

Software Solution for Creating Online Training and Certificate Programs



**Duane Wells – CEO
Certspring**

CEOCFO: Mr. Wells, would you tell us about Certspring?

Mr. Wells: Over the last five years there has been a rapid paradigm shift in academia as it relates to how content is used and how credentials are given to students that fit into that content. There has been a paradigm shift with the universities that have been doing a lot more sophisticated programs. They are issuing many alternate credentials. Over the last few years, our company has done work with large corporations and different types of companies that are trying to launch learning programs to large groups of people. We have learned that most organizations have a few common problems as it relates to creating online learning applications. One is the creation and content that has to be put together to roll out to students. The other is that many times, companies do not have the internal resources or the bandwidth internally to run a piece of software to roll the learning programs out. Third is the budget. If you take all of that and put it together, there is a common problem across many training, and there are a great number of companies that are trying to roll out training. The online learning space itself is about \$150 billion industry and about \$10 billion of that is dedicated toward self paced learning. There is a small piece of that \$10 billion dollars that is aimed at helping organizations that have never used online training that have these problems.

CEOCFO: You mentioned universities, was that just for context now that enterprise is catching on?

Mr. Wells: It is about the content and that is what Certspring is really about. It is about helping organizations to a better job of utilizing content that already exists.

CEOCFO: What were the challenges in developing the technology addressing the problems that you mentioned?

Mr. Wells: The main challenge that we face was how to keep it easy. We realize that many companies that create online learning software are rooted in academia and that software is generally aimed at people that have experience with creating content and creating courses online. The average person does not have that. We had to ignore all the rules with how software has traditionally been created for this kind of progress. Folks are making it as easy as possible so that anybody could sit down and get it done within minutes without having any training. That was our biggest challenge, just trying not to make it complicated.

CEOCFO: How does your system help a company choose what should be in a training program?

Mr. Wells: Interestingly enough, companies think because they are trained to think that creating learning programs requires them to author new content. What makes our system so special is that we focus on helping people repurpose content that they already have and to find content that exists in the public domain to create training programs very quickly. By using our program, they can create blended learning that includes thing like their manuals or internal policy documents and combine that with information that may exist on the internet like TED talks or a blog article, to create a meaningful training program quickly.

CEOCFO: Would you walk us through a basic scenario?

Mr. Wells: If a company wanted to roll out some kind of awareness training about cyber security and they knew they were having a problem with training employees and making sure they were held accountable for that knowledge, they would look at any policies that they would have internally and any kind of information the company might already have. If it does not have any information, they can simply go to the internet and do searches on best practices for cyber security in companies, security best practices, etcetera. By finding content on the internet that they find meaningful to their company, it could be just a series of Youtube videos. We have a worksheet format that we give to our customers so they can create

questions. One of the things that we do that is unique is that we can create the questions for the company if they want. All they have to do is plug those videos that they find or it could be a PDF article, that they find on the internet or internal content that they already have. They simply upload it or they plug in the URLs, they publish and they are done.

CEOCFO: *Is there a particular type of company or industry that is using Certspring?*

Mr. Wells: There is a common thread that we market to although it is applicable to many industries. Right now, our focus is in helping companies that do training take their in-person training programs and quickly turn them into online training. For example, if they are doing a sexual harassment training in person, all they need to do is take their power point and screen cast it into the computer. It takes about fifteen minutes to upload it to our system and now they have taken their content and they have made it online. Another significantly different group is associations. Many associations want to be able to offer additional value to their members and by telling their membership what information they need to pay attention to, or creating learning programs that can enhance their continuing education. That is another group. The last group that we focus on is software/hardware companies that want to train their partners and reduce cost by holding their partners accountable to understanding their product. It can be software/hardware companies.

CEOCFO: *Are companies in the areas you mentioned actively looking to create training programs?*

Mr. Wells: I think there is increasing pressure in the industry now and there is a general awareness that is really becoming more prevalent amongst general organizations that they can use training online to increase the skill set of their workers or use online training to help reduce cost or potentially create revenue depending on how they are doing it. I think that right now is a great time for us because there is sort of a hockey stick right now in terms of understanding what options are available on the market. Many companies are looking at ways to try to get that done.

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CEOCFO: *How do you reach out?*

Mr. Wells: We have done very well with our SEO campaigns and a lot of companies find us by just searching for some of the common keywords such as creating online training, online certificate software, online certification software, and creating an online certificate. Those are some of the keywords where we have done well. We use PPC in different software portals.

CEOCFO: *When a company is looking and they come upon Certspring, what jumps out that would cause them to go further and speak to you rather than one of the many other companies that may come up in a search?*

Mr. Wells: There are two parts to that answer. Although many companies out there do provide online training software and a lot create only a certificate program. There are not many companies out there that focus on that idea. There are many companies out there that are looking at trying to provide social clemency to their learners and by us focusing on being a certificate platform, which really helps. The other thing is that we focus on micro learning so we accommodate mobile devices. The certificate part helps if you combine that with the micro learning. The last part to that is that we have a free forever plan where anybody can sign up and create the program. They get it free for fifteen days and then beyond that they have a maximum of five students. Because of that, it makes the barrier to entry very simple and a company without spending a dollar could sign up with our company and end up with a new learning program within thirty minutes. That is one thing that makes us stand out a lot.

CEOCFO: *Do many people start that way?*

Mr. Wells: Most people start that way. Although some of our bigger customers engage us to help them understand it a bit better before they take the first step.

CEOCFO: *What has changed in your approach over time?*

Mr. Wells: One of the most important things that we have learned is that there is a major shift that is going on in the thinking around credentialing. One of the first things that people always say is that if they finish a certificate program, what does that matter? The answer is that people wanted to have social currency applied to them in terms of getting recognition for what they have learned. If you have a group of 100 people that all understand this new concept and they are able to show in a boastful way either via social media or by just having a certificate on their wall, they have completed

something and that is enough to make someone feel good about earning that certificate. That is one of the big things that our customers have an aha moment about.

CEOCFO: *How is business these days?*

Mr. Wells: Business is fantastic. We are getting roughly ten new companies a day signing up which is good organically. We are using the lean startup method to develop and watch the company. We are continuing to hold those principles so by having a methodology to help us build a company has helped us establish consistent growth pattern.

CEOCFO: *Are there features you provide that, in general, companies are not taking advantage?*

Mr. Wells: Our software operates in two modes. One is in course mode and that is when you log in, view the content and take the test and you are done. We also have something called catalog mode, which you need for our software which allows a company to load content and assign a point value. It is almost like a game, but not quite. It lets the learning choose what content they want to consider and as soon as they earn enough points, they test out. That is a unique feature that many companies like and want to be able to create a dynamic learning program that has content added to it over time so that in a given year somebody can choose what content they want to learn and still be able to earn a certificate.

CEOCFO: *What might be different a year from now for Certspring?*

Mr. Wells: I think that the way we are selling the product now is a direct sales model but we are getting more interest from partners. We see the potential for changing our sales model to work with partners more because we want to focus on always being the best platform company that we can be. We think that channel model might make sense for us and that is one of the things that we are considering right now. We want to focus on being the same. A lot of the time with the learning software that is out there, they are trying to keep up with all the different function and features that are new but we really have to focus on keeping things as simple as possible for our users and to do that we have to stay true to our mission. Our goal is to have a training program for every business in America. Every business in America should have an online training program of some sort and we want to make it that easy that we can bring that to the masses.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

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