



SALESFORCE ACCREDITED PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIAL

A VALOIR REPORT

DECEMBER 2022

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As Salesforce continues to grow its application footprint, developing an ecosystem that can design and implement Salesforce solution is critical. Partner Learning Camp (PLC) is one of several initiatives focused on increasing the number of skilled consultants, architects, and developers that can deliver the latest Salesforce applications and capabilities. Salesforce's Accredited Professional (AP) program, launched in 2021, is designed to help partners credential their consultants in in-depth Salesforce knowledge and expertise in key areas. In interviews with Salesforce partners, Valoir found that although AP credentials are only beginning to gain recognition in the customer community, they are important for proving the depth of expertise in specific Salesforce areas – particularly emerging solutions – and important for differentiating partners' brand and competitiveness in the Salesforce ecosystem.

As the functionality and capabilities of the Salesforce platform have expanded, so has the need for partners with skills and expertise to help customers adopt and maximize value from Salesforce. Historically, Salesforce partners have relied on Trailhead, in-person training, and a variety of third-party Salesforce blogs and documentation to develop their Salesforce expertise and ability to deliver solutions.

However, as Salesforce continues to add capabilities to its platform and extend its industry solutions footprint, many partners have found that they need more in-depth expertise. Beyond the customer-focused training on Trailhead, Salesforce extended its training for partners with Partner Learning Camp (PLC), launched in early 2020, to provide specialized training and education for Salesforce partners.

Building on the initial success of PLC, in 2021 Salesforce launched the Accredited Professional (AP) credentials. AP credentials help partners expand their product and industry knowledge and give them the tools needed to deliver projects and drive customer success. To date, more than 10,000 AP credentials have been earned.

To better understand the potential benefits of the AP program for individuals and partner organizations, Valoir conducted in-depth interviews with multiple Salesforce professionals who had successfully completed AP exams. Participants in our analysis represented more than 10 different partner organizations ranging from small consultancies with only a few years of experience in the Salesforce partner program to global organizations that have been Salesforce partners for more than 10 years.



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PLC and the Accredited Professional program

The AP courses and exams in PLC are designed to help Salesforce partners expand their product and industry knowledge so they can effectively plan and deliver projects and help customers get the most value from Salesforce innovations. The current library of AP exams falls into several categories:

- Core platform areas including Mobile, Heroku Developer, Security and Privacy, CMS, and Process Automation
- Analytics components including Einstein Discovery, Einstein Prediction Builder, and Einstein Next Best Action
- Sales Cloud including Sales Cloud Einstein, Revenue Cloud, and Salesforce Maps
- Commerce Cloud including Commerce Cloud Einstein, Order Management Administrator, Headless API First, B2B Commerce for Administrators, B2B Commerce for Developers, and Order Management Developer
- Marketing Cloud including Account Engagement: Reporting and Analytics, Personalization, Data Platform, Advanced Cross Channel, Account Engagement: Business Units, and Intelligence
- Service Cloud including Digital Engagement, Service Cloud Voice, Advanced Field Service, Workforce Engagement, and Service Cloud Einstein
- Industry Clouds including Financial Services Cloud, Health Cloud, Manufacturing Cloud, Consumer Goods Cloud, Public Sector Solutions, and Communications Cloud
- Credentials to help partners grow their soft skills in their respective roles including Indirect Sales and Sales Business Excellence.

Salesforce continues to release new AP courses and exams, and plan to have credentials aligned to most of Salesforce's product portfolio by early 2022. The AP exam guides and credential exams are available in English. Many of the exam guides and exams are also available in Japanese. Preparation time for each AP depends on the exam and recommended prerequisites, and Salesforce provides guidance on the expected time needed to complete individual courses and exams to help partners understand the potential time investment involved. The cost per AP exam is \$150.

AP credentials gained by individuals count toward a company's knowledge check requirements for Navigator distinctions. They must be maintained every two years by the individual, and stay with the individual – so if a consultant changes partner firms they retain their AP credentials.

Why PLC and AP

Valoir found there were a few reasons why partners were investing the time and effort in AP credential exams:

- Depth of product capabilities covered. Partners said that AP courses and exams, by and large, went deeper in specific functionality than other training and certifications, enabling them to

develop deeper knowledge in areas such as process automation, for example, which enabled them to deliver more complex solutions for clients.

- Emerging product knowledge. Because the AP program has invested in developing exams and training for emerging areas of Salesforce's offering, such as industry clouds, partners can come up to speed more quickly on emerging areas where other content and training isn't yet readily available.
- Knowledge of new, relevant capabilities and technologies. Because AP credentials must be maintained, partners – especially those in management and talent acquisition roles – found that they were a better indicator than other certifications of whether a consultant had up-to-date knowledge of the latest capabilities of a particular cloud solution.



Partners cited depth of capabilities covered, new cloud knowledge, and currency of knowledge as key differentiators of AP over other certifications and training.

Key benefits

Valoir found that there were four main benefits partners saw from PLC and AP exams: increased depth of expertise, increased differentiation and competitiveness, acceleration of new cloud opportunities, and accelerated time to proficiency.

INCREASED DIFFERENTIATION

Because AP credentials tend to go deeper in Salesforce functionality and capabilities than other credentials, and cover topics (particularly in emerging clouds) not covered by other exams, Valoir found partners were using them to differentiate their bench from other implementation partners – both with prospective customers and with Salesforce. Partners said:

If I'm trying to tell my customers that I'm an expert in automating Service Cloud or Einstein or Digital Engagement, I can distinguish myself from everybody else that just has Service Cloud.

AP helps us differentiate ourselves against our peers. Others have higher certification numbers, but AP really helps us gain some traction there. If someone looks you up on LinkedIn, people take note that you went that extra mile [to do AP credentials].

AP helps for partners' Trailblazer score and Navigator score and helps our profile. Now I work for a Summit partner – others can use the APs to improve their standing and improve their overall value and positioning of the company.

It matters because it helps our little consultancy seem more legitimate. Our consultants are top tier, world class – [AP] builds the resume about our company and makes it look as good commercially as possible.

It helps me and the company internally with partner tiers in Salesforce ... It shows you're extra invested in learning about Salesforce and going the extra mile.

Although partners said that not all of the Salesforce ecosystem was aware of the AP credential as opposed to other credentials, momentum for AP recognition was growing. They hoped that, in the future, AP credentials could be included in their Trailblazer.me profile to provide greater visibility into their investment in building Salesforce skills with AP credentials (which is a capability Salesforce has planned for fiscal year 2024).

INCREASED DEPTH OF EXPERTISE

Valoir found that partners that had successfully earned AP credentials had gained an increased depth of expertise in Salesforce capabilities that they could then more effectively communicate and deliver to customers. Preparing for the AP credentials gave them a breadth of experience that they wouldn't necessarily gain from simply working on similar projects. Partners said:

AP is at a level deeper to specific functionality and features that gets called out. Everybody has Sales Cloud, platform app builder [certifications], but I have process automation so I'm a specialist in automating processes. I've gone to an additional level of detail in building out flows the right way.

The content in PLC is very specialized. If you want to learn within the Einstein platform Vision or Prediction Builder, the depth of the content on PLC is much deeper than it is on Trailhead.

This depth of expertise was important to individuals in being able to lead more complex projects as well as to their partner organizations in being able to bid for more complicated opportunities.

ACCELERATION OF NEW CLOUD OPPORTUNITIES

As Salesforce announces and releases new clouds, such as clouds for specific industries, the AP program enabled partners to quickly come up to speed on new cloud offerings and be able to capitalize on new client opportunities. Partners said:

AP helps us go to market with emerging capabilities like Net Zero Cloud.

As other clouds have launched [APs] give us the ability to come up to speed and show customers we know what we're doing.

ACCELERATED TIME TO PROFICIENCY

Valoir found that, from an individual perspective, the process of preparing for and sitting for AP credentials enabled consultants to develop proficiency faster than other training opportunities or projects. Partners said:

An AP [credential] just focused on Service Cloud Voice, for example, allowed us to get our consultants excited about it... A consultant wants to get upskilled in a short period of time. It's more focused than a broader Service Cloud consultant exam.

To get up to speed without PLC I would spend a lot of time searching help and documentation. I might try asking questions on the Trailblazer Community, forums, or AppExchange. [AP] is all content that's been collated and put in one place. It's definitely been huge in terms of saving time.

Partners particularly pointed to the estimated hours for preparation for AP exams as a means to help them identify areas where they could rapidly develop proficiency in a new Salesforce skill. Knowing that they could spend a weekend prepping for an exam and be successful in gaining new knowledge in a short period of time made it particularly attractive for new consultants or those looking to quickly expand their resumes.

Looking ahead

In analyzing the experiences of partners that had successfully earned AP credentials, Valoir found that the program enabled them to deepen their Salesforce product and industry knowledge and gain more confidence in being able to communicate about and implement new solutions for clients. Moving forward, Valoir expects that greater integration of Trailhead and PLC will enable partners to more rapidly be recognized for their AP credentials and increase the public visibility of their AP-validated expertise. This will drive greater adoption of AP credentials, helping partners to maximize the value of their AP credential investments and gain broader and deeper Salesforce knowledge to deliver more value for customers.

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