

Chartered Accountants of Canada

How Secureexam Eases the Administration of High-Stakes Exams

High-stakes examinations for accountants and other professions demand the highest level of testing integrity. To that end, organizations such as the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants (CICA) have deployed Software Secure's Secureexam solution in recent years. By securing the test environment, CICA ensures that Chartered Accountants have successfully completed their professional training and are qualified to serve the public.



However, while CICA originally selected Secureexam to support secure computer-based testing, they have since discovered a benefit they may not have considered: Secureexam can be a powerful tool for easing the administrative burden of conducting, reviewing, and scoring professional tests.

A RESPONSE TO GROWING DEMAND

Conducting regular professional examinations on a nationwide basis is a prodigious undertaking. For CICA, the Uniform Evaluation (UFE) is an annual rite that attracts more than 3,500 prospective Chartered Accountants at 40 writing centers across Canada over three days.

Information technology has been used in professional testing for decades, but primarily in multiple-choice question exams. In recent years, CICA has sought to incorporate computers more fully into their professional tests, primarily for the convenience of their candidates.

"CICA went to a competency-based exam in 2003," explained Paule Massicotte, Principal of CA Qualification for CICA. The UFE challenges candidates to demonstrate their competence by responding to simulations and business scenarios representing the kinds of challenges they could face in their accounting careers. "This requires candidates to demonstrate their professional knowledge by writing up to 60 pages of handwritten responses per day over the three-day period," continued Massicotte. CICA officials decided it would benefit test-takers if they could type their exam responses on their computers, especially since computer literacy is a near-universal requirement in the workplace.

As CICA's exams are conducted only in designated, proctored locations on a limited number of occasions per year, CICA was primarily concerned with ensuring that candidates' laptops could be locked down to prevent access to non-exam information on their computers or the Internet. Officials evaluated several solutions before choosing Secureexam from Software Secure. CICA began mandating the use of Secureexam in 2009, as did the provincial organizations across four regions that Canadian Chartered Accountant candidates use to prepare for the UFE.

A SOLUTION THAT WORKS FOR CANDIDATES

CICA was delighted with the results. "In terms of the candidates being able to demonstrate their competency, Securexam has made things much better," said CICA's Paule Massicotte. "Their thoughts are clearer and their work is better organized than when they were written by hand."

To use their computers for the UFE, candidates must first install patented Securexam software on their PCs before testing. At testing time, a qualification test is performed to ensure that all computers are properly secured for the exam. After candidates complete the exam, they upload their answers to a secure website operated by Software Secure. To guard against mishaps, all examination files are also saved to USB keys which are handed in at the end of testing.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE DIVIDEND

The administrative impact of Securexam was felt immediately in the elimination of hundreds of handwritten hard-copy exams. This was a major improvement in logistics for CICA, which in the past had had to pack thousands of pages of completed papers into locked boxes at the 40 exam locations across Canada and ship them via courier to Toronto. There is no longer a risk of boxes being lost or stolen.

"This is the first year that we are marking all three days of paper online. The markers love it. We are totally paperless now. In terms of efficiency, there is a great gain".

Paul Massicotte
Principal of CA Qualification
Chartered Accountants of Canada

Initially, CICA printed the computerized exam files for evaluating and marking. This was a time-consuming and cumbersome process. The exam marking is performed at a centralized marking center by 120 Chartered Accountants over a three-week period. With the elimination of the cost of paper and courier service, CICA has vastly simplified the logistics of administration

CICA's Paule Massicotte is a firm believer in the benefits of Securexam. "We would recommend it to others," she said. "We work a lot with international accountant bodies, and we've talked to them a lot about Securexam."

CICA has been very pleased with the service provided by Software Secure, as well. "Software Secure modified their software so that we can give students access to customized databases that they can search during the exam," said Massicotte. "We also work closely with Software Secure to ensure the software is updated every year, as well as ensuring that it meets each of our four region's specific requirements." CICA also relies on Software Secure's support website as the

primary source of information for candidates. Since Canada is a bilingual country, the support is provided in both English and French.

For CICA , the conclusion was that Securexam is powerful technology for easing the administrative burden of conducting, reviewing, and scoring professional tests.

ABOUT SOFTWARE SECURE

Software Secure is a pioneer and market leader in secure, computer-based testing solutions. With an unrivaled commitment to supporting its customers, Software Secure provides proven, patented solutions for traditional and distance learning environments, as well as professional certification organizations. Academic institutions, as well as organizations overseeing mid and high-stakes testing environments, rely on Software Secure's expertise for testing solutions that exceed regional and national accreditation standards as well as federal regulation requirements, and facilitate the responsible use of technology in education.



Learn how Software Secure can help your organization: www.softwaresecure.com
