state it has expired and can no longer be verified. The increased visibility of expired credentials serves to boost enrollment as learners want to keep their skills portfolio up to date.

Expired Digital Credential Example

Simple one-click verification that is handled on the credential itself reduces the time commitment of credentialing teams. Team members are not required to man a telephone line or email inbox and verification can happen around the clock, which is helpful when issuing credentials to candidates around the globe and across many time zones.

CREATING A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM CHECKLIST

Track your progress and ensure no important steps are missed with the print-friendly checklist for creating a certification program below:

Course Overview
Chosen course topic:_____
Launch date:_____
Budget:_____

Platform for delivery:_____
Integrations required:_____
Estimated up-front cost:_____
Estimated ongoing costs:_____

Target audience information
Age:_____
Gender:_____
Education level:_____
Employment status: _____

- ☐ Learning objectives planned
- ☐ Course outline planned

Learner Engagement
- ☐ Community discussion space
- ☐ Course creator content
- ☐ Peer assessments

Digital Credentials
Digital credentials used:
- ☐ Digital badges
- ☐ Digital certificates

- ☐ Delivery email written
- ☐ Delivery email proofed

Email CTA:_____

- ☐ How-to webpage
- ☐ Credential FAQs

- ☐ Collections created

Course Content
Course content to create:
Video   Webinar   Podcast   Written   Interactive

Additional work required:
Script writer   Graphic designer   Editor   Media company

Video requirements:
- ☐ Script
- ☐ Setting
- ☐ Equipment
- ☐ Media company
- ☐ Accompanying graphics
- ☐ Screen recorder

- ☐ Filming completed
- ☐ Editing completed

Webinar requirements:
- ☐ Script
- ☐ Setting
- ☐ Equipment
- ☐ Webinar slides
- ☐ Screen recorder

- ☐ Filming completed
- ☐ Editing completed

Podcast requirements:
- ☐ Script
- ☐ Equipment

- ☐ Filming completed
- ☐ Editing completed

Interactive content:
- ☐ Type chosen
- ☐ Created
- ☐ Tested

Written content to create (i.e eBooks, guides, checklists, templates):_____
- ☐ Created
- ☐ Proofed

Program Marketing
- ☐ Pre-sell discount offered
- ☐ Email list created
- ☐ Social profiles created
- ☐ Social posts scheduled
- ☐ Landing page copy written
- ☐ Landing page copy proofed
- ☐ Landing page published

IN SUMMARY

Creating a successful certification program isn't a 'set it and forget it' process. A great course requires engagement of learners through:

- Defining clear learning objectives
- Delivering preferred content
- Providing access to online communities
- Marketing to the right audience
- Monitoring to ensure learners are getting the most out of your program

Digital credentials support each step of the process for course creators and their learners through gamification, increased visibility, monitoring learner progress, and automation that simplifies scaling and reduces program costs.

Get started with digital credentials today with a **free user account** that enables you to issue credentials for up to 20 unique recipients. To see the Accredible solution in action, **book a platform demo.** We can help you get started with integrated digital credentials, designing fantastic-looking digital certificates and digital badges, and additional features such as Branding and **White-Labeling** credentials.

FURTHER RESOURCES

What Are Digital Credentials?

DIGITAL CREDENTIALS
BUYER'S GUIDE

Accredible

Read the Guide

Digital Credentials Buyers Guide

Uncover the fundamentals of digital credentials

DIGITAL CREDENTIAL
USE CASE GUIDE

Accredible

Read the Guide

Digital Credential Use Case Guide

The results of our 2021 Q1 survey across a cross-section of clients.

Guides to Support Professional Certification

PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION
USING DIGITAL CREDENTIALS

Accredible

Read the Guide

Professional Certification Using Digital Credentials

Insight into using digital credentials for certification.

HOW TO INCREASE COURSE
COMPLETION RATES WITH
DIGITAL CREDENTIALS

Accredible

Read the Guide

How to Increase Course Completion

This guide helps organizations identify pain points for enrollment.

Preparing for Digital Credentials

DIGITAL CREDENTIALS
FEATURE CHECKLIST

Accredible

Digital Credentials Internal Sign Off and Planning Guide

Create tailored sign off checklists, or use the print-friendly checklists provided.

PREPARING TO LAUNCH WITH
DIGITAL CREDENTIALS

Accredible

Digital Credentials Feature Checklist

Compare features between credentialing solutions.

DIGITAL CREDENTIALS
**INTERNAL SIGN OFF
AND PLANNING GUIDE**

Accredible

Preparing to Launch with Digital Credentials Guide

Plan strategies that improve visibility for the issuer and the program at launch.

Read the Guide

Read the Guide

Read the Guide

FURTHER RESOURCES

Thought-Leadership Guides

The Impact of Credential Fraud
Covering the common lies told on resumes, to the harm caused to brand credibility.

THE STATE OF DIGITAL CREDENTIALS
2022 GUIDE

Accredible

THE IMPACT OF
CREDENTIAL FRAUD

Accredible

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN
EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT

Accredible

The State of Digital Credentials 2022
Explore further into the landscape of digital credentials.

Read the Guide

Read the Guide

Bridging the Gap Between Education and Employment
Empower candidates to pursue career-advancing credentials..

Read the Guide

Designing Digital Credentials

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO
DIGITAL BADGE DESIGN

Accredible

Read the Guide

The Definitive Guide to Digital Badge Design
The guide covers the steps of creating digital badge designs.

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO
DIGITAL CERTIFICATE DESIGN

Accredible

Read the Guide

The Definitive Guide to Digital Certificate Design
The guide covers the steps of creating digital certificates.

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