

Goodbye Paper: Recognizing Professional Achievements with Digital Badges

Dr. Ginger Malin | EVP Business Development | BadgeCert Inc.
613 Landwehr Rd | Northbrook, IL 60062 | E: gmalin@badgcert.com

Credentials matter. To move their careers forward, professionals need ways to differentiate themselves from their competition and ultimately stand out in a crowd. They also need others to understand the rigor, time and effort devoted to developing their professional expertise. Moreover, in today's digitally connected world, professionals share practically everything online in ways that can be publically searched and viewed. As such, they must have ways to communicate their verified advanced skills and expertise on the Web beyond just putting a few additional letters after their names or providing a static paper certificate.

Additionally, in order for professional associations and training providers to stay competitive and continue to both retain and grow their membership or participant pools, they too must find innovative ways to extend their reach and further engage their stakeholders by providing them with additional value.

Enter digital badges.

What are digital badges?

Sometimes referred to as digital credentials, digital badges offer associations and trainers a meaningful way to recognize their stakeholders' certifications, awards and other continuing education experiences in a format that can be readily shared online. A digital badge is more than just a visual image or logo. Rather, it is a dynamic portable icon that is embedded with qualifying information such as who issued the credential, where and how it was earned and a detailed description of the competencies met. It can also include expiration dates and continuing education units-if applicable, and links to multimedia artifacts such as pictures, websites, videos, or documents. When the badge icon is clicked, the information is revealed and the accomplishment can be authenticated and verified by the viewer.

Digital badges are gaining significant traction in the credentialing industry because they are secure and verifiable, thus protecting the integrity of the credential. They also deliver significant additional value to certificants because they can be easily shared via email or on email signatures and on social networks, websites or digital resumes. Depending on the vendor, earners can also create an individualized digital badge portfolio to store and manage one or many of their earned badges.

As earners, or certificants, share their digital badges with others, namely employers, colleagues or licensing boards, they essentially act as ambassadors by extending the brand of the issuing organization to a wider network. Once shared, the issuing organization can track the sharing and opening of badges, accruing vital data about the impact of their programs.

How are digital badges issued?

Typically, the issuing organization creates a digital badge for each course or credential. This involves designing the front facing image and information associated with the accomplishment. Thereafter, upon completion of the credential, the organization would issue the badge– via a software platform–to earners. Earners receive an email or similar communication informing them of the issued badge and how to access the profile page. Thereafter, depending on the vendor implementation, it can be shared with the earner’s social networks or via email.

What value do digital badges deliver?

Digital Badging offers *earners* tremendous value including:

- **Verified skills and expertise:** Digital badges provide an easy path for employers, colleagues and licensing boards to verify an earner’s credentials with a single click. They also convey all of the underlying qualifications needed for earning the badge.
- **Differentiation in the job market:** The badges help earners differentiate themselves when looking for jobs by showcasing their validated skills and expertise in a cutting-edge savvy way.
- **Convenience:** Badges offer a convenient way to digitally record, store and share their certifications and experiences online.

Digital badging also offers issuing *organizations* a number of significant, quantifiable benefits including:

- **Branding and Marketing:** As earners share their badges with others, the issuing organization is able to market its programs virally and build its brand organically.
- **Risk Mitigation:** Unlike paper certificates, digital badges are 100% verified and authenticated, thereby protecting the integrity of each credential. Moreover, some badging platforms, such as BadgeCert, even allow issuers to set expiration dates and business rules that further mitigate the risk of earners sharing credentials that are no longer current.
- **Analytics:** Some platforms offer highly sophisticated data collection tools that allow organizations to analyze market impact by reviewing badge sharing, clicks and views.
- **Cost mitigation:** Digital badges allow organizations to reduce mailing expenses and paper processing labor. Moreover, organizations with international certifiants do not need to be concerned that the paper certificates won’t (or can’t) be delivered properly.
- **Global:** Digital badges can be rendered in multiple languages.
- **Skills:** Along with credentials, organizations can create programs to capture and verify skills, especially for renewal purposes.

- **Revenue generation:** Organizations can upsell digital badges as an additional value for certification and continuing education courses.

What do organizations need to consider when investing in digital badging?

Digital badging clearly delivers value to both organizations and individuals. However, not all badging platforms are created equal. As such, before choosing and investing in a specific digital badging software platform, an organization needs to consider its overall objectives and goals.

Some questions the organization will want to consider:

- Does the platform include a badge creation and authoring tool?
- Does the platform include open interfaces that can be readily integrated with existing credentialing processes?
- Do the digital badges include underlying data describing the accomplishment, or are they easily reproducible static images?
- Can the embedded data fields encapsulate the organization's requirements and can they be customized to meet other objectives?
- Does the platform track and communicate expiration as well as cluster continuing education courses that can be leveled-up into a certification?
- Does the workflow align with the organization's volume and frequency requirements?
- How is the digital badge profile to be shared and communicated to both the issuer and the industry?
- Does the platform track badge analytics such as "clicks" and sharing?