

Ten Reasons to Seek Accreditation *(Published 2001)*

By Linda Lee, ABC, CAE
IABC Manitoba Accreditation/Education Chair
(204) 985-7010

Recently, I was asked for information to help SELL an employer on the benefits of accreditation to the individual, and to the employer. I decided that my response might be of interest to more than one of you — whether you're a potential candidate, or the employer of one. IABC International offers a list of the top 10 reasons why communicators seek accreditation. I've added my own commentary:

1. Accreditation improves career opportunities and advancement.

Having your ABC indicates to employers that you have a certain level of education, experience and competence in somewhat the same way as having a CA or CGA does for an accountant or P.Eng. does for an engineer. It may not guarantee a promotion or success in every job interview, but, all other things being equal between you and another candidate, it may tip the scales in your direction.

2. Accreditation prepares you for greater on-the-job responsibilities.

Completing the accreditation process requires that candidates submit an acceptable portfolio of two work samples and pass both a written and oral exam. Candidates are assessed on:

- knowledge of organizational communication concepts, tools and technology,
- ability to write or perform professional communication activities based on actual assignments,
- ability to "think strategically," to think through and develop complete communications programs for specific organizational or case problems, and
- understanding of the ethics of organizational communications, management principles related to communication, and the communicator's role in the application of those principles.

No communicator completes this process without becoming more conscious of "best practices" within the communication field, and gaining a deeper understanding of how communications fits within, and contributes to, an entire organization. That kind of increased knowledge and awareness increases the career potential of most individuals, and makes them more valuable employees.

3. Accreditation provides for greater earnings potential.

Although accreditation doesn't mean you get paid more; being the kind of communicator who gets accredited may. According to Profile 2000 — the study of the communications profession conducted in 1999 by IABC and PRSA (the US equivalent of CPRS) in cooperation with the IABC Research Foundation — the average salary of accredited female communicators in 2000 was \$82,500 US, compared to \$56,500 US for those non-accredited. The average salary of accredited male communicators was \$89,500 US, as compared to \$88,000 for those non-accredited.

Other facts from Profile 2000:

- Accredited communicators operating their own businesses had an average income of \$68,000 US, as compared to \$37,000 US for those not accredited.
- Accredited communicators are more likely to supervise another person (63% vs. 47%), and, typically, have more communicators in their departments than non-accredited communicators.

4. Accreditation demonstrates your commitment to the profession.

No one who is NOT committed to being a professional communicator - who is not committed to communications as a career — would go through this lengthy and demanding process - even if they COULD. To me, the ABC designation indicates that a person is both committed to being a professional communicator, and proud of it.

5. Accreditation improves skills and knowledge.

I'm convinced that no one goes through the accreditation process without improved skills and knowledge, and I'll offer up some objective evidence. Athabaska University in Alberta formally spells out an academic equivalency for the accreditation process. Athabaska grants applicants with their ABC entry to its Bachelor of Professional Arts (Communications Studies) program PLUS 12 credits. This means that it has assessed completion of the accreditation process as the equivalent of taking four of its three-credit courses.

6. Accreditation reflects achievement.

The accreditation process offers senior communicators - with a minimum of nine years education and experience — an opportunity to demonstrate, test and measure what they have learned since they entered the communications field. Figuratively or literally, successful candidates can pump their arms in the air and proclaim, "I DID IT!" and know that what they have done is respected and recognized by their fellow professionals. This achievement of successful candidates also reflects well on their employers — especially if the candidate's portfolio items were produced for that employer.

7. Accreditation builds self-esteem.

Completing the accreditation process demonstrates to successful candidates that their professional knowledge, skills, abilities and judgment have been measured against the recognized standard of expertise in their chosen field and judged worthy. For a candidate, that kind of objective validation makes for increased self-esteem; for an employer, it makes for a communicator who not only knows what to advise, but has the confidence to give good advice (as opposed to comfortable advice) and the confidence to ask the advice of others.

8. Accreditation enhances the professional image.

According to Webster's Dictionary, "professional" means to be "characterized by or conforming to the technical or ethical standards of a profession." IABC's accreditation process is designed to assess candidates against both technical and ethical communications standards. Among communicators, and increasingly among the placement firms, human resource specialists, and

communication managers who make hiring decisions, accreditation is recognized as a measure of communications expertise. The designation establishes a professional image for both the successful candidate and the candidate's employer.

9. Accreditation establishes professional credentials.

Acknowledged among communicators as a credible means of evaluating an individual's expertise, gaining accreditation is accepted as evidence that the successful candidate has demonstrated competence and professionalism to a "jury of peers." This not only establishes professional credentials for the individual, it also imparts an aura of communications professionalism to the organization that employs that individual.

10. Accreditation offers greater professional recognition from peers.

Any communicator aware of the process recognizes the professional achievement involved in completing it. It's one of those circular situations — the more communicators who get accredited, the more communicators are aware of the process; the more communicators who are aware of the process, the more peer recognition of the accomplishment; the more peer recognition of the accomplishment, the more communicators who want to get accredited. And when individuals receive professional recognition from their peers, so do their employers.

ABC - think about it!