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What are Digital Badges... and why are they important?

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Digital Badge Overview

Digital badges are identified as a visual representation of what an individual knows and a means to demonstrate in granular detail the depth of learning that was acquired. They are an evidence based accreditation of a person's skills and knowledge that confirm specific qualifications. The digital format allows their availability through electronic search methods making them accessible in many more settings than original paper documents such as certificates or certifications. Digital badges also provide a means to reduce costs during employer or college interview processes by providing an in-depth perspective allowing employers, colleges, etc. to choose the best qualified candidates.

Many of the characteristics that define digital badges make them well suited to foster individualized pathways for learning and align well with trends in adult education. Given the presence of electronic devices of mobile phones and Internet availability, there are more opportunities to record and note educational achievements and milestones. Learning is captured and retained as adult students accumulate and share varied experiences creating the potential to convey the bigger picture about identity, knowledge, capacity, and achievement.

Key Players of Badging Systems

The structure of digital badging systems is often described as an ecosystem, meaning that all parts of the system are interconnected. Because the badges need to be open to multiple users such as students, employers, and high education institutions, this eco-environment is also often referred to as an open badging system, meaning that information is shared rather than being kept proprietary.

This open system structure was first identified by **Mozilla** who is also known for creating the Fire Fox web browser. Mozilla's innovation with digital badges set the standards for Open Badge Infrastructure (OBI) software. Mozilla currently offers their Open Badge System free of charge.

Pearson has followed the Mozilla standards in creating an open badge system using their platform identified as Acclaim. Pearson is best known for being a leading education company and provides learning materials, technologies, and assessments. Pearson's digital badging targets academic institutions, professional associations, and other high-stakes credentialing programs.

Beyond Mozilla and Pearson, other companies are expected to enter this emerging market.

Employers and Digital Badges

Due to the metadata and electronic availability, digital badges are discussed in terms of being more granular and more portable than their hard copy counterparts. The metadata, which may include course outlines, learning objectives, grades, or topics studied, provides the observer with a powerful landscape of a particular learning experience. This granularity offers employers, universities, or recruitment firm's enhanced insight when making decisions. The portability of the badge is also a plus to observers because decision makers are able to vet candidates more thoroughly before or after interviews. Beyond the components of granularity and portability,

online literature supports that digital badges provide a means to reduce hiring or admission costs to employers or colleges by providing a critical perspective allowing employers, colleges, etc. to choose the best qualified candidates.

As more jobs require a college degree, employers value a better understanding of candidates who apply for these positions. Digital badges reflect well-rounded candidates beyond their specific or technical competencies...other abilities such as teamwork, writing, and critical thinking can be highlighted through digital badge applications because of the nature of their granularity and portability.

References

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