OPEN BADGES
Competency Credentials For A Digital World

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Learning is changing

The way we learn continues to change. Google and YouTube have become some of the largest learning resources supporting learners outside of formal courses.

LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook have also enabled the wider development of learning networks that go beyond the academic institutions. Even academic institutions are changing their learning delivery approaches and adopting approaches such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

What is also beginning to change is how we recognise, credential and validate learning. Whilst most credentials are still awarded for traditional pathways of learning, primarily in traditional bricks and mortar institutions, there is a growing use of digital badges. In this paper we examine the reasons behind the growth and look at:

- the current adoption of digital badges
- the benefits being driven by digital badges
- some example case studies
The credentials employers require

Employers want workers with specific industry-recognised skills, experience and credentials, which are not necessarily aligned with educational courses. In fact many employers feel there is a disconnection between the skills they need from their workforce and what is being delivered by formal education providers.

Even where they are aligned it is difficult for employers to be able to check against specific skill and knowledge needs. We are therefore seeing more learner-centred models of training where the focus is more on how to learn combined with recognition of skills and competencies rather than the passage of time spent on a course.

The key benefits of new competency-based models are they can be highly individualized and aligned to a particular bundle of skill requirements. These new learning models lend themselves to modular learning-centred designs where multiple learning pathways are accommodated. These can include short courses, work based experience, assignments and projects. These may include softer skills such as acquiring an international multi-cultural mind-set, the ability to collaborate, to problem solve and to re-learn.

Paper based credentialling makes less sense in a digital and fast changing world. A diploma or degree depreciates in value and relevance over time. Many skills need continual updating as recognised by continuing professional education programs.
Digital credentials such as digital badges with machine readable data embedded, including the capability to be verified and even cancelled by the issuing organization are more relevant to the world today.

Digital badges allow learners to take control and showcase their skills and competencies by displaying their badges on digital CVs and web based profiles. Employers can easily validate and access the bigger picture behind learner’s skills and achievements.

It was this logic that led Mozilla, HASTAC and the MacArthur Foundation to create a community of collaborators around an open technical standard that would allow any organization to create, issue, manage and verify digital badges. In 2013 they released the first version of the Open Badges Infrastructure.

Badges are very simple at one level. In the same way they work in the Scouts or Girl Guides; they are a validated indicator that an individual has a particular skill or accomplishment. They can be earned through all forms of learning such as:

- on the job training
- elearning
- courses
- demonstrated experience

Once earned and awarded, these badges can be shared and displayed in a digital form. The awarding organisation can provide details on what the badge was for and set expiry dates as appropriate.

Anyone can issue an Open Badge: employers, even your community peers if that is how you structure your badging system. Employers can use verified skill-based badges to identify suitable new employees and to address staff development. Learners can display them to show employers what they’re capable of. Badges are not the same as just sticking your irrelevant degree from 20 years ago on your LinkedIn profile. Badges can carry expiry dates. You’ve got to stay fresh and prove you’re still on top of your skills.

The open badges infrastructure addresses the issues of identity, verification, validation and the ongoing management to enable a secure and trusted ecosystem around the credentials enabling them to be trusted.

OPEN BADGES: SIMPLE, VALIDATED, UP TO DATE

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Who’s using open badges?

It has been estimated that over 14,000 independent organizations are issuing digital badges. Large corporates such as Samsung to schools like Carnegie Mellon, MITx and edX, Kahn Academy, Purdue University, Seton Hall, and Yale have been developing and using badges.

In a recent survey carried out by Extreme Networks over a third of organisations surveyed said they currently use digital badges or plan to do so in the future. Over 80% of those who currently use digital badges said they will maintain or increase their use in future.

These organisations said they believed that badges added value in a number of ways:

- Motivating learners
- Providing a display of achievement
- Providing recognition of a specific skill or knowledge
- Providing recognition of soft skills and work achievements
- Encouraging participation in learning
- Increasing course completion rates

Two thirds of those surveyed felt digital badges have had a positive impact and 65% felt the use of digital badges would grow in the future. This is supported by Educause as badge use is growing among its learners. In the first 11 months of 2014, the association issued 2,563 badges to individuals who completed an educational program it produced and 41.4 percent of the individuals accepted them (in other words, opening and sharing them with others). Campus Technology in Jan 2015 commented that badges are quickly becoming an acceptable currency in the world of higher education.

In the Extreme Networks survey 60% of those surveyed felt that digital badges would either entirely replace, or be used in combination with current diplomas and course certificates.
Open Badge Applications and Use Cases

Badges are being used in a number of ways including:

1 **CREDENTIA LLING NON-TRADITIONAL PATHWAYS**

   In reality learning doesn’t just involve seat time in a classroom or on a course. Badges allow skills developed in the workplace or by undertaking short pieces of informal learning to be recognised and validated.

2 **MICRO-CREDENTIA LLING**

   Micro-credentialing can more accurately represent a learner’s skills, knowledge and behaviour. Linked to the concept of micro-credentialing is unbundling where you can separate elements of a larger learning programme to recognise specific skills such as communication skills, team working or software installation. Badges can be created and validated for very specific skills and experience. Thus learners who demonstrate they have acquired critical job-ready skills can earn job-relevant badges.
According to the Extreme Networks survey the most popular use of digital badges was to recognize professional development and internal training (70%). Veronica Diaz, director of online programs for Educause, the association for higher education technology professionals. “We think badging for professional development purposes is kind of a no-brainer.”

Badges represent specific learning objectives and outcomes, and facilitate easier comparisons between different programs. If I’m a learner making a choice, it makes a lot of sense to examine the badge I might earn if successful and make a decision based on that.

The use of digital badges is more efficient in terms of delivery and management. The use of embedded data also makes validation easier and can allow expiry to be automated.

Badges give learners more control, they can display badges that demonstrate appropriate workplace skills, knowledge and behaviour based on their achievements, and signal their suitability to employers.
Overcoming Obstacles

The adoption of Digital Badges is still being held back by a lack of awareness of badges and what they are. However, this appears to be changing especially within the education sector.

For some people they have an issue with the name badges, as they associate badges with young people not adult learning. For this reason some organisations have actually given their badges different names.

Some people worry that badges can be issued for frivolous reasons and not have value. It is true that some organisations may issue badges along these lines but no more so that if they were issuing paper certificates. There is a requirement for standards and for issuing authorities to adhere to standards. The Open Badge Infrastructure (OBI) is designed to provide assurance to potential employers as it provides transparency around the award of the badge and contact details of the awarding organisation.

Digital Badges technology and open standards

Deploying a badge system built on open standards means any organisation can create, issue and verify digital badges, and any user can earn, manage and display these badges all across the web without being locked into a single vendor’s model.

Currently there are a number of competing proprietary badge platforms including Basno, Work.com, Credly, and Pearson Acclaim. Totara Learning is supporting the Mozilla OpenBadges framework as it is an open technical standard. Totara Learning is supportive of Mozilla’s overall goal to establish an open ecosystem where users can verify, display and combine badges to represent skills and achievements.
Totara LMS and Open Badges

Totara Learning Solutions has developed a badge issuing and management system for both Moodle and Totara Learning Management Systems (LMS) based on the Mozilla Open Badges infrastructure.

TotaraLMS is an open source LMS with its enterprise edition available via subscription. Totara can reduce a corporate enterprise’s learning management costs significantly whilst providing some of the most advanced learning management functionality. The team at Totara Learning collaborated as part of the broader Hastac and Mozilla OpenBadges initiative to enable badging systems for users of Moodle and Totara LMS.
Getting Started with Badges with Totara

If you use Totara LMS the process to set up a badging system is really easy - just follow the set up options, complete the fields with the necessary data for the issuer together with your image and then link the badge to specific learning activities.

There are full details on the Totara help site at http://help.totaralms.com/
Totara Case Study

Many organisations using Totara LMS have begun to use Badges to redesign their competency credentialing process. Below is a specific example:

SAMSUNG

Samsung use open badges on their Totara LMS platform to reward staff for completing product based knowledge learning. You can see some badges in the image below.
GET IN TOUCH:

Contact Totara Learning or your Totara Partner to see badging systems in action

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