

FLASH & FLEX

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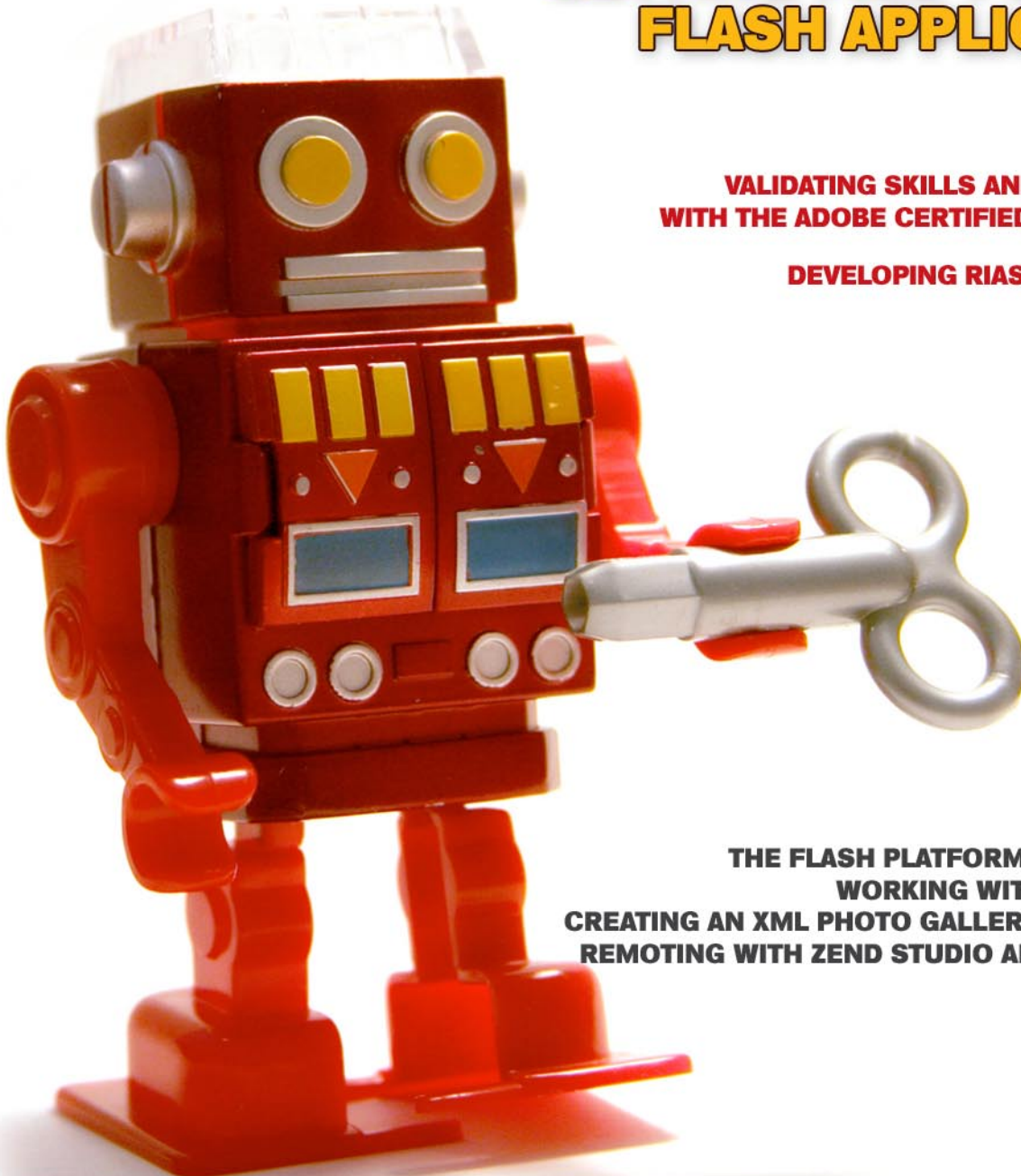
DEVELOPER'S MAGAZINE

AIR FOR ANDROID

GETTING PAID FOR YOUR FLASH APPLICATIONS

**VALIDATING SKILLS AND BEST PRACTICES
WITH THE ADOBE CERTIFIED ASSOCIATE EXAM**

DEVELOPING RIAS WITH AERIAL-CMS



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Validating Skills and Best Practices with the Adobe Certified Associate Exam

Suppose you are a contractor in the running for an Adobe® Flash® software development project. The employer narrowed the hiring pool down from a list of a hundred applicants due to the scarcity of IT jobs. Now suppose you and the other final candidate are virtually equal on paper – who will get the job? In order to secure jobs, promotions and esteem from your colleagues, consider industry certifications as the ideal tie breaker.

The candidate who holds industry certifications related to the required job skills is more likely to succeed on the job. Let's face it, resumes can be exaggerated or even false. A portfolio shows what you may have done in the past, but it does not give any indication of how long the project took to complete and whether or not you used best practices. Industry-recognized certifications however, prove that valuable skills and best practices have been learned and retained rather than studied long ago and forgotten.

According to *Certification Magazine's 2009 Salary Survey* incorporating detailed responses from more than 40,000 IT professionals in over 150 countries, a majority of respondents reported receiving a raise after earning their most recent certification. Around 47 percent said they think their most recently earned certification played a role in them getting a raise. Furthering their certification portfolios also contributed to respondents' career progression. Roughly one in five respondents received a promotion in the first year after receiving their most recent certification.

In the survey, certifications were also credited with helping IT professionals get along better in this volatile market. More than 85 percent of respondents agree that since they've become certified, there is a greater demand for their skills. More than 86 percent said becoming certified has improved their problem-solving skills, and roughly the same number report that achieving certification has increased their productivity on the job.

Both students and professionals need to demonstrate their technical expertise to succeed in today's competitive job market. Whether they are looking for a new position or simply working to excel in their current role, any IT professional can use certification to prove they are invaluable. Many employers now recognize the value of technical certifications as a means to validate real world knowledge more effectively than a completed course or even a degree. If you still need to be convinced, let's discuss the value of one certification – the Adobe® Certified Associate.

The Value of Digital Media Certification

The workplace demand for digital media skills – communicating information using multimedia, video, graphic, web, or design software – is on the rise. Since 2000, more specialized digital tasks have gained substantial traction in the workplace. According to a study by the California Community Colleges Media & Entertainment Initiative called *Digital Media Skills Initial Findings*, 20 percent of respondents said they performed video, audio, Web, or graphic production tasks once or twice a week while another 40 percent said they executed such tasks at least once every couple of months. Products such as Adobe® Flash®, Adobe® Photoshop® and Adobe® Dreamweaver® applications are popular among ordinary users and professionals alike, and more industries than ever before are utilizing these tools to accomplish their technical goals. Flash is the world's most pervasive software platform, with more than 1.5 million users worldwide and an audience of more than 560 million users across the web.

Due to an accessible development environment, there are a large number of amateur Flash and Flex developers. Even dabblers can call themselves experts and most claim they are proficient in a long list of digital media products. With such a broad community ranging from hobbyists to true experts, certification becomes increasingly useful to prove job candidates are more than familiar users of digital communications technology.

In particular, the *Adobe Certified Associate (ACA)* certification program confirms that individuals have the entry-level skills to plan, design, build, and maintain effective communications using different forms of digital media. By requiring ACA certification, managers can standardize base skill sets and best practices for both permanent and contract employees. One such professional, the art director for Virginia Tech Magazine, discovered that Adobe Certified Associate has helped boost his capacity and credibility to support Web design projects at Virginia Tech, as well as through freelancing opportunities.

I feel like I'm moving my career forward, said Glen Duncan. It's something I can put on my resumé. I can tell clients I have an Adobe certification. It's something that can build a lot of trust for clients.

Getting Certified

The ACA certification program aims to ensure test takers not only understand Adobe products including Adobe Flash, Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Dreamweaver, but that they are using best practices for building a website and designing rich media content. The ACA exam is more than a multiple choice test. To reinforce best practices, the test simulates the actual application and asks test takers to develop in a true Flash environment.

In developing the ACA exam, Adobe and Certiport identified the foundational skills students need to create effective communication using digital media tools. Adobe met with educators and design professionals and surveyed businesses and educational institutions around the world.

The research resulted in objectives that cover entry-level skill expectations for the following:

- Rich Media Communication using Adobe Flash
- Web Communication using Adobe Dreamweaver
- Visual Communication using Adobe Photoshop

The Adobe Certified Associate certifications are offered for the following versions: Adobe Creative Suite® 3, Adobe Creative Suite® 4 and the Adobe Creative Suite® 5 available summer of 2010. The ACA exam measures a core group of skills for each software program regardless of any version updates. Then, Certiport updates the tests continually as Adobe releases new versions of the software, so employers and professionals are assured the test measures individuals against the most current look and feel for each product. As a Certiport developer, I can tell you we are using the skinning features in Flex® and Flash® to cleverly update how our simulations look each time there is a revision to the software.

Armed with validation from Adobe, becoming an Adobe Certified Associate will give professionals the inside track to careers in graphic design, Web marketing, video production, Flash development and more.

Students often seek out technical certifications while they are in school. Four-year and two-year colleges, and even high schools, are starting to offer more certifications to set their students up for success in the workplace. Large corporations can also offer Certiport certifications to their employees, and individual professionals can seek out a testing center to obtain certification.

Certification Builds Development Project Success

As the leader of our development team at Certiport, the exclusive provider of the ACA exams, I recently discovered the value of having my own employees earn the ACA

credential. We build all of our certification tests using Flash and Flex. We have a base of employees who are experts, but when we ramp up for large projects we hire additional contractors. In assembling a team of independent contractors, I used to peruse portfolios and ask interview questions about their knowledge of Flash and Flex. I quickly realized this superficial method did not always produce the most qualified team of professionals who knew the tools well enough to hit the ground running. Someone who claims to know Photoshop may have simply cropped family photos a few times. In most cases employers realize hiring mistakes quickly in the work environment, but waste time and money on the wrong individuals.

Now, requiring that my team earn the Adobe Certified Associate credential assures me the entire group will have a foundational knowledge of the design tools we use. I can hand recent graduates new tasks with confidence they will use best practices to deliver the project on time and up to specifications.

Professionals who earn ACA certification can use it to their advantage in securing a new position or proving their current value. They should point out the ACA certification requirements to their superiors and compare them directly to job requirements to confirm they have the most applicable skills. Furthermore, professionals who are ACA certified will be able to spend more time completing projects rather than training or wandering aimlessly with Adobe products trying to figure out how to complete a task. Emerging Technologies Director Jonathan Huer, Ball State, noted that students who interviewed for positions often overstated their knowledge of key graphic design programs like Adobe Photoshop.

The combination of an outstanding portfolio and Adobe Certified Associate credentials makes graduating students credible professionals in the workforce, said Huer. It's a technical foundation that says, [this] didn't take me ten years to make. I can do it efficiently and effectively, using the right processes.

SINEAD HOGAN

Sinead Hogan holds a first class honors degree in Management Science and Information Systems Studies from Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland's top ranked university. Sinead has over 10 years of training and assessment development experience with a strong background in evaluation and measurement. This includes: four years directing development with Skillspro, an CBT content publisher and three years consulting internationally on the development of rich interaction environments for testing and training, developing primarily for the Flash Platform. Sinead joined the Certiport team three years ago, helping expand Certiport's performance testing offering with the development of cutting edge, web delivered simulations using Flex and Flash.

