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CBM credential gains momentum in business world

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SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

When **Cindy Key** set out to build her own consulting business, she felt the need to seek some new credentials — even though she had 25 years of human resources experience. So she pursued the certified business manager (CBM) certification, which endorses her general business management proficiency.

“I wanted to be known as more of a generalist than a specialist,” said Key, president of **Key Concepts**, an HR consulting and business development firm based in Northbridge. Key was a staff development specialist and a corporate trainer before launching her own firm in 1999.

Key graduated from **Wayland Baptist University** with an occupational education degree and carries the senior professional in human resources (SPHR) credential from the Society for Human Resources Management.

She says the certification helps her serve a broader client base. “The CBM gives me the backing to say I am a generalist,” Key says, who earned her CBM in 2001.

Key is one of a growing number of professionals seeking the certification. According to the **Association of Professionals in Business Management**,

the Chicago-based educational service organization that sponsors the CBM, there are 3,050 professionals with the certification, compared with 2,950 last year. According to current registration figures, the cumulative number stands to grow to 3,700 next year and 5,000 in 2008.

There are many different specialty certifications, but the purpose of the CBM is to provide a “generalist” business certification, according to the association.

APBM Chief Executive **Devi Vallabhaneni** said the CBM is more comprehensive than other certifications.

“MBAs are getting CBMs to round out their skills,” she said. “There is a common body of knowledge that all managers need to have, regardless of whether they have a career in law, accounting, manufacturing or some other profession.”

Vallabhaneni said the CBM doesn’t aim to usurp the MBA. It’s geared toward those who are preparing to earn their MBA because it helps them understand business concepts.

“MBAs often specialize in a certain area, such as marketing,” she said. “The CBM helps them become proficient in other areas of general management so they can move up the corporate ladder.”

The growth in the CBM’s popular-

WHO’S GOT A CBM?

According to the Association of Professionals in Business Management:

- 40%** have earned an MBA degree.
- 75%** have at least one other business specialty certification.
- 30%** are certified public accountants.
- 35%** live outside the United States.

ity over the past few years came as the MBA dealt with a steady year-over-year decrease in the wake of the dot-com collapse — although this year, the trend seems to be reversing itself, according to a study released over the summer by the **Graduate Management Admissions Council**.

“MBA degrees at various universities are of various quality. Employers may decide to use the CBM as a way of getting some assurance that they have mastered this body of knowledge. The CBM would demonstrate that expertise,” said **Rakesh Khurana**, an associate

professor of business administration at Harvard Business School.

The CBM takes between nine and 12 months to complete, a much shorter period than an MBA program. The CBM is also much less expensive than an MBA. Exam registration fees for each part of the four-part process run \$399. Preparation guides cost \$199 per part. There is a \$48 annual certification maintenance fee and a requirement to complete 20 hours of continuing education each year, if they are not involved in other certification programs with the same requirement. Mandated CBM membership costs an additional \$68.

Cindy Key considered going back to college to earn her MBA, but decided the CBM was a better fit for her — and her clients — because it offered a broader body of knowledge. Her 25-year corporate career was narrowly focused on non-profit, government and retail, but her business targets small to midsize businesses in a variety of industries.

“My clients benefit from the knowledge I got through the CBM testing and credentialing,” Key said. “When they call me with a problem, I can go in and look at the overall picture and see what’s going on with the business and help determine what the best solutions are regardless of what industry they are in.”