Evidence of Authority: A Case Study on the Certified Meeting Professional Accreditation

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ABSTRACT

EVIDENCE OF AUTHORITY: A CASE STUDY OF THE CERTIFIED MEETING

PROFESSIONAL ACCREDITATION

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The continuously evolving experience industry is proving to be a growing field when it comes to the planning of corporate events and meetings. Professional certifications allow for corporate event planners to test their knowledge of best practices for the future of companies. The purpose of this study was to examine how the Events Industry Council (EIC) administers and markets the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) accreditation to corporate event planners in the experience industry. Research for this study was gathered using a case study analysis established by the researcher, which highlighted professional certifications and the benefits they have on industry-related professionals. The results of this study conclude that there are many effective practices for obtaining a professional certification. It is imperative for EIC administrators to stay current on event planning trends and best practices to improve the future of CMP exams.

Keywords: corporate event planning, accreditation, meeting professionals, experience industry, marketing

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of Study

       In 2017, business events involved more than 1.5 billion participants across more than 180 countries (Eic, 2018). The types of professional certification exams offered for corporate event planners can range on topics such as venue research, catering, risk management, and marketing. Many individuals will be trained in specific areas that pertain to the job description in which they applied for. However, professional certifications allow for individuals to ensure their knowledge and competence on the subject matter. Though most individuals only think of professional certifications as a means to get a pay increase, there are extreme benefits that will also lead to better job performance. As of now, there are about 26 certification exams for corporate event planners to take so they can become a verified professional ("Event Planning", 2019).

       Corporate event planning may be one of the most underutilized—and misunderstood—strategic tools in professional America (Vennerstrom, 2013). For example, when telling other professionals about specific job requirements within the industry, the individual is referred to as a "party planner". Every corporate event planner is entrusted with the safety and well-being of people at every event (Hunt, 2012). Not only are more universities recognizing this as a field of study, but corporations are continuing to demand their conferences, tradeshows, and meetings to stand out from competitors. The projected growth for the meeting, convention, and event planners is expected to increase by 11% in the USA between 2016-2026 (Summary, 2018). The

experience industry is booming and it is all thanks to the powerful effects of social media and the urge to compete against other industry professionals. Through professional certifications, the experience industry is made possible. The purpose of this study was to examine how the Events Industry Council (EIC) administers and markets the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) accreditation to corporate event planners in the experience industry.

Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: Academic Search Premier, Hospitality & Tourism Complete, and Google Scholar. This review of literature is organized into three topic areas: professional certifications, marketing strategies of professional certifications, and corporate event planning in the experience industry.

Professional Certifications

Over 1 million certifications are awarded every year and professional certifications are the second most common award in the United States (Carnevale, Rose, Hanson, 2012). Certifications are proven to increase employee credibility within the industry, as well as being viewed as a learning tool to motivate the workforce (Koenigsfeld, Perdue, Youn, & Woods, 2011). Certifications for other industries are becoming more popular because there is a growing need for all types of qualifications.

Certifications are typically created to protect the public from unqualified professionals as well as promote the competencies of an association (Mulkey & Naughton, 2005).

There are many different types of credentials ranging from licensure to certifications, microcredentials, and certificates (Foshay, 2017). Certificates are the least demanding form of credential (Foshay, 2017). They are typically given to individuals once they complete a training program, such as Cvent Supplier Network, that many corporate event planners take to get venue certified. Licensure and certifications are the most demanding programs because they typically require some proof of knowledge in the specific field of study (Foshay, 2017). A corporate certification test is designed to be based on real-world work experience (Foshay, 2017).

The most common reasons for individuals to become a certified professional include salary or monetary compensation, positive feedback from superiors and peers, self-esteem, self-worth, and confidence (Eppang & Som, 2018). The number of certification programs is continuously increasing, and the amount of certifications for various industries is as diverse as the number of professions in the United States (Lengnick-Hall & Aguinis, 2012). Not only are certifications themselves becoming more popular and required by companies to take on a specific role, but individuals are seeing the benefits.

There have been many studies of the values of certifications in areas which need highly required skills such as medical, nursing and accounting (Eppang & Som, 2018). However, very little research is done on the effects of professional certifications within the experience industry for corporate event planners since it is still a growing industry.

Most certifications are based on an individual's experience as well as overall qualifications.

Various certification programs are typically managed by an outside organization within the specific industry. They typically require a number of Continuing Education Units to uphold the benefits of the certification. For example, every year, an individual may need to attend a number of webinars or conferences so they stay up-to-date on current industry trends and best practices. Many companies value Continue Education Units as a form of experiential learning and critical thinking (Raybould & Wilkins, 2006). Certifications are becoming a more popular skill to include when applying for jobs, but various companies are also encouraging their employees to get a certification, after they are hired, so the business can maintain a positive reputation.

Marketing Strategies of Professional Certifications

The most important factor to consider when marketing a professional certification is knowing who exactly the customers are. A U.S. corporate meeting planner can best be described as a 30 to 44-year-old female, who has a bachelor's degree, earns a salary of $45,000 to $49,999, and lives in the South Atlantic states (Casanova, 2005).

Knowing that this is the targeted demographic can assist in determining how this individual will relate to the product or service of one company versus its competitor. Understanding why an individual is pursuing a certification is just as important as why they may be interested in becoming a certified professional. According to a Knapp International presentation for American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) & The Center for Association Leadership, having an understanding of a company's competitor's other certifications, certificate programs, professional development

programs, degree programs, and employer in-house training will be valuable when determining time and money (Resources, n.d.).

A program's feasibility, ability to compel and competitive effectiveness can distinct the certification from competitors and help meet the unique needs of the target market (Resources, n.d.). Blending traditional as well as new marketing techniques is essential in strategy development. Traditional marketing techniques include direct mail, print articles, website pages, presentations, and exhibit hall booths. New marketing techniques include social media, evangelists and "fansumers", buzz and viral marketing, and blogospheres (Resources, n.d.). These marketing techniques help drive the experience industry.

Corporate Event Planning in the Experience Industry

Experiential learning has long been an approach used in hospitality and tourism education (Lau, 2010). Technology has revolutionized the meetings industry for the past twenty years (Casanova, 2005). "Twenty years ago the term "meeting planner" was virtually nonexistent, but it has become a common term for that individual in an organization whose duties consist in whole or in part of planning the details attendant to meetings of various types and sizes" (Rutherford, 1990, p. 23). It is important for any individual to learn from real-life examples and how to better apply those tools to future practices. Experiential learning focuses on that approach by allowing individuals to make mistakes and understand from them.

The meetings industry focuses on three specific types: association, corporate, and tradeshows (Casanova, 2005). "Associations play an important role in meeting planning, especially in professional training efforts. They also maintain comprehensive lists of

meeting planning buyers and suppliers. Some of these associations are Meeting

Professionals International (MPI), Professional Convention Management Association

Meeting (PCMA), and the Convention Industry Council (CIC)" (Casanova, 2005, p. 23).

CIC has since been rebranded as Events Industry Council (EIC) to incorporate all aspects

of meeting planning.

Events are about communication and use a variety of tools, such as signs,

brochures, name badges, and presentations with logos to carry forth their messages

(Tinnish, 2012). An increasing amount of experiential marketing agencies are planning

events for larger corporations due to the need of impressing its customers. There is this

concept of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) that agencies want to incorporate with all of its

events, whether it is a meeting, conference, or a tradeshow (Ting, 2017). Millennials are

chasing experiences over things and the events industry is taking advantage of this

strategy. Social media is also helping to influence this concept by allowing others to

publicly broadcast where they are and what they are doing at the event.

Corporate event planning has become recognized as an industry that is built for

women (Bartanen, 2005). Meeting planners in the past were typically known as an

administrative or executive assistant, and now 89.9% of meeting managers and 85.8% of

meeting directors are women (Jackson, 2003). Women are multitaskers, and, historically,

are sought as caretakers who provide food and organize events (Bartanen, 2005). Women

in event planning still face stereotypes. However, with an influx of women in the

workforce and a growing profession, the meeting professionals who will succeed are the

ones who are knowledgeable about upcoming trends thus becoming industry leaders

(Canton, 2000).

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the current structure of the Certified Meeting Professional accreditation?

2. What are the current practices Events Industry Council uses to market the Certified Meeting Professional accreditation?

3. How effective are the current practices Events Industry Council uses to market the accreditation?

4. How do Events Industry Council administrators stay current on experience industry trends?

Chapter 2

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine how the Events Industry Council (EIC) administers and markets the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) accreditation to corporate event planners in the experience industry. This chapter includes the following sections: description of organization, description of instrument, and description of procedures.

Description of Organization

The instrument utilized in this study was a case study checklist developed by the researcher on EIC. EIC is a $3 million association and has over 30 member organizations that represent over 103,500 individuals and 19,500 firms within the events industry. EIC has four signature programs—Sustainability, Industry Insights, Knowledge, Leadership. The programs work together to advance the events industry and the professionals who plan business meetings (Home, n.d.).

EIC was first known as the Convention Liaison Committee in 1949. They formed a book titled "Group Business Unlimited" to aid the hotel industry in understanding all the business opportunities and challenges faced in hotels. In 1999, the Convention Liaison Committee changed its name to Convention Industry Council to incorporate the meetings and events industry associations. As of recent, the Convention Industry Council rebranded as EIC for a more global presence of all industry associations (Home, n.d.).

<u>Description of Instrument</u>

        The instrument utilized in this study was a case study checklist developed by the researcher (see Appendix A). The structure for the instrument included three sections: Structure of Accreditation, Marketing Practices, and Continuing Education Programs. The Structure of Accreditation section included eligibility requirements, preparation materials, administration, and fees. Under the marketing practices section, various traditional marketing practices were listed in addition to digital marketing practices. Continuing Education Programs listed additional resources a test taker could refer to if they wanted to uphold the standards of their accreditation. Overall, the instrument is used to gauge more information on the marketing and administering of certifications and accreditations.

        A pilot test was conducted to determine if there were any flaws that could limit the amount of research. The pilot test was done by the researcher on a similar organization to EIC, known as the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). After the pilot test, the researcher decided that the two subsections labeled "practice exams" and "topics" needed to be combined into one subsection labeled "prep materials". Under marketing practices, the researcher decided "endorsement", "paid", "sponsorship" and "referral" would overcomplicate the study and thought it would be best to focus on "testimonial", "social media", "email" and "advertising". The researcher also decided to combine the three subsections labeled "conferences", "tradeshows", and "webinars" into one subsection labeled "meetings and events" as well as created an "additional resources" that focused on other attainable continuing education credits. These changes within the

pilot test allowed the researcher to focus on how EIC administers and markets the CMP accreditation.

<u>Description of Procedures</u>

This study consisted of a thorough analysis of how the EIC administers and markets the CMP accreditation to corporate event planners in the experience industry. The instrument utilized in this study was a case study checklist developed by the researcher on EIC. During the two-week research phase from February 14, 2019, to March 1, 2019, the researcher used the instrument to gather, examine, and further analyze the context of the study. The researcher primarily used the EIC website to gather relative information about the organization as well as the accreditation. The following websites were also used during the research period: Social Tables, Meeting Professionals International, Events Industry Council, Successful Meetings. The researcher also watched a webinar on the organization's website to learn more about the accreditation process and how it is administered to industry professionals. Third party sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, helped the researcher to see social media marketing practices. The researcher also looked at third-party sites to determine which topics were presented on the accreditation exam and if the organization is staying current on industry trends and best practices.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine how the Events Industry Council (EIC) administers and markets the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) accreditation to corporate event planners in the experience industry. A case study approach was utilized to examine the EIC. This chapter includes the following sections: Structure of Accreditation, Marketing Practices, and Continuing Education Programs.

Structure of Accreditation

Eligibility Requirements

The target applicant for the CMP exam is someone who is currently working in the meeting, convention, exhibition, and event industry. General eligibility requirements to apply to take the CMP exam are based on professional experience as well as continuing education. There are three professional options that can provide proof of eligibility. Option 1 includes 36 months of full-time work experience in the event or hospitality industries. This option is ideal for applicants who have been working in the field for a few years and looking to advance into a more senior-level position. Option 2 includes 24 months of experience that demonstrates meeting management as well as obtaining an industry degree. This option is ideal for applicants who are starting out in the industry and may not have as much full-time experience. Option 3 includes 36 months as a full-time instructor in the event or hospitality industries. The full-time

instructor must teach meeting, event, exhibition, hospitality or tourism management at an education institution or university program.

There are two options for continuing education that can be used towards gaining eligibility. Option 1 is 25 clock hours of educational activities, which includes attending conferences and watching webinars. All continued education is documented per session and uploaded via the CMP handbook requirements. Option 2 is typically for those who have also chosen to apply via option 2 in the experience section. This option allows for a 200-hour industry internship taken within the past five years to certify completion.

Preparation Materials

The CMP Handbook and the CMP International Standards are both required readings when preparing for the accreditation. On top of the required readings, there are also three recommended texts of exam items. These texts are Event Industry Council Manual 9th Edition, Events Industry Council Glossary, and Professional Meeting Management 6th Edition.

Other study tips and recommendations include participating in Meeting Professionals International (MPI) led CMP study groups around the world. Local MPI chapters post dates to register for study groups with other individuals in the area or general informational sessions. MPI occasionally offers a CMP Bootcamp during their World Education Congress conference in June to aid in comprehension. Taking practice exams and quizzes are also beneficial in preparing for the actual exam. A few exams are published on EIC's website as well as given to MPI study groups.

Administration

The CMP exam is offered every January, May, August, and November. The exam can be scheduled online with Prometric and the applicant will report to the nearest testing area. Prometric has hundreds of testing locations throughout the world. To find the nearest location, the applicants would need to visit Prometric's website. The exam is comprised of 165 multiple choice questions ranging over topics in the nine domains: strategic planning, project management, risk management, financial management, human resources, stakeholder management, meeting or event design, site management, and marketing. This is a computer-based test with four possible answers to each question. It will take roughly three and a half hours to complete the exam. A total score of 55 or above is considered passing. This does not mean that the applicant needs to answer 55 questions correctly. The CMP exam is scaled so some questions may be more difficult than others, which affects the score differently.

Fees

When applying to assess CMP eligibility requirements, there is a $250 fee associated with the application. Once accepted into EIC, the applicant has one year to pay the $475 fee to take the CMP accreditation exam. Two scholarship foundations, Midwest Meetings, and Timothy S Y Lam Foundation, provide assistance to those who lack the financial stability to cover the cost of the exam. Every five years, it is required to renew the accreditation. Based on submission dates, renewal fees range from $225-$275.

Other fees include purchasing testing materials or practice exams, which range from $25-$150, as well as an emeritus fee of $225 and certificate reprint fee of $50. To be an associated member of MPI or any other CMP-related program, there are additional

member fees and conference fees involved, which will increase the total cost of preparing for the exam.

<u>Marketing Practices</u>

Testimonial

EIC provides testimonials from industry leaders around the world that provide useful insights, including questions and answers about the growing events industry. Employees who have made an impact within the organization are also featured in the testimonial to explain how EIC has made an impact on their careers and profession. For example, Sathya Chinni, who holds the CMP designation, is featured on the website to share about the growing events industry in India. He answers questions regarding getting involved in the events industry, his favorite part about being a CMP, some challenges of being one of India's only CMPs, the growing events in India, advice, and how he learned about the CMP.

Social Media

EIC's Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter are the main social media sites the researcher decided to focus on. Many of the Instagram posts encourage followers to go read an article that is featured in the biography section of EIC's account. Some unique posts on Instagram include posting an event planning related "word" or "term" and explaining the definition of how it relates to the industry. On Facebook, EIC chooses to publish related blog posts and informational trends about event planning, sustainability, and technology. EIC posts on Twitter consist of promoting job opportunities within the events industry as well as posting about upcoming webinars and registration dates. There

14

is a crossover of posts being published across platforms with very little consumer interaction and engagement.

Email

Primary communication with EIC administrators is done through email. Whether it is for general information about the exam, applying to take the exam or recertification, it is expected that all inquiries will be conducted through email. The researcher emailed the EIC information email account to gain more information about the accreditation. The email consisted of a personal response back from an employee with related information about the researcher's questions as well as additional resources. The contact information was also provided for easier communication between parties.

Advertising

EIC primarily advertises on their eNewsletters, *CMP Today* and *Pathway*, through Naylor Association Solutions as well as through the EIC website. They also advertise on related sites like MPI that provide programs for CMP test-takers. For example, on MPI's website, it includes upcoming courses one could enroll in to obtain continuing education units as well as a video depicting why an individual should become a CMP.

Continuing Education Programs

Meetings and Events

There is a great amount of live webinars on the EIC website that are used to assist candidates in understanding the importance of the exam. By attending the live version of the webinar, the applicant is able to earn 1.00 CE to be used towards Continuing Education credits. However, by attending a pre-recorded webinar, no CE is available.

Throughout the year, EIC attends a number of events around the world. These events include certificate courses, exhibitions, such as International Monetary Exchange (IMEX), conferences and tradeshows.

Additional Resources

Preferred providers of EIC allow for individuals who are either applying for the accreditation for the first time or are applying for recertification the chance to earn Continuing Education Credit. These credits are used to document an understanding of the changes within the industry and best practices, such as sustainability features. EIC published "Principles for Sustainable Events" in January 2019 as a new set of guidelines to ensure sustainable practices being followed when planning various types of meeting events. There is also a certification exam that can be taken to demonstrate an understanding of these sustainable practices.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The significance of this study is to determine how the benefits of the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) accreditation relate to corporate event planners. Events Industry Council (EIC) is the organization involved with the meetings, exhibition, and convention industry. Having a certification in the events industry allows for an influx of job responsibilities as well as monetary incentives. This concluding chapter will include the following: a discussion of the findings, limitations, conclusions based on research questions, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

The research collected through this study pointed to four major findings that are examined within this chapter: the current structure of the CMP accreditation, current practices EIC uses to market the CMP, the effectiveness of the marketing practices, and how EIC administrators stay current on experience industry trends.

The current structure of the CMP accreditation includes gaining enough professional experience in order to be eligible to apply for an opportunity to take the exam. The CMP exam is a series of multiple choice questions that challenge the event professional on topics such as strategic planning, event design, marketing, and risk management. As Eppang and Som (2018) mentioned, there are values of certifications in areas which need highly required skills. Trusting an individual to coordinate an event with the company's best interest in mind requires knowledge of industry standards. The

standards of the exam are determined by individuals who hold the CMP accreditation and work in the industry. Moving forward, it is essential for these event professionals to rate the standards of the exam every year. In addition, it is important to survey participants to understand the types of questions being asked and the methodology or resources available to teach these standards. The researcher believes it is essential for each applicant to have the same opportunity to take the exam on the same set of standards. EIC administrators should market the exam equally to all meeting and event professionals.

Current practices EIC uses to market the CMP accreditation include social media, testimonials, advertising, and email. Most communication with administrators is done through email, however, the researcher believes social media has the greatest impact on marketing the accreditation exam. EIC has a presence on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. All three of these social media sites know their targeted demographic and work to encourage individuals to engage with their posts. As Casanova (2005) stated, the most important factor to consider when marketing a professional certification is knowing who exactly the customers are. With technology continuously evolving, it is important for EIC administrators to also increase their digital media use to create brand awareness. The researcher recommends working with corporate event planning influencers to increase the following level of engagement on social posts. Working with well-known event professionals or influencers will encourage their followers to attend more conferences or listen to more webinars if they know a particular influencer will be present.

EIC is the main organization that markets the CMP accreditation. In doing so, their effectiveness is highly efficient. Resources (n.d.) mentioned how a program's feasibility, ability to compel, and competitive effectiveness can distinguish the

certification from competitors and help meet the unique needs of event professionals. EIC benefits from partnering with other organizations for study groups or crash courses. These groups help promote the CMP accreditation, which raises awareness for EIC as an organization. In the future, EIC should partner with additional organizations, such as college institutions with event-related undergraduate degrees, or specific companies with internships for interested individuals.

When marketing and administering the CMP exam, it is essential for EIC professionals to have a general understanding and a solid basis of current event trends and best practices. Even when the event professionals are updating the structure of the exam, they are doing so based on feedback they have from current trends. As Lau (2010) stated, experiential learning has consistently been an approach used in hospitality and tourism education. The researcher believes the best way to understand current trends and best practices is to physically be working in the field of study. By attending conferences, tradeshows, and webinars, it provides the individual with first-hand research at how a specific meeting or event can change the entire future of the industry.

There are a few limitations concerning the researcher's results and outcomes of the study. The researcher is planning on taking the CMP accreditation to further their own success as a corporate event planner upon graduation. Bias has occurred by the promotional efforts of the CMP accreditation and the benefits it has on the industry. Additional research could be done on event professionals who have not taken the exam and how successful they are in their position. The second limitation has to consider all the expense-related factors. Some event professionals might not be able to afford to take the accreditation exam without the help of their employer. Since the researcher is planning on

taking the accreditation, this can create bias because the researcher believes the funds are worth it and there are proven advantages. However, additional research can be done to see the percentage of employers who encourage or help support their employees to take the exam. The third limitation is how most of the results section is taken from the Events Industry Council website. There can be additional documents that support the exact steps one needs to take when applying to take the exam. Additional research can be done to see if there are scholarly articles or journals on someone's personal experience with the exam. Although these limitations are present, the researcher aimed to provide a thorough analysis and understanding within this case study that will benefit EIC and the CMP accreditation.

Overall, the results of this case study analysis showcase the benefits of the CMP accreditation as well as the marketing and administrative tactics the EIC members utilize in their promotional efforts. The current practices are effective for event professionals, however, with meeting and event planning becoming a widely recognized field of study, it is imperative for EIC members to continue working in the professional field. These professionals understand the best practices and future trends for the events industry as a whole. The findings made by the researcher are simply a starting point for future studies and improvements in event-related certification programs.

<u>Conclusions</u>

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The current structure of the CMP accreditation is a two-step process, which includes applying with related event experience and continuing education units followed by a multiple choice exam once granted eligibility.

2. EIC uses digital media practices to increase awareness and engagement for social posts on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

3. More than 11,000 meeting professionals in 55 countries hold the CMP designation. EIC is effective at marketing because many event professionals want to take the exam to increase their own marketability in the workforce.

4. EIC administrators stay current on experience industry trends by physically being present in the workforce and working towards obtaining continuing education units.

<u>Recommendations</u>

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. EIC administrators should continue marketing the exam equally to all meeting and event professionals.

2. EIC should send surveys and feedback links to event professions once they have taken the CMP accreditation for the first time or for renewal to uphold industry standards.

3. EIC should work with corporate event planning influencers to increase the followers and level of engagement on social posts.

4. EIC should partner with additional organizations, such as college institutions with event-related undergraduate degrees, or specific companies with internships for interested individuals.

5. EIC should continue promoting the importance of attending conferences, tradeshows, and webinars to earn continuing education units.

6. Further research could be done on event professionals who have not taken the exam and how successful they are in their position.

7. Further research can be done to see the percentage of employers who encourage or help support their employees to take the exam.

8. Further research can be done to see if there are scholarly articles or journals on someone's personal experience with the exam.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Instrument

	EIC	ASAE
Structure of Accreditations		
Eligibility Requirements		
Preparation Materials		
Administration		
Fees		
Marketing Practices		
Testimonial		
Social Media		
Email		
Advertising		
Continuing Education Programs		
Meetings and Events		
Additional Resources		