

Certify Me – Two Emerging SEO Certification Programs

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Two emerging initiatives aim to create and present certification designations for search engine optimization specialists. Oddly enough, both are from Southern Ontario, Canada both are being initiated by long term players in the online marketing world, and neither has sanction from any official bodies, other than their own boards of directors.

If the situation sounds confusing and ad-hoc, that's because it is. There is no official governing board for search engine optimization practitioners. In other words, SEO is not a profession by any extent of the word. It is a practice. There is no regulation, other than the vocal self-policing that happens within the industry and no bureau of complaints and compliance, other than the search engines themselves.

From a business and consumer's point of view, the lack of professional oversight or certification in the search engine optimization field can present problems when deciding with whom to risk advertising dollars. Again, there is no overarching better business bureau or best practices council for consumers to file complaints with. Without an industry-wide certification program, the only protection consumers can expect comes from the due-diligence process they exercise themselves.

The Society of Internet Professionals wants to change that. Formed as a non-profit society in 1997, the Society of Internet Professionals (SIP) sees itself as one of the few entities capable of offering a professional certification for SEOs. They took sole responsibility for the certification for Internet Professionals in 2003 when the Association of Web Professionals ceased operation, though they have been offering an accreditation program, Accredited Internet Professional (AIP), since 1999.

Since that time, the number of specialization streams under which SIP offers accreditation has grown to include, Web Technology, Web Design, Web Management, Web Development, Internet Privacy, e-Business, e-Learning, and SEO.

According to SIP president and founder Max Haroon, "AIP is the accreditation of Internet professional's qualification and experience. AIP are professionals practicing in the Internet sector whose qualifications, experience and professionalism have been assessed by SIP." Expanding certification into the SEO sector is a natural move for SIP, says Haroon.

In order to qualify for an AIP in SEO, a practitioner must first become a member of SIP. They must then conduct a three step assessment program, the first step being a free online self-assessment. After taking the online assessment test, applicants must then pass a SIP Core Examination which challenges the writer's mastery of general Internet competencies. Lastly applicants must take a more difficult test covering the specific AIP certification stream they are interested in.

The certification process is rigorous. Taking the two competency tests is one thing. Passing them with a grade of 75% or higher is another. If the applicant passes both competency tests, he or she will also need to provide references from employers, peers and friends, and agree to abide by [SIP's code of ethics](#).

For more information on becoming a member of the Society of Internet Professionals, or on achieving SIP accreditation, visit their website at <http://www.sipgroup.org>.

A second certification initiative will soon be launched if Terry Van Horne (Webmaster T) from SEOPros.org has his way. SEOPros.org is also a registered non-profit society based in Southern Ontario. Founded as a directory of vetted and approved ethical SEO and SEM firms, SEOPros wants to bring a standard of best practices to the industry by offering an online training and evaluation course covering SEO Best Practices and Techniques.

The SEOPros initiative differs from SIP's in that direct instruction is offered to participants in a highly focused online classroom setting. As SEOPros promises one-on-one instruction, it limits its classes to a maximum of 20 participants.

Participants benefit from instruction offered by some of the most well known and trusted names in the SEO industry including Van Horne, Dan Thies, Scotty Claiborne and CJ Newton. SEOPros guarantees participants at least one hour of private conversation with an instructor for personalized, one-on-one lessons.

According to the SEOPros certification documents, "If you have heard of "boot camps" for MCSE, then you know what to expect!"

The SEOPros course covers the following areas, Web Development and Conversion Strategies, Understanding SERPs and HTML Optimization, and Submission and Link Building Strategies. Participants who successfully navigate their way through the intense learning sessions are invited to take a final exam which, if passed leads to SEOPro "Best Practices Certification" and membership in the (best practices exclusive) SEOPros directory. For more information on the SEOPros Best Practices certification, please visit the SEOPros website.

Both the Society of Internet Professionals and SEOPros recognize they have common goals and have indicated a willingness to work with each other in the future. It is interesting to note that both initiatives began independently of each other but are located within 50 kilometres of each other.

The need for a professional designation or best practice certification for SEOs is obvious. The method for creating, marketing and distributing these certificates is not. Each of the initiatives would have more strength if backed by one of the known SEO/SEM industry associations such as SEMPO or the emerging Search Marketing Association of North America.