Complex Continuing Education:
INDUSTRY TRENDS & TECHNOLOGY

By John Leh, Joelle Girton and Bill Perry
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Maintaining a professional license or certification is unique by industry and jurisdiction. For example, in Alaska, certified public accountants must complete four hours of instruction on Alaska-specific ethics, statutes and regulations. In Ohio, the ethics requirement is three hours.

We recently asked an administrator at a top 20 U.S. hospital how difficult it was to respond to an audit by an accrediting body examining whether or not physicians had completed continuing medical education.

“We spent two hours calling doctors to obtain records because our system only tracks the courses they take at our hospital,” says Paige Heaphy, director for Medical Staff Services for Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. “No single system feeds us all CME.”

DEFINING CONTINUING EDUCATION

Continuing education is broadly defined as training provided to adults after they have left the formal education process. It can be informal learning like taking a Lynda.com course online, completing a MOOC or more formal training like earning your Project Management Professional certificate, becoming an electrician or maintaining a Certified Public Accountant license. Complex continuing education is most often associated with the administrative challenges of maintaining professional licenses.

"In medicine, accounting and finance, professional licenses are given by a board or bar,” says Lee Maxey, CEO of MindMax, LLC, a provider of marketing and enrollment management services for academic institutions like Harvard University. "Keeping that license requires ongoing professional continuing education. When you talk about continuing education in the context of a university that can mean anything from taking lifelong learning to earning a master’s degree."

Professional continuing education (CE) is focused on achieving and maintaining professional certifications and licenses. Many of the 92,000 U.S.-based associations provide training activities and certifications for their users. Other types of organizations also provide professional CE such as for-profit training companies, universities, hospitals and the government.

In 1970, the International Association for Continuing Education (IACET), which sets the standard for continuing education units, or CEU, defined 1 CEU = 10 contact hours. IACET is accredited by the American National Standards Institute and oversees what a CEU is. For example, a learner taking a two-day course meeting five hours daily would earn one CEU if the course met IACET standards. IACET manages a process for content providers to use when developing a course; IACET looks at 10 different categories when analyzing whether a course meets IACET’s standards. However, with the evolution of self-paced eLearning many industries have simplified the equation to 1 CEU = 1 hour of study. Though some industries like accounting and legal define 1 CEU = 50 minutes of instruction.

"There are accreditation boards beyond IACET,” says Casey Goldberg, associate vice president of the Credentialing Program for Coulter, an association management company whose clients include IACET, "such as the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education, which examines continuing medical education for physicians.” Other examples include National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) and National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB).

Accreditation can be a very good thing. But it adds to complexity and extends the development time for courses. The director of continuing medical education (CME) at a top 20 U.S. hospital system says, "It can take nine months to develop, gain approval from ACCME and deliver a CME course for physicians. Plus, there’s a three-month outcome study to make sure the course accomplishes what it was designed to do.”

ANSI/IACET 1-2013 STANDARD

- CATEGORY 1: Continuing Education and Training Organization
- CATEGORY 2: Responsibility and Control
- CATEGORY 3: Learning Environment and Support Systems
- CATEGORY 4: Learning Event Planning
- CATEGORY 5: Learning Outcomes
- CATEGORY 6: Planning and Instructional Personnel
- CATEGORY 7: Content and Instructional Methods
- CATEGORY 8: Assessment of Learning Outcomes
- CATEGORY 9: System for Awarding CEUs and Maintaining Learner Records
- CATEGORY 10: Program Evaluation

SOURCE: IACET.org

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1 NASBA.org “Boards of Accountancy,” Listing of Statutes
2 According to the American Society of Association Executives tabulation as of 2010
3 Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education
THE SIZE OF THE CE MARKET

According to a 2015 report from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce titled "College Is Just the Beginning," certifications, apprenticeships, and other workforce training comprise $47 billion of annual U.S. spending on formal training.

This number excludes employer-provided informal training, which might include asking a colleague to explain a process.

In 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau conducted a survey including the topic of professional credentials and found that 46 million adults held a professional certification or license. Of the 46 million, 11 million have bachelor’s degrees and maintain a professional certification; 7 million people with a master’s degree also hold a professional certification or license; 2 million people with a professional degree hold a professional certification or license. In total, 25% of the adult U.S. population participates in formal continuing education.

There are currently no global calculations on the size of CE market since continuing education is managed nationally and by local jurisdictions industry by industry.

THE CE PLAYERS: ACCREDITING BODIES, CONTENT PROVIDERS, EMPLOYERS AND LEARNERS

Beyond the millions of learners who consume CME, CEU and other professional CE, there are employers, university professional extensions, colleges, content developers and associations that create, deliver and, in many cases, charge for the CE content. There are also boards such as the American Board of Medical Specialties, the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards and the American Board of Internal Medicine, to name a few, that manage the business of certifying whether a doctor or financial planner meets industry standards. In 2012, the ABIM’s Internal Revenue Service Form 990 shows the organization received more than $55 million in fees from physicians seeking certifications. And there are technology providers who develop the software for tracking, cataloguing, delivering and registering learners for professional CE. Among these are CME software tracking tools, continuing legal education (CLE) tracking and reporting systems and learning management systems (LMS).

THE CONSUMERS AND PROVIDERS OF PROFESSIONAL CONTINUING EDUCATION

The plethora of tracking and management systems stem from how many professionals take CE to obtain and renew licenses and certifications and the specific industry requirements. According to the Census Bureau, education services and health care workers (e.g., nurses and physicians) make up 48 percent of professional certification and license holders. The next largest group (i.e., 36 percent) holds certifications and licenses in finance, insurance and real estate. The smallest percentage, only 13 percent, holding professional certifications and licenses are agriculture, forestry and mining workers.

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CE CONTENT PROVIDERS MUST ENGAGE LARGE NUMBERS OF LEARNERS

According to the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) website, its “accredited providers offer more than 130,000 continuing medical education activities in communities across the country drawing more than 24 million health care practitioner participants.” The ACCME had approximately 2,000 CME providers in its network as of 2013. The National Association of State Boards of Accountancy lists more than 1,950 approved content providers on its National Registry.

Chris Rousseau, the chief information officer at the Practicing Law Institute, a premium supplier of continuing legal education for attorneys throughout the U.S., says that PLI delivers more than 400 continuing legal education (CLE) programs per year.

“We’re highly interactive and visual and, in some ways, some of our CLE looks like a television show,” says Rousseau. "In our department, we have a person with the title ‘producer.’ And we chose that title for this person because the job involves scriptwriting, post-production and more. The impetus for this was a desire on PLI’s part to lead and stretch the boundaries of what CLE can do."

But managing the CLE a provider creates can be a challenge. Some rely on an LMS.

"Our LMS is a course catalogue, and we have a single sign-on for CLE completion and certification," adds Rousseau. "Through an API, our partners let us know that a person has completed a course. The rules, however, are very complex."

For example, when a lawyer completes a course, PLI has to look at which jurisdiction has accredited the CLE program. When it comes to CLE ethics courses, the rules differ from state to state just as in accounting.

UNIVERSITIES MARKET AND PROVIDE CE TO PROFESSIONALS

From the Community College of Allegheny County, Pa., to Harvard University, postsecondary academic institutions offer professional continuing education for attorneys, accountants, insurance professionals and more. "Of approximately 4,300 postsecondary schools nationwide, around 2,000 provide CEUs," adds Maxey.

ASSOCIATIONS GENERATE AN ARRAY OF CE CONTENT AND DOLLARS

Many associations deliver education to create more money for the association and help the profession that the association serves. One example is CPA2Biz, the technology subsidiary of the American Institute of CPAs (AICPA). The AICPA’s 370,000 members have to meet and keep track of state regulations.

According to an article appearing in Chief Learning Officer magazine, CPA2Biz uses an LMS to sell content sourced from AICPA and third parties to accounting and financial professionals who are required to take approximately 40 hours of continuing education annually depending on their state of licensure. The LMS helps CPAs consider their career paths and CPAs are buying more education because of it. The LMS delivers the education in the context of a learning plan each time an AICPA member takes a course says the article. In 2012, AICPA members paid, on average, $30 per course hour taken via the LMS.
A PROFUSION OF EDUCATION

While accountants take continuing professional education (CPE) from sources like CPA2Biz, physicians take CME and lawyers register for CLE. The requirements vary by profession. CLE accreditation is given on a state-by-state basis. And CME and CPE are among the most complex to manage; whenever CE is tailored state by state for licensing and regulations and accreditations (see Figure 1), the tracking and management challenges grow exponentially.

At hospitals and accounting firms, entire departments are formed to manage the maze of CE. It’s no less complicated for the certifying organizations that have to decide which CE to accept from other entities. By uniting under one standard, says the IACET, “the cost of approval for continuing education would be minimal, supporting affordable quality education.”

ACCREDITING BODIES REQUIRE CE TRACKING

Across industries, concerns about informational bias in the design of CE have led to the creation of bodies to regulate instruction. The ACCME designates state medical societies as accreditors of local CME organizations. The National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) provides support to America’s state boards of accountancy, which, in turn, prepare students for professional licensure and administer licensing exams. Built into the standards of many accreditation bodies is the requirement that a CE provider must track and report on what they offer.

TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGIES FOR MANAGING COMPLEX CE

If there are national or global standards on credit requirements, continuing education is governed by states, provinces or other local jurisdictions. If organizations have employees that are licensed in multiple jurisdictions, they must adhere to the standards of all applicable jurisdictions and so must their accredited training.

Managing all this gets complicated quickly for everyone involved including organizations managing, providing or individuals consuming continuing education. Here are some key complex certification requirements that vary industry to industry, certification to certification and jurisdiction to jurisdiction that cause all the administrative problems:

- Value of seat hour of instruction
- Amount and type(s) of credits needed to maintain a certification
- Length of certification period
- Deadline to report continuing education and any grace period
- Where and how to report continuing education achievement
- Categories or types of credit needed
- Approved content formats

With each incremental accrediting jurisdiction the problem compounds and becomes so complicated that many organizations can’t use a commercially available LMS to manage CEUs but rather are forced to cobble together spreadsheets, homegrown custom systems, specialized commercial CE trackers and manual processes to bridge the gap, connect the data and ensure compliance. Today there are more than 600 LMSs to choose from yet few are capable of managing complex CEUs.

CONTINUING MEDICAL EDUCATION FOR LICENSURE REREGISTRATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Required Number of CME Hours per Year(s)</th>
<th>Average Hours per Year</th>
<th>Certificates Accepted as Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>24 hrs</td>
<td>2 yrs</td>
<td>12 ACOG, AAFP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>50 hrs</td>
<td>2 yrs</td>
<td>25 AMA PRA, ABMS, AOA, APA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>40 hrs</td>
<td>2 yrs</td>
<td>20 ABMS, GME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona DO</td>
<td>40 hrs</td>
<td>2 yrs</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>20 hrs</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>20 AMA PRA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California*</td>
<td>100 hrs</td>
<td>4 yrs</td>
<td>25 AMA PRA, AAFP, CMA, CAPF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1  State-by-state CME requirements for physicians
(Source: American Medical Association)
“We would like to have technology for e-commerce, registering students and supplying certificates,” said Jim Eagen, director of Training Development Strategy for the Institute of Internal Auditors, which describes itself as the most widely recognized advocate, educator, and provider of standards, guidance, and certifications. “An LMS that is multi-tenant or partitioned would help us.”

In the accounting industry, most firms setup a NASBA license and award CPE or CEU credit based on the NASBA standards, rather than maintain the complex CPE rules of each state. LearnLive Technologies, which is a compliance software application owned by Thomson Reuters, automatically maps NASBA CPE credit to each state jurisdiction. An LMS that can regularly feed the NASBA CPE credits a learner earns plays a critical role in helping organizations automate the steps of mapping and reporting of CPE renewal compliance.

A key for training directors is having an LMS that includes the ability to easily integrate with any other software in an organization’s ecosystem including CPE mapping tools, practice management software, human resource information system, single sign on, CEU tracking in another system, surveys and assessment engines. The LMS will then share data with these systems eliminating manual administrative intervention and reducing the complexity.

Among medical training providers, the ACCME’s Program and Activity Reporting System (PARS) is a primary conduit for CME tracking. PARS, according to the ACCME, is a web-based portal designed to streamline and support the collection of program and activity data from accredited CME providers.

“I have to report to PARS on a yearly basis,” says Alicia M. Blodgett, director of Continuing Medical Education, UB School of Medicine & Biomedical Sciences. “By March 30 of every year, every CME activity I’ve certified for the year goes to ACCME through PARS.”

Blodgett added, “We also use CME Tracker, a system to get CME transcripts and record CME credits.”

LMS providers will readily tell you that their systems can track CEUs. But accounting firms, banks, hospitals and law firms need an LMS that manages something far more complex.

For example, Figure 2 shows how granular the considerations can become for a law firm considering technology for the tracking of CLE.

In some industries the LMS might push CEU information to the accreditation body and in other industries the LMS would be the repository. So, how are people responsible for delivering and tracking CE tackling the challenge? We interviewed banking, healthcare and accounting professionals to find out.

WHAT TYPES OF CLE DO YOU NEED TO TRACK?

- Will you be tracking CLE credits for multiple states or just one state?
- Do you want the attorneys to track their own time or will you have a point person track the credits?
- Will you be tracking CLE credits for one office or multiple offices?
- Do you want a program pre-loaded with the CLE regulations or one that can be modified?
- Do you want the vendor to update the program when changes are made to CLE requirements?
- Will you be tracking traditional CLE seminars in addition to online course offerings?

Figure 2 Tracking CLE (Source: ABA)
STORIES FROM THE FRONT LINES

BANKING

“We have 2.5 FTEs working on licensing our employees who handle the sale of insurance and securities,” says a vice president of administration for a top U.S. bank. “As we onboard a salesperson or branch manager, we register them from an insurance and FINRA (Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, Inc) perspective. For FINRA, that means using Web CRD, a database for licensing and registration for the securities industry.

“We are very manual. There’s no system that populates reports,” the vice president adds.

The director of training for a Northeastern U.S. regional bank says, “We could probably do something with our LMS to track external CE, but we would probably have to trick our LMS into thinking the person is registering for a course.”

Banks say the biggest challenge with CE is data warehousing requirements. One bank executive said, “If FINRA’s Web CRD could manage insurance CE on one platform that would be ideal.”

HEALTHCARE

“Our biggest challenge with CME is being completely integrated,” says the CME director of a West Coast hospital system. “Making sure everything flows from one part of our process to the other and not duplicating activities. CME is a very labor-intensive process.”

The West Coast CME director said she doesn’t employ an LMS for delivering and tracking CME, which can include: seminars; courses; Grand Rounds, the walkabouts on a hospital floor that staff conduct to share information; webinars and more. Rather, the hospital relies on a combination of spreadsheets, which are used for input to PARS. The assistant chief of staff at this West Coast hospital adds, “For physicians in private practice, they would track CME on their own.”

The hospital does tap its LMS to ensure staff have taken and acknowledge understanding regulations such as HIPAA.

ACCOUNTING

“Our current LMS allows us to build a calendar and register people for requirements; that’s it,” says Jason McKeever, director of Training and Development for Eide Bailly LLP, a top-ranked accounting firm. “We can’t build, assign learning paths.”

The accounting industry’s accrediting bodies have decided there are six layers, or progressions an accountant can take. If an accountant is at the first progression, he or she may need to acquire 12 to 15 competencies to progress to layer six, where the accountant may ultimately need up to 35 competencies.

“We want to be more strategic about competency development,” McKeever adds. “We want to tie learning to competency and provide accountants the skills and knowledge they need to know.”
HANDLING THE COMPLEXITIES OF CE

Continuing Education and Certification Management Continuing education (e.g., medical, pharmacy, nursing, dental, financial, legal, real estate) and certification management (e.g., aerospace, manufacturing, pharmaceutical) is a specific feature set in LMS solutions. CE is typically the revenue generator of the feature set, while compliance heavy organizations use the feature set to reduce compliance risk with employees.

BASIC CE

Basic CE capabilities include assigning points for completion of learning activities. From an administration standpoint, administrators can set up the types of CEs they will offer such as CME or Continuing Nursing Education (CNE) and then when they create a course they can specify the amount of credits or credit hours achieved. Many LMS that claim CE support fail to consider the complexities of recertification, regional variations, job variations, support for multiple accreditation per course and other complex scenarios involving practical exams, OJT, mentoring and group collaboration. LMS vendors usually start out as generalists winning in the easy industries and discover the complexities of CE down the road as they mature.

INTERMEDIATE CE

Intermediate CE capabilities include entering external certification information with workflow to review and approve administratively. These capabilities would also include configuring certificate date rules: How long is the certification good for? Is it two years from course completion, or two years from course completion rounded to the nearest Dec. 31, or is it 270 days? Or is it all three depending on what job you have?

Supporting multiple credit types per course is another capability. For example, you offer a course and are accredited to award credits in Pennsylvania, Maryland or New York accreditation bodies. If you do not have this feature, then you must create a course for each accreditation type, which causes much administrative overhead and confusion for end-users/buyers.

ADVANCED CE

Advanced features are typically deployed for internal users. These requirements include managing qualifications and carrying out two-way integration with accreditation bodies. Advanced CE also includes auditing of the LMS to ensure 21 CFR Part 11 compliance, eSignatures, time stamps and audit trails. Some advanced LMS solutions will also display dashboards for complying with all levels of organizational, team and individual qualifications. Allowing for informal learning events achieved outside of the LMS to be stored within and also using mobile technology to support live events and seminars are available yet rare in LMSs.

CONCLUSION

To manage complex professional continuing education successfully, an LMS must play the leading role in automating, centralizing and integrating all CE processes. Many LMSs track training but the complexities of CEU can challenge even the best LMSs. To manage professional CE across industries as complex as finance and healthcare, an LMS must do more than award a single CEU value and single CEU type and, instead, offer a potentially unlimited number of CEU values and CEU types per learning record. The CEU value and CEU type a user earns must be based on where the learner is licensed.

Better managing the complexities of professional continuing education requires centralizing CE processes and integration with accreditation systems. An end state for everyone touching professional continuing education would be knowing in real-time the total amount of credits needed, a historical record of what’s been earned and status of the license without any manual intervention.
ABOUT TALENTED LEARNING, LLC AND THE AUTHORS

Talented Learning, LLC is a news, research and consulting organization dedicated to the advancement of all aspects of extended enterprise learning technology solutions. We help organizations buy learning technology wisely and we provide assistance, guidance and resources for business case development, requirements identification, vendor selection, deployment and adoption marketing.

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**Bill Perry** writes about the training industry for Talented Learning, LLC; he has worked for several top-tier LMS providers. His stories about training technology have appeared in publications ranging from Chief Learning Officer magazine to TD Magazine.

ABOUT ELOGIC LEARNING

Since its founding in 2001, eLogic Learning has been leading the industry in learning management system (LMS) innovation and providing personalized solutions to help clients achieve better business results through learning. As a full-service learning solutions provider, eLogic offers its clients a range of professional services and tools to successfully train and develop their most valuable asset: the people behind their brand.

Ranked as a Top 3 LMS by E-Learning 24/7, eLogic’s eSSential LMS offers robust functionality and unparalleled user experience. The eSSential LMS has helped hundreds of companies including Outback Steakhouse, Sage and Massage Envy Spa increase productivity, save costs and generate value. Learn more about eLogic Learning & the eSSential LMS by visiting elogiclearning.com

METHODOLOGY FOR THIS REPORT

This is a free, independent, unbiased report with research sponsored by eLogic Learning but conducted by Talented Learning, LLC.

We compiled the information for this report in several ways. First, we carried out interviews with training and development professionals and experts on continuing education working with state and federal government, universities, banks, hospitals, accounting firms and law firms. These workers ranged from lawyers and physicians to CME directors and government statisticians.

Next, our research led to interviews with companies who offered compelling benchmarks based on our findings. Third, along with our primary research, we looked to best practices on continuing education, digested the latest reports and articles on the topic, reviewed case histories and interviewed and consulted with researchers who regularly study the discipline and trends affecting technologies for CE.