



CASE STUDY

Making the Grade: The Consumer Electronics Association's Move to Computerized Testing

A Prometric/CEA Case Study

The Consumer Electronics Association

The Consumer Electronics Association (CEA®) unites more than 2,100 companies within the U.S. to help grow the consumer technology industry and support advances within the field. CEA acts as the leader for the consumer electronics industry, keeping its members and the public-at-large aware of emerging trends, new technologies and engineering standards.

More than 70 percent of the candidates remarked that taking the certification exam at a Prometric test center was easier than taking the test via the paper-and-pencil method.

The CEA's Challenge: Dated Exam Delivery and Widespread Candidates

The Mobile Electronics Certified Professional (MECP) program, offered by CEA, certifies mobile electronics installation technicians and sales people on the techniques and capabilities of automotive information technology, entertainment, navigation and safety/security systems. It is the only nationally recognized program of its kind and is administered in four different levels to measure knowledge from "Basic" to "Master." The exam ensures that consumers and employers can be confident that the mobile electronics installer understands industry standards, products and requirements of the task at hand.

Commissioned in 1991, the MECP exam was originally a paper-based test. More than 35,000 professionals held the MECP certification by 2007 and more than 5,000 installation technicians and sales professionals undertake the exam annually. Since the program's reputation and attendance have displayed such a steady growth path, CEA decided that it needed a more effective means of delivering the certification exam. CEA executives resolved to use an exam medium accessible to nearly every test taker in every state across the country: the Internet.

A Computer-Based Solution

To commence the transition from paper-based to computer and Internet-based testing, the association initiated a relationship with Prometric in early 2005. Contracting with Prometric, the global leader in technology-enabled testing and assessment, to computerize the exam and deliver it at 3,000 testing centers nationwide gave CEA the broad, stable platform it needed to effectively and securely deliver the MECP exam to candidates and authorized proctors across the country. Offering the exams via both Prometric test centers and the Internet with the supervision of approved MECP proctors vastly increased the available geographic options for MECP candidates and still maintained a high level of secure exam delivery.





The End Result

The computerization of the exam has helped streamline the testing process, which was formerly conducted on an individual-by-individual basis. Previously, a candidate was required to contact a CEA-approved test proctor, making it the proctor's responsibility to not only set-up the exam, but also mail in the completed test to CEA for grading. Prometric's solution eliminates the burden on proctors while simultaneously creating far easier scheduling, registration and results processing for candidates.

Another advantage is that exam scores are submitted electronically, a process more secure and efficient than reliance on a human proctor and paper mailing system. The scores can also be received more swiftly by the candidate, removing the agonizing wait time that candidates experience between taking a paper exam and receiving the results via snail mail.

The candidate response to the computerization of the MECP exam has been widely positive. In a 2006 study conducted by CEA, more than 70 percent of the candidates remarked that taking the

certification exam at a Prometric test center was easier than taking the test via the paper-and-pencil method. In addition, more than half of the candidates said that taking the Internet-based test with an approved MECP proctor was easier than taking the paper-based exam.

Planning for Future Tests: The Next Steps

As the candidate base continues to grow, CEA plans to incorporate more advanced testing features into the upper-level MECP exams, most notably the Master test, the highest level of certification available. Designed to test the knowledge of seasoned mobile electronics professionals with real-world scenarios and problems, CEA plans on incorporating various computer-only features into the test, including high-resolution images of actual hardware components and technologies, and streaming videos of sample job tasks and activities.

Thanks to both the computer based and supervised, Internet-based version of the exam, CEA plans to continue to expand the content of the exams, making

them more about situations that candidates may face on a day-to-day basis and less about the knowledge gleaned from textbooks. The addition of these enhanced test features, along with the more effective delivery methods allow CEA to not only better prepare MECP candidates for their careers, but also to ensure the protection of consumers and employers alike from poorly-trained or fraudulent mobile electronic installers.

