

# Turn Learning into Earnings: How to Transform Your CE Program into a Profit Powerhouse



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## Introduction

Continuing education (CE) programs have incredible potential as revenue drivers for associations and credentialing bodies. Too often, though, these programs exist without adding much to the bottom line. In this guide, we'll outline how to overhaul an existing CE program so that it becomes a revenue-driver in its own right.

Before we get into the how-to, though, let's take a look at the why: *why is now such an excellent time to rethink a continuing education program?*

First, demand for certification among workers is increasing:

[75% of students](#) agree that they are more likely to enroll in programs that offer micro-credentials for academic credit.

Worldwide, revenue from professional certificates is expected to [grow 8.11%](#) per year, reaching a global market value of nearly \$9 billion in 2029.

Then there's the employer experience to consider: [70% of US firms](#) report talent or skills shortages. Globally, employers expect [44% of employees' skills to be disrupted](#) in the next five years, meaning those workers will need new competencies and skills to stay relevant.

Nearly [three-quarters of business leaders](#) agree that human capabilities have to keep up with technological advances—but fewer than one in ten think we're on target to do that.

Clearly, demand for CE is high and only likely to grow as technology becomes more and more disruptive. Here's why conformity assessment bodies (including associations and credentialing bodies) are the best group to deliver CE and, crucially, *how* they can craft programs that meaningfully contribute to the bottom line.

## Why You?

# Trust + Revenue Potential Make CE a High-Priority Investment for Associations and Credentialing Bodies

We've established that there's a growing demand for continuing education. Now let's take a look at why associations and [credentialing bodies](#) are uniquely positioned to meet that demand, and why doing so can have a positive effect on their bottom line.

There are three related elements to consider here:



Benefit to learners and members



Trust in associations and credentialing bodies



The lifelong learning journey

## 1. CE Offers an Undeniable Benefit to Learners and Members

Demand for professional certificates is growing as professionals recognize that these certificates have real value for their careers and their professional prospects. To stay relevant in fast-changing industries and amid fast-changing technology, they understand the need to require additional training and certification.

What's more, employees know that earning additional certificates opens them to increased responsibility and higher earning potential at work. On LinkedIn, being able to demonstrate new credentials and certificates may be especially valuable, as it's possible for anyone (including recruiters) to stay abreast of a worker's latest achievements.

Then, of course, there are the workers who need to keep their credentials valid or complete CE courses to stay certified.

In all three cases, learners and members recognize CE as a valuable tool to advance and mature in their careers.



## 2. Learners and Members Trust Associations and Credentialing Bodies

The question then becomes: who will these workers turn to when they're ready to engage in CE? For many, the obvious first choice is the association or credentialing body from which they got their original certification.

Why? It's the same reason as the one that drives us to take our car to the dealer rather than a mechanic we've never worked with.

### **Trust.**

Learners and members trust that the organization that creates and administers an exam or credential is *the* authority on that subject. They know that no third party is better equipped to develop continuing education assets that align with the certification in question.

Contrast this with how learners or members might see a third party offering CE materials: untested, of uncertain quality, and perhaps only in it for the money.

Beyond the inherent trust that learners and members have in conformity assessment bodies, these bodies also enjoy a kind of "digital trust" that manifests as an ecommerce benefit. When your organization launches CE materials on its website, it is likely to outrank third-party competitors because your domain has more authority for that particular topic.

Higher rankings generally translate to more digital traffic to your site, which can lead to revenue as learners and members choose your CE courses.

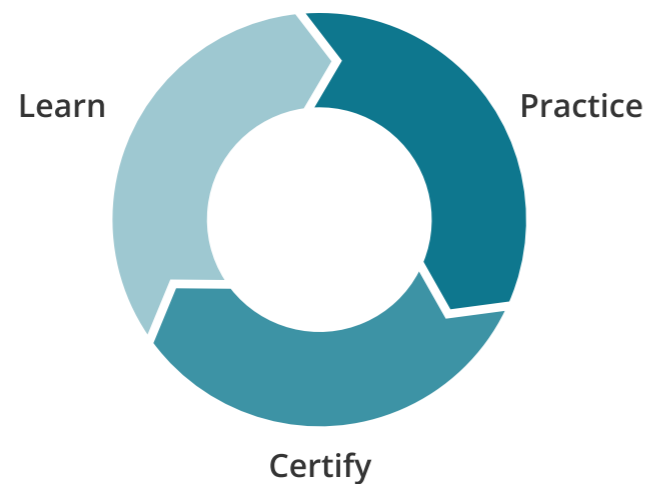
If you're unfamiliar with how to optimize an ecommerce page to maximize search engine traffic, be sure to check out our guide: [Tips and Tricks for Creating Your Ecommerce Storefront](#).

Of course, for strong Google rankings to matter, your organization must create CE materials that actually engage the people who purchase them. We'll get into how to do that—and in fact, it will make up the bulk of this guide.

### 3. The Lifelong Learner Cycle Means Learners and Members Need You Again and Again

Learners and members know they need CE, and they trust you to deliver it. Here's where the really powerful part of the equation enters: they'll need CE again and again throughout their professional career. Just as car owners expect a kind of lifetime maintenance loop for their vehicles, professionals exist in a kind of "lifelong learning loop."

Understanding this lifetime cycle of learning is an essential part of understanding how CE can become a revenue driver for associations and credentialing bodies. Here's how it works:



**Learn:** Learners or members take in new information that will advance them in their careers or keep them accredited.

**Practice:** At this stage, learners or members practice putting their new knowledge to work via practice questions, mock assessments, self-assessment, and more.

**Certify:** Learners or members take an exam or test to earn a specific credential or certification.

At every stage of this ongoing cycle, learners or members benefit from support from associations or credentialing bodies. A CE course and practice materials are the obvious examples, but there are many others:



Reaching out post-exam with follow-up information or refreshers, for example, can help new credential holders ensure information stays fresh in their minds and [interrupt the forgetting curve](#).



Reminding certificate holders when their certifications require renewal or additional CE credits can ensure that professionals are always empowered and accredited.



Alerting members or learners about new certifications that have become available can help them stay competitive in their industry and on track with their professional goals.

Remaining in continual communication with members or learners offers a very real benefit to your organization: you stay on their radar. This makes it much easier to cross-sell and upsell the various CE courses you offer.

Check out our guide on [how to create a lifetime learning journey](#) to foster your learners' or members' long-term success.

Clearly, associations and credentialing bodies are well-equipped to provide CE in a way that improves members' or learners' experience and drives revenue. Now let's talk about how to ensure that the content in your continuing education materials is of the quality necessary to keep members or learners engaged and make them eager to return for more.

# Keep Your Learners Engaged: How to Create Effective Content

Engaging content helps retain existing members and learners and encourages them to renew. Again, let's think of that car that needs maintenance throughout its lifetime. Are you likely to return to a mechanic whose diagnoses are questionable, whose shop is messy, or whose fixes never seem to get to the heart of the problem?

Or are you likely to return to the place with a clean waiting room that always has fresh coffee and fast WiFi, where the mechanics explain in detail what's going on with your vehicle, and where you drive away with no new rattling sounds?

Just as important: which service provider are you likely to refer your friends to?

In the world of continuing education, the content of the CE modules is akin to the experience at the mechanic. This encompasses both the material itself and the way learners or members are able to access it. Together, the content and its format must be engaging enough to hold learners when a thousand other content types are pulling at them, from social media to TV to podcasts and beyond.

In this section, we'll break down exactly how you can do that.

First, though, a quick definition.

*Engagement (n): The degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion learners show when learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in education*

**When learners are engaged, the learning (or teaching, depending on whose shoes you're wearing) is more effective, which in turn supports key business goals:**

- Connecting with as many learners or members as possible to increase **reach**
- Bringing in **revenue** from learners or members who return time and again
- Delivering meaningful **impact** to learners and members, thus demonstrating you share their values

Now let's look at some strategies for increasing learner or member engagement.

## PART 1:

# The 3 Components of Engagement

**Cognitive:** Cognitively engaged learners are able to form connections among ideas. They're able to think critically about the topics covered in a CE course and put learning strategies to use.

**Emotional:** Emotionally engaged learners are motivated to participate in courses, complete course material, study, and practice. Their emotional engagement refers to the way they feel about the learning experience.

**Behavioral:** Behavioral engagement refers to how involved learners or members are in doing the actual work of learning: participating in discussion forums, asking questions in classes, taking practice quizzes, etc.

The strategies outlined in Part 2 address each of these components. For more insight into these components, consider viewing our webinar on [How to Maximize Learner Engagement](#).

## PART 2:

# 8 Engagement Strategies for Content and Delivery

To create CE content that engages learners or members on all three dimensions of engagement, try these eight strategies.

## 1. Personalized learning

Today, [personalization](#) is the norm in the content we consume. From social media feeds to tailored playlists to shopping or viewing recommendations, much of what your learners or members encounter is algorithmically built just for them.

Generic learning materials will struggle to hold their attention.

Luckily, associations and credentialing bodies don't have to have an Amazon-like algorithm to deliver a [personalized CE experience](#). Instead, try offering...



**Goal setting:** Make it possible for learners to choose personal goals to work toward, like mastery of specific skills or a custom completion date.



**Adaptive learning:** Build a course where learning is based on mastery and confidence so each learner gets the context and practice they need.



**Multiple formats:** Make materials available in multiple formats: audio, video, text, etc., so learners can choose the modality that works for them.



**Multiple features:** Flashcards, discussion boards, in-depth answer explanations, practice tests – there are dozens of ways to present and practice course material. Create variability so there's something that appeals to every learner.



**More here:** [The Future of Education is Personalized Learning](#)

## 2. Microlearning

It's no secret that human attention spans are shrinking, though the reason may surprise you. [Abundant information](#) (from 24-hour news cycles, social media, and elsewhere) leads to a fear of missing out (FOMO), which drives us to bounce from one platform to another.

In today's context, CE content is competing with every other content source out there, meaning learners or members may not stick around for long before clicking over to somewhere else.

To accommodate this behavior, associations and credentialing bodies can create [microlearning](#) modules, which deliver information in smaller chunks than a standard lesson size. A typical [microlearning](#) module requires no more than 10 minutes to complete. The learner can complete it in one sitting, then revisit it for retention.

**More here:** [5 Tips to Create Effective Microlearning that Drives Engagement](#)

## 3. Gamification

Another way to keep CE learners engaged is to [gamify the learning process](#). This is exactly what it sounds like: bringing some element of game play to learning. For example, you might set up a competition to see who in a class can complete the most practice questions. Or let learners score points for contributing in various ways or completing various study modules.

The "right" [gamification](#) features depend on the students and the course material, but in any setting, incorporating elements of game play can keep learners engaged.

**More here:** [3 Gamification Strategies to Keep Your Learners Engaged](#)

#### 4. Blended learning

CE learners are busy. They're juggling multiple priorities, not least of which is the career they're hoping to advance by completing the CE course.

To accommodate those busy schedules, associations and credentialing bodies can offer a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning modules, also known as [blended learning](#).

This means some sessions meet at a specific time, either digitally or in person, and others are available as text or video modules that learners can complete when they have capacity. This model empowers learners to consume course material when it works best for them.

#### 5. Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning (also called [social learning](#)) involves learning with a group. It not only drives engagement but also helps boost retention because the social learning environment lights up more areas of the learner's brain. CE courses can tap into the power of collaborative learning by offering...

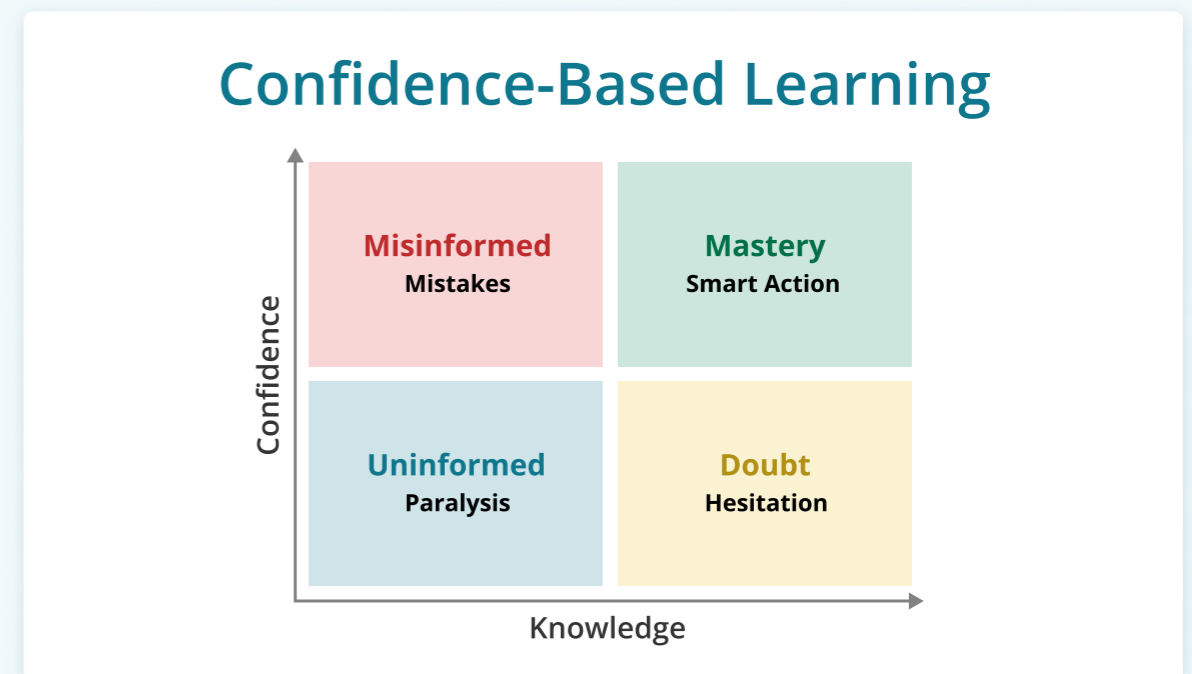
- Discussion boards
- Chat
- Live video
- Group work
- Games
- Polling during video sessions
- Q&A features
- A flipped classroom (where a student teaches a concept)
- ... and more.

Learners who engage socially also tend to engage with more course material: the average online discussion participant is 15 times more active within the learning platform than a learner who doesn't participate. This engagement increases the likelihood of positive exam or certification outcomes, which can lead to long-term engagement, positive reviews, referrals, and more.

#### 6. Learning that taps metacognition

Thinking about thinking can help keep learners engaged and improve retention of material. One way to introduce metacognitive elements into CE courses is to ask students to think critically about their study strategies: what's worked in the past? What hasn't? What will they do this time around?

Another option is to ask learners to rate their confidence. This helps identify areas where they don't yet have mastery, which often includes areas where they need more study time but may not realize they do.



*Confidence vs. knowledge*

How can metacognition improve engagement? Our data shows that learners in the 75th percentile of confidence answer 36 percent more questions. In other words, the most confident learners are the most engaged. Helping learners boost confidence—and therefore engagement—starts with asking them to assess it.

## 7. Course branding

The last thing a CE course should sound like is a history textbook. Why? History texts are often written to sound neutral, which translates to bland.

Instead, aim to give course materials a voice or character. Make sure they have a consistent look and feel, using the same fonts and colors throughout. In some cases, updating only the font and color scheme can breathe new life into course content.

But don't limit yourself to those superficial changes. A few other ways you can create consistent branding for CE materials:

- Add recurring elements, such as symbols that indicate it's a good idea to take notes or that there's an accompanying video.
- Choose a universe of references to make: is your course's "speaker" a Star Trek nut? A baseball fanatic? A passionate knitter?
- Update outdated references, especially if your learners are younger. (And if they are, be sure to check out our [webinar on engaging Millennial and Gen Z learners in CE courses](#).)

## 8. Storytelling

One reason history texts are a bad model is that they tend to over-index on facts, which only tap the cognitive dimension of engagement.

Storytelling, on the other hand, is a great way to engage the emotional dimension as well. Whenever possible, find ways to weave stories into course material to bring concepts to life.

For example, a course on security practices might include stories of individual people who clicked phishing emails or those who had to cancel weekend plans to deal with the aftermath. These, coupled with the facts about cost and prevention, stick longer in learners' minds.



PART 3:

## How to Drive Engagement Before and After a CE Course

Creating engaging, stand-out content for the CE course itself is the main event of creating an engaging CE experience. But for associations and credentialing bodies serious about driving increased revenue via CE offerings, it's also essential to find ways to engage learners before and after the course itself, i.e., when they're in other phases of the lifelong learning loop.

The tables below highlight ways to tap all three dimensions of engagement both before and after a CE course.

### Before a CE Course

The goal of these actions is to promote CE courses and activate learners.

Cognitive Engagement	Emotional Engagement	Behavioral Engagement
Share course ratings	Share testimonials (social proof)	Share a content nugget like a sample question for learners to complete
List course materials and services	Tell stories that create tension by showing a gap between where a learner was before the course vs. where they were after	Ask learners to do something: download an ebook, attend a webinar, view a slideshow on social media, etc.
Highlight impact data (certificates completed, pass rate, etc.)	Share pricing (for some learners)	
Share pricing (for some learners)		

### After a CE Course

The goal of these actions is to retain learners and reactivate them – i.e., to get them into another course when they're ready.

Cognitive Engagement	Emotional Engagement	Behavioral Engagement
Send information on supplemental tools and resources you offer	Provide badges or other recognitions, which offer a boost of pride and other positive emotions	Send post-test questions to keep learners sharp
	Share stories of impacts and outcomes from other learners	Send recordings or course summaries for learners to review
Offer follow-up review sessions to combat the forgetting curve	Ask learners to provide reviews, ratings, or testimonials	Send follow-up knowledge checks
		Offer live office hours
		Share next steps for learners to put on their calendars

**The takeaway:** no matter where learners are in the lifelong learning loop, there are opportunities to engage them in their learning journey so your brand becomes the guide that helps them achieve their professional education goals.

## PART 4:

# Foster Engagement with Technology and Automation

As with most things, having the right tools makes a big difference in how easy it is to create and distribute engaging CE materials. So far, we've mentioned video, email, streaming courses, audio material, ecommerce, text-based materials, and more.

Without the right platform, coordinating all these elements can be challenging.

With the right platform, however, the work of building engaging CE materials that make your organization stand out from the crowd is much more doable.

Not only that, it will feel much more intuitive for your learners. That's important, because a disjointed learning experience—or even one that lacks basic features learners have come to expect elsewhere, like recommendations for additional practice or a snapshot of their current status—can counteract even the most engaging course material.

While it's possible to [piece together a technology stack](#) to achieve everything we've outlined so far, doing so requires much more work on the backend. For example, you'll need IT resources to make sure the polling plug-in you add to your video streaming service works every time an instructor needs it and can capture poll data and send it to the instructor's admin portal to guide their next lesson plan.

If you've got an IT team that has capacity to manage all those APIs and troubleshoot as connections break, this can be a workable model.

For most organizations, though, the easier and less time-intensive option is to [invest in an all-in-one learning management system](#) (LMS) that includes...



**Learning technology:** This should allow for omnichannel delivery, personalized learning pathways, gamification, competency-based course progression, and real-time feedback by default.



**Content management:** This system should make it easy for your organization to create new course content, import existing content, and translate content into multiple languages, and for learners to configure content formats and select their preferred language. Ideally, the framework would also be supported by experts who can help you shape and structure your course materials.



**Administrative tools:** These should make it easy to configure and launch courses quickly, brand all materials with your own branding, run an ecommerce store, and maintain security and compliance.



**Reporting and data features:** In addition to standard data (user activity and performance, course- and product-specific data, and aggregated deep learner insights), your platform should provide access to learner sentiment and engagement data, psychometric reports, and predictions on outcomes and efficacy. The best in breed will also offer sales-focused data, including upsell and cross-sell recommendations, and comparisons of marketing data to learner engagement outcomes.

## To Grow Revenue This Year, Reinvigorate Your Continuing Education Offerings

Demand for CE is on the rise as workers adapt to a changing professional landscape and stay up to date with the demands of fast-evolving industries. Associations and credentialing bodies have a combination of brand equity, trust from learners and members, and deep knowledge that makes them uniquely well-positioned to meet the needs of this growing market.

To seize this opportunity and translate it to bottom-line growth, organizations can update their CE programs so that they engage learners throughout the learner loop, which will also keep them consistently top of mind.

If you're interested in starting the process of revamping your CE materials and you're curious about how BenchPrep's platform could support you, [request a demo today](#). We'd be happy to show you how our technology makes possible all of what we discussed in here.

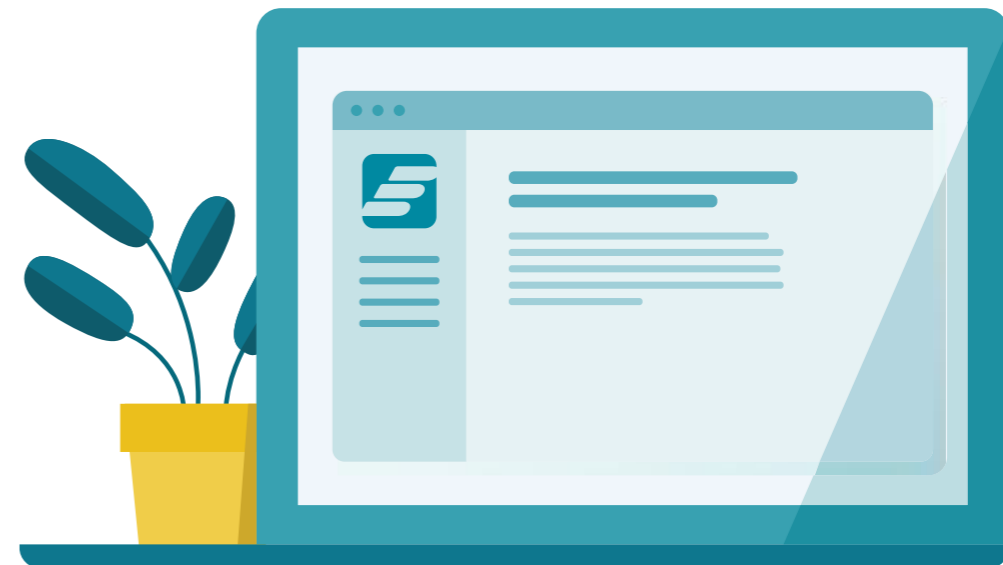


# About BenchPrep

BenchPrep is an award-winning learning management system (LMS) with a mission to transform traditional learning. Specializing in certification training, exam preparation, microcredentialing, and continuing education, we offer an interactive and personalized learning experience. We enable associations and credentialing bodies to grow their education programs and better support their learners throughout the lifelong learning journey.

BenchPrep is more than just a technology provider; we collaborate closely with organizations, helping to design and implement interactive online courses, and providing comprehensive project support alongside a versatile self-service admin portal for streamlined course management.

Many of the world's leading learning organizations trust BenchPrep to power their learning programs, and more than 12 million learners have used BenchPrep to attain academic and professional success.



Experience the transformation BenchPrep can bring to your learning programs.  
Visit [benchprep.com](https://benchprep.com) today.

# Additional Resources

We hope you find this guide useful and encourage you to explore more great BenchPrep content.

## Microcredentials: Do's and Don'ts for Your Association



[Microcredentials: Do's and Don'ts for Your Association](#)

## 3 Proven Strategies to Develop High-Impact Microcredential Programs



[3 Proven Strategies to Develop High-Impact Microcredential Programs](#)

BenchPrep

LEVEL UP  
Your Learning

## 10 Ways to Level Up Your CE Program

Delivering an engaging and effective continuing education (CE) program isn't just about checking boxes—it's about delivering career-changing value, building learner loyalty, and powering your organization's growth.

Ready to level up?

[10 Ways to Level Up Your CE Program](#)

## 3 Stages of Creating a Continuous Learning Journey for Your Learners' Long-Term Success

The professional learning journey is a continuous, lifelong cycle. Does your learning program effectively guide learners through this journey and support ongoing professional development?



[3 Stages of Creating a Continuous Learning Journey for Your Candidates' Long-Term Success](#)

GUIDE

## From Bits & Bytes to Insights: A 5-Step Guide to Refining LMS Data into Actionable Business Intelligence



[From Bit & Bytes to Insights: a 5-Step Guide to Refining LMS Data into Actionable Intelligence](#)

## CLO Secrets Revealed

5 Learning Leaders Share Secrets to Transform Your Certification Program



[CLO Secrets Revealed: 5 Learning Leaders Share Secrets to Transform Your Certification Program](#)