



PROMETRIC



CASE STUDY

Modernizing the CPA Exam

A Prometric/AICPA - NASBA Case Study

Annually, more than 110,000 candidates take the exam, which is required for licensure from all state boards of accountancy. The CPA credential ensures the competence of practitioners and is one of the world's most respected credentials.

The Client:

Since 1917, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA), the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) and the individual state jurisdictions have collaborated to serve the needs of the Accountancy Profession. AICPA is the national professional organization for CPAs. The mission of the CPA examination is to demonstrate that CPA candidates have the knowledge and skills required to fulfill their ultimate responsibility – protecting the public's financial interest through their independent reports on business.

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Comprising 330,000 members, AICPA sets U.S. private auditing standards and the ethical standards for the profession. NASBA serves as a forum for its 54 member boards of accountancy in the U.S., District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. As the 'gatekeepers' of the public accountancy profession, the boards have certified or licensed more than a half-million CPAs.

Challenge #1:

In its paper-based format, the CPA exam was only available twice a year in limited locations and was administered in large auditoriums to accommodate thousands of candidates simultaneously. In addition, first-time candidates were only permitted to take the four-section exam in its entirety over a two-day testing period – creating a stressful environment for candidates and test administrators alike. Moreover, the exam was limited in its ability to simulate real-world skills and experiences, including assessment, research and analysis.

AICPA and NASBA needed to be able to measure real-world candidate skills accurately and effectively. The organizations also sought a more flexible and seamless candidate experience to help attract new talent. In short, the CPA exam needed to be more applicable to 21st century practices and demands.

Modernizing the CPA exam would also demonstrate a commitment to protecting the public through more effective measurement of accounting competencies. This proved to be particularly important to the accounting industry, which faced increased scrutiny due to a number of highly publicized accounting scandals. In order to maintain its status

GEOGRAPHIC AREA SERVED:

United States, Guam, Puerto Rico
and the Virgin Islands.

and success, the program required a partner experienced in computer-based testing and the conversion and marketing of large credential programs.

The Solution:

In 1998, AICPA and NASBA chose Prometric to be their test partner. The organizations formed an exam conversion steering committee and several targeted work groups with representation from each stakeholder. The cross-organizational teams met semi-monthly to guarantee the effective transition to a computer-based format.

Prometric, AICPA and NASBA completed the large-scale transition on budget and on schedule. They integrated more than 54 geographically dispersed systems and related personnel – and managed a simultaneous, on-schedule launch with a success rate of over 99.9 percent. In addition, candidate satisfaction is higher than anticipated, test scheduling

reflects candidates are taking advantage of their new flexibility, and the volumes are projected to continue to grow. In doing so, they successfully balanced the needs of all stakeholders.

Test sponsors are assured – through simulations, modernized test items and the stringent security of Prometric Testing Centers – that CPA candidates are competent and ethical practitioners. The computer-based test format also enables test sponsors to review and enhance the exam as necessary. Candidates enjoy the flexibility of taking the entire test or individual sections nearly year-round at more than 300 labs in the U.S., Virgin Islands and Guam. Flexibility and convenience also apply to the streamlined test scheduling process, with 85 percent of all candidates scheduling their exams online; Prometric customer service staff are certified in their knowledge of CPA exam policies, yielding high levels of customer service; and the testing environment is secure, spacious and temperature-controlled – all of which amounts to a superior testing experience.

The American public can assume even greater confidence in the competency and ethical proficiency of accountants holding the already highly respected CPA credential.

The CPA program is expected to expand to well above 250,000 testing events annually.

Challenge #2:

To collaborate with diverse stakeholders to release an exam closely aligned with requirements of certified public account-

tants. Also, to enhance the testing experience for one of the world's largest and most respected professional groups.

The Solution:

The conversion of a 90 year-old paper-and-pencil program to a robust computer-based examination delivered through an expansive national network of proctored test centers and supported by flexible scheduling and registration systems.

Results:

- Increased flexibility in exam scheduling
- A secure testing experience that affirmed the competence and ethics of CPAs
- A modernized exam administered in a secure, comfortable environment
- High levels of satisfaction from all stakeholders

"Throughout the project, the Prometric staff went above and beyond what was required of them. This applied not only to their work, but also to their willingness to help us."

Craig N. Mills

Executive Director, Examinations, AICPA

"Prometric has once again proven it is the industry leader. Their execution, partnering and subject matter expertise ensured the successful and on-schedule conversion of the Uniform CPA Examination."

Joe Cote

NASBA Chief Operating Officer