

EBOOK SERIES

Certification & Digital Skills: Benefits to Educators & Students

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In today's fast paced world, finding professionals with the right skills is proving difficult for many global organizations. The extent of the problem is such that **93% of HR executives**¹ report matching the skillsets of candidates to the job openings as a growing and ongoing challenge.

When it comes to digital, the speed at which technologies and channels evolve means that skills become outdated quickly. For many individuals, the right skills are essential to land that all important job, ensure a promotion or advance their career. Recent research² found that when digital skills were tested the majority of professional marketers in the US, UK and Ireland scored just **38% (on average)**. While in the US, **only 8% of professionals** managed to achieve a competent digital skill level.

These statistics demonstrate the substantial and growing global digital skills gap³ which is proving the biggest obstacle for individuals looking to achieve job success and the greatest hurdle for organizations striving to achieve digital transformation.

In order to cultivate talent, educational institutions and training providers need to offer certified and validated digital qualifications that ensure graduates are industry ready and instantly employable.

Why certification?

In traditional industries such as accounting, IT, teaching and management, professional certification is renowned and even expected. In these sectors, a certification is known to help establish and enhance the career of a professional along with increasing their prospects and opening them up to a wealth of new opportunities.

Digital marketing and selling is no different. A discipline in a constantly evolving landscape, digital skills need to be upgraded and boosted on a continuous basis and require input from experts to ensure the latest trends, competencies and developments are known and shared across an organization.

For professionals and organizations alike, certification is becoming more and more important as a way to gauge digital knowledge and skills in order to make the right hires. For future and current employees, it's a way to keep up with technologies and trends in order to stay relevant and digitally aware. In this ebook, we explore the benefits of certification and examine the importance of offering professional qualifications to students as part of a diverse and profitable portfolio.

Certification for Educators

As global organizations continue to hunt for digital professionals with particular skills, certification provides a clear cut way to ensure employees - current and future – have the knowledge and talent needed to help progress their digital transformation. This presents huge opportunities for educational institutions looking to tap into a new market of digitally hungry professionals both directly and through corporate training programs.

In the US, the professional development market is growing to such an extent it is expected to generate \$8.5 billion by 2020⁴ while in Europe that figure is expected to increase by **4%** in same time period. This is in contrast to traditional education routes such as degree programs which are coming under increasing financial pressure due to government funding cuts and rising costs. US colleges have been particularly hard hit with some predicting mass bankruptcies in two decades so new funding streams are required to stem the shortfall.



An example of a university that established a professional development route in order to tap into new revenue streams is Virginia Commonwealth University. Through its Office of Continuing and Professional Education (OPCE) launched in 2014, the university has profited greatly from offering new programs bringing in \$50 million annually⁵ as a result.

By tapping into new markets including Fortune 500 companies along with military bases and higher education institutions, the university is driving revenues and increasing enrollments in the wake of the recession which reduced the market for traditional classes.

Their continuing education programs - which includes professional development recertification and customized training programs for employees in the public and private sectors – offered alongside academic degrees has grown Virginia Commonwealth University's student. Future plans are for the OPCE to expand into an independent school and use the academic expertise to develop a portfolio of offerings that address the needs of the community.

As the demand for digital training that enhances skills is on the rise, educators can provide enhanced learning options and long-term success through:

- **Drive enrollments:** They key to attracting new students is to provide the education they need and want. In just 20 years the digital economy has grown to \$2.9 trillion and means that 8 in 10 jobs⁶ now require digital skills. A digital certification helps graduates stand out from the crowd and demonstrates skills in an increasingly competitive job market.

- **Tap into a new revenue stream:** According to Econsultancy/ Oracle Marketing Cloud, **77%** of businesses plan to increase their investment in digital marketing with the demand for specialist digital marketers on the increase. In addition, sales professionals are now keen to upskill in digital to facilitate better customer engagement through the various digital platforms and channels.

This growth requires learning that provides the foundation for digital marketing and selling skills that can boost digital skills and provide insight into emerging trends.

- **Increase brand awareness:** As a learning provider that offers cutting-edge digital qualifications, you will establish your brand as an education leader with a diverse and relevant portfolio. As organizations continue to embark on their digital transformation paths, an educator with a reputation for providing digital certification has the potential to tap into a growing corporate training market.
- **Diversify your portfolio:** With 2.3 million digital workers required by 2020⁷ to drive the UK economy, educational institutions need to broaden their offering to include training that is relevant to the needs of the workforce. Traditional courses still hold value but with career success a high priority for most professionals and graduates, digital education that can be applied to a work environment immediately interests students and employers alike.
- **Create employable graduates:** **77%** of companies⁸ agree that their employees benefit from digital skills training resulting in higher employee productivity, greater performance and better innovation capabilities. Providing a digital qualification creates graduates that are **90%** more productive and **60%** more efficient compared to those without according to IDC.

- **Increase ROI:** Return on Investment is key for an educational institution looking to get the most value out of their courses. Partnering with a digital certification specialist can speed up the time to market, enhance the attractiveness of the course due to the value of the certification and drive student enrollments which equals an increase in revenue.
- **Establish a bank of esteemed alumni** – Alumni provide huge value to an education provider while those with links to industry demonstrate the value of your certification. Graduates who move into roles in global organizations can go a long way to cementing your digital offering as one that makes them highly employable on its completion.
- **Connect with marketplace needs:** With over half of marketers⁹ planning to recruit more people into their digital teams in 2016 and beyond, the marketplace needs digitally skilled professionals. Digital qualifications that create industry ready and employable graduates will go a long way to bridging the digital skills gap.

Certification for Students

With the appetite for digital marketing and selling skills, a wide range of individuals realize that 'the learning curve is the earning curve'¹⁰ and want access to dynamic learning opportunities that can progress and enhance their careers.

Along with professionals looking to upskill in digital specialisms, recent graduates are keen to learn skills that weren't included in their syllabus while career changers and evolvers want to move into digital roles. This diverse market provides huge scope for education programs that are developed by and validated by experts.

This is especially true for millennials who are becoming a core part of the workforce and rate learning and development as the number one factor in job selection while the majority of workers see culture and leadership as three times more important than salary¹¹.

When individuals pursue professional certification, they are validating skills and abilities that more often than not have been developed over time, through professional development and on-the-job experience.

In the US and UK only 18% and 20% of organizations offer digital marketing training support to their employees

Professional certification that is globally recognized and transferable is proving hugely popular in a job landscape that now commonly features advertisements for specialist roles like Content Marketing Manager, Search Marketing or Marketing Automation Manager.

Benefits include:

- **Assurance of quality:** An external certification means that an individual is accredited by a certification body that is recognized and validated; therefore helping to improve career progression and salary expectations. In fact, **90%** of employers surveyed by CompTIA agree that certified individuals are more likely to be promoted than those without, while **89%** feel they perform better than non-certified staff in similar roles.
- **Transferable qualifications:** Having a certification that is recognized from industry to industry, as well as from country to country gives graduates the opportunity to move roles to progress their career. This is particularly important to millennials as job-hopping is common and 4 job changes by the age of 32¹² is the norm for many.
- **Boost salary and prospects:** With business increasingly going digital, Communication and Marketing Managers have seen their salaries leap by **37%**¹³ in the past year. This huge increase is due to the growing demand for digital professionals and the war for talent amongst organizations for qualified digital talent. Such is the demand, roles that use digital are growing 2.5 times more rapidly¹⁴ and offering wages **18%** higher than non-digital roles.
- **Stand out from the crowd:** An external certification will enable a job candidate to demonstrate that their skills are validated and of a professional standard. This ensures that candidates are hired for the 'right' job that utilizes their skills, but also guarantees a level of enjoyment for the individual in that role.

- **Increased morale and job security:** With many feeling the weight of having to learn new skills and increase their digital capabilities particularly in the digital age, a certification that enhances knowledge can increase job satisfaction and security.
- **Proof of abilities:** A qualification clearly demonstrates a high level of skill and gives a potential employer faith and assurance in an individual's abilities. It also differentiates one employee from another in a competitive environment.
- **Validation of a continuous learning ethic:** Gaining a certification demonstrates proactivity and motivation to learn and gain new knowledge that will not only benefits them personally, but also reaps rewards for a potential employer.
- **Improved & increased knowledge:** A certification ensures an improved level of knowledge in a specialist area - which in today's fast-paced digital world is priceless.

Professional certification is not about gaining a certificate after the completion of a training course; it is a form of standardization, as it federates recognition for practical and specialist knowledge. As industry qualifications become a genuine alternative to degrees, individuals and organizations realize that they need to have digital skills that reflect the commercial landscape.

The world of digital marketing and selling is constantly moving, and it doesn't wait for latecomers. The best way for educators to close the skills gap, reduce staff turnover, improve efficiency and ensure skills and know-how remain relevant is through providing continuous learning and professional certification.

SOURCE

1. Comptia.org; 2. 'Missing the Mark: The Digital Skills Gap in the USA, UK & Ireland', The Digital Marketing Institute; 3. 'How to Narrow the Digital Skills Gap in Your Organization', The Digital Marketing Institute; 4. Businesswire.com; 5. Richmond.com; 6. 'The Digital Skills Gap in the Workforce', Burning Glass; 7. O2.com; 8. Trainingindustry.com; 9. Econsultancy & Oracle Marketing Cloud; 10. Josh Bersin, LinkedIn.com; 11. Deloitte; 12. Money.cnn.com; 13. Thisismoney.co.uk; 14. 'The Digital Skills Gap in the Workforce', Burning Glass