

# Professional Certificates

## *Education or Business?*

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Undoubtedly, you have earned some of those 3-6 letters certificate names to append after you name, whatever your specialty or professional field. Those certificates are supposed to be as a means of expressing knowledge and professionalism of the certificate holder. This perception of the certificate meaning and value is mainly based on recognition from the wider base of a professional community. But, have you ever tried to put this assumption in question to validate it?

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Back to the roots, the institutions who issue these certificates. Each professional certificate that's claimed to be testifying the holder's knowledge and capabilities is issued by some company or institute, who are in many cases supposed to be non-profit professional organizations.

Clearly, certification is an industry and business by itself, and in some cases the business part is so prevailing that the mission of the institution itself is threatened to be lacking credibility. Executives of these institutions are excessively focused on making money and growing revenue than on professional development of their field. The result is abuse of your desire for professional growth, and putting your professional development efforts and investments in risk of becoming useless and of no value.

A danger point in this regard is that leadership of those professional institutions continually changes, vision and direction change, and hidden agendas may intervene in the process. You can't one hundred percent rely solely on previous historical record of some certificate issuing institution without taking in consideration the future directions, and there is always risk.

It's of course necessary for any operational entity to pay attention to being financially self-sufficient, but not to make this objective the dominant attitude governing the whole decision making process.

## Credibility Metrics:

So how to judge the credibility and worthiness when selecting professional certificates and the issuing institutions? It's not an easy question, but based on many years close range experiences and interactions in this area, I can highlight the following symptoms that signify a possibly con business institution:

- They keep releasing new certification programs all the time without being driven by real professional needs in the community and not serving any professional development purpose. These new certificates are released mainly as new income generation channels.
- They may cancel certification programs at any time when these certificates are no longer generating the financial reward that was expected from them, or when more financially rewarding options are found, even as reseller for another company. Such financially focused institutions don't care about the certificate holders of the cancelled certificates or about their professional and investment losses out of this cancelation. One incident of this kind is enough to mark such institution for elimination completely from your professional development plans.
- Competitive, rather than collaborative, institutes who are driven by the desire to outperform and win over other institutions working in the same profession and issuing competing certificates. This is a clear sign of pure business mission of such institutions.
- Releasing commercial products which were developed by volunteer efforts from the professionals who were taken by the glossy image of those institutions and thought doing efforts free of charge will enhance their professional profile just by attaching those institutions' names to their resume. Unfortunately, those well-intentioned professionals were abused by such commercial institutions who take advantage of their hard work for the purpose of income generation and image building.
- They require periodical payment for maintaining the professional certificates you earned. Although periodical renewal in general is valid and acceptable, associating this with the need to keep continually paying endlessly to keep your certificate active is evidently a financially driven action.

That said, most of these criteria, if not all, are actually materializing in majority of certification institutes in the market currently. Arguably, we can say that academic studies are more credible and of higher value than commercial proprietary certificates, unless it's clear enough from those institutions performance that they are professionally, not financially, driven.