How SMUA Worked with Accredify to **Reinvent the Future of Training and Education**

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Introduction

SMU Academy (SMUA) offers a range of professional courses and accreditation programs designed and developed for working professionals. The institution has since grown to become one of the leading training institutions for adults, training up to 22,000 people per year and counting.

The team at SMUA were looking for a solution to digitalise their offerings whilst ensuring that their certificates will not be easily replicated. Here's how Accredify worked with SMUA to address their pain points and develop new offerings together.

As of the date this article was written, SMUA has issued 50,000 certificates using Accredify.

02. The Problem
Preparing for Digital Transformation

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Michael Low
Deputy Director of Curriculum Development & Digitalisation at SMUA

Driven by the idea of differentiating themselves from the competition, SMUA initially adopted digital badging, a method of accreditation where students are awarded with virtual badges upon course completion which they can then display on their social media profiles, such as LinkedIn.
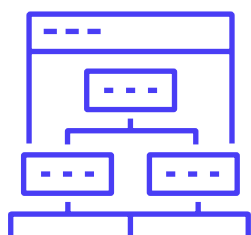
"We foresee the education industry slowly digitalising," said Michael Low, Deputy Director of Curriculum Development & Digitalisation at SMUA, "We thought it would be interesting that instead of issuing hardcopy certificates, one can have all these badges tagged to your LinkedIn profile. When someone goes for a job interview, s/he can just open up his/her profile and show the interview panel what s/he has learned at a glance, instead of having to carry big folders with hardcopy certificates."

Although the exposure such badges on social media can bring to SMUA's courses is undeniably appealing, this method of accreditation also posed another problem, which is forgery. SMUA goes to great lengths to ensure that their paper certificates are as authentic as possible, with features like hot-stamping and embossing. However, such features cannot be achieved on a virtual badge back then. When displayed onto the screen, the digital badge is just an image file. The problem of forgery arises when digital badges are issued without an established method of validating its credentials. There is nothing preventing users from duplicating the image file and producing a fraudulent one.

"The problem with digital badging is that you can easily fake and duplicate it." Michael explained. "There's no way that people can verify that. We wanted to avoid the possibility of forged certificates to protect our institution's reputation. So, we were looking for something verifiable; something that people can't duplicate easily. It also has to be affordable for us."

That's when Accredify came as a "timely solution" for SMUA in 2019, according to Michael.

ACCREDIFY

03. The Solution
Verifiable, Tamper-proof Certificates

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"**Verifiable documents are the way forward** because they are a trusted source of information."

Accredify proposed a solution for SMUA using OpenCerts, an open-source schema developed by GovTech Singapore where learners' educational credentials are verified on the blockchain before they are issued in the form of a digital certificate.

"They didn't even need to persuade us. We were sold on the idea the moment we realised how powerful blockchain certificates were," Michael said, "Verifiable documents are the way forward because they are a trusted source of information."

Immediately after onboarding Accredify's solution, SMUA switched entirely from digital badging to issuing tamper-proof and verifiable certificates.

Michael's counterparts from SMU were so impressed with this technology that they asked to be linked up with Accredify, which he readily did. "If it's something that's good and useful, we're happy to share, always." Michael said.

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"**The benefits are multifold**, really. It's not just in terms of cost savings."

SMUA had also stopped printing hardcopy certificates after adopting Accredify's solution of issuing digital certificates. More than just saving costs and resources, it also helped to realise the Academy's desire to go green. This technology also allowed digital certificates to be imported into the Skills Passport of an individual's MySkillsFuture account, something that couldn't be achieved with hardcopy certificates. As Singapore goes virtual in an effort to building a more sustainable future, SMUA believes it paramount that it adopts new technologies such as those offered by Accredify to keep up with this transition.

"My team, which is one of the five in SMUA, ran about 60 courses a month. It would be quite tricky if Accredify isn't here to help us issue the certificates." Michael said. "The benefits are multifold, really. It's not just in terms of cost savings."

04. Discovering New Opportunities
Learning Analytics

> "Having worked with many vendors, I think Accredify is very accommodating and flexible." Michael said. "This encourages a lot of innovation on both sides. They are also quite receptive to move things in certain ways that's new to SMUA and Accredify."

Accredify continues to maintain a strong connection with SMUA throughout the years. Accredify's account managers go the extra mile to ensure that SMUA has a seamless experience using the dashboard while continuously making improvements based on feedback and suggestions. This struck a chord with Michael and his team. "Having worked with many vendors, I think Accredify is very accommodating and flexible." Michael said. "This encourages a lot of innovation on both sides. They are also quite receptive to move things in certain ways that's new to SMUA and Accredify."

Through this collaborative relationship, Michael saw a new window of opportunity. If SMUA could monitor and analyse the latest skillsets the market demanded, SMUA would be able to offer new courses and cater to new training needs aligned with the job market, which could propel them to becoming the leading provider for adult education.

And thus, the Learning and Development Project was born. Accredify and SMUA would evaluate an individual's skillsets and recommend courses to plug in any skill gaps they identified. This project would support SMUA's business intelligence by gaining market insights and allow them to stay ahead of the competition by developing relevant courses.

"Singapore has very limited renewable resources, hence human capital becomes a key stimulus of economic development for us." Michael said. "One of the ways to continue to excel as a nation is to develop and take full advantage of our human capital. Hence we should keep upskilling and reskilling our people." This project both serves the individual's need of knowing their skill gap to recommend training, and at our end, to be able to know the latest skill set that the market demands."

04. Discovering New Opportunities
Pathway Learning

After receiving feedback from SMUA's learners, Michael saw the need to develop courses with a more customised approach. Hence, he initiated the Pathways project.
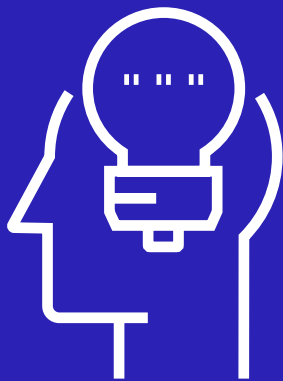

"These programmes are designed in such a way that they cover different skill sets and technical areas around certain subject areas," Michael explained. "Each programme comprises of several modules with each covering a different aspect so as to equip learners with the relevant skills and knowledge for the workplace after attending our classes."

SMUA provides different learning 'pathways' for the individuals to embark on, depending on their competency level and needs. Individuals apply for a programme and are able to select the modules they wish to attend to fulfill the module requirements for that particular programme, giving them the freedom to choose specific modules they wish to attend instead of having to follow a set programme.

The Pathways project provides a clearer overview of each participant's academic progress and helps in identifying learning opportunities for him/her. Accredify will issue individual certificates once a participant has completed a module, allowing both SMUA and the participant to track the learning progress over time. SMUA will then issue a final certificate once the participant has completed the necessary modules that meet the criteria for programme completion.

In time to come, Michael hopes to expand this project across the Academy with the help of Accredify. "Now we are trying to review all of our courses and build the right pathway that meet the needs of our learners and the industry. The aim of doing so is for our learners to pick and choose the courses and combine them in a way that allow each individual to gain a comprehensive set of skills that would help them contribute better in the workplace or their business."

Envisioning the Future of Training and Education

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When asked how he envisioned the future of education, Michael said: "How I foresee it, I don't think you have to go to a particular school. As long as one know the skills s/he wants to acquire, s/he can then pick and choose courses or programmes from various universities that help him/ her build the competencies and capabilities needed."

"I'm glad we have Accredify as a collaborative partner to realise this vision", added Michael.

Michael Low

Deputy Director of Curriculum Development & Digitalisation at SMUA

About
Accredify

Headquartered in Singapore, Accredify is the leading service provider for organisations to create and issue verifiable documents. With a presence in more than nine markets serving 900 clients globally, documents issued by Accredify have been verified close to 7 million times. With a dedicated team that embraces the highest standards of customer service, security, and privacy, Accredify's objective is to be the trusted solution for managing and verifying documents anywhere and anytime.

For more information, visit www.accredify.io and follow us on LinkedIn @Accredify

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About
SMU Academy

Established in 2017, SMU Academy, with its pillars of Business Management; Finance & Technology; Human Capital, Management & Leadership; Service, Operations & Business Improvement and Whole Sale Trade leverages SMU's reputation and linkages to prepare our workforce with the competencies and career resilience required for today's rapidly changing world.

For more information, visit https://academy.smu.edu.sg/.