

Opening comments for “Practice Makes Perfect: Or Does it?”

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Without a doubt, we live in a testing and credentialing society. We identify skill sets, we educate or train for them, test for the acquisition of them, and in many cases, offer a credential to those who are successful, either through voluntary or regulatory mechanisms. In an open and complex society, obtaining a relevant credential or credentials is important as a way differentiating those who possess the appropriate knowledge and skill from those who *may* not.

This institutionalized process puts a high premium on adequate preparation for the actual credentialing examination in order to ensure success. Preparation can take many forms. Over the past few years, practice tests have become very popular particularly

since they can be delivered efficiently and cost-effectively over the Internet. To see just how widespread Internet-based practice tests really are across the broadest spectrum, I conducted a Google search under the term, “practice test”, and found entries covering 123,334 pages! I then scanned the first 25 pages for credentialing agencies offering Internet-based practice tests and testing companies offering practice tests on the Internet in preparation for credentialing examinations. You will be interested to know that the work of several of our presenters is referenced in those 25 pages! Listed first among those 25 web pages was Promissor with their practice tests in Real Estate and Insurance. In recognition, I will ask Terry Kowalski, who represents Promissor, to make the first presentation! Two certification programs were also mentioned, one of which is served by PES. Finally, the practice tests offered by the National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying were mentioned in the first 25 pages of the search.

As an aside, does anyone care to venture a guess as to which industry or field dominated those first 25 web pages under my “practice test” search criterion? It was clearly the IT industry with listings not only for specific subject-matter examinations offered for various IT company-based products, but listings of “brain dump” sites claiming to offer items and tests very close the “real thing”. I am sure we’ll have more discussion on this issue later.

With that said, I want to emphasize that the listings on Google are based on its specific search algorithms and are also subject to the vagaries of the business rules which do *not* include *any* evaluation of the actual quality of the practice tests mentioned on the search engine.

Our presenters will be addressing one or more of the following questions:

- What are the different ways that practice test are being offered to credentialing candidates? What features are provided?

- What are candidate reactions to practice tests? What do candidates like or don't like about them? Do candidates feel they benefit from practice tests?
- What do empirical results on the relationship between practice test results and the "real thing" suggest?
- Who takes practice tests? And when do they take them? Early on in preparation? Or at the last minute, just prior to taking the "real thing"?
- How does the sponsor of a credentialing examination program position the practice test product to ensure appropriate value to stakeholders?
- Are there ethical issues or conflict of interest concerns when the sponsor of a credentialing examination program offers practice test products? Are there intended and unintended consequences of offering practice tests?