



Ten Real-world Tips for Taming the CPE Beast

BY SARAH SIMONEAUX, CPC

How to get the most out of conferences, webcasts, seminars, and your colleagues when fulfilling your continuing professional education requirements.

“Getting my CPE,” he said, in answer to my question about what he was doing on his iPad. I stared in astonishment. This person was not one of my college-age kids, but my 80-year-old father. Seeing my wide eyes, he went on: “Look, you know I’ve never liked traveling to conferences. I’d rather spend time with my grandchildren or go ballroom dancing with your mother. So I download webcasts to my iPad and listen to podcasts on my iPod to get my legal CPE.”

How does my octogenarian still-working father figure into the retirement services profession? He demonstrated that even an 80-year-old can take advantage of online on-demand CPE. Read on for 10 real-world tips to taming the CPE beast, even if you’re considerably younger than my dad.

1. Make recorded webcasts seem live:

Watching recorded webcasts alone at your desk or on your iPad at home, no matter how riveting the subject matter, can be a CPE chore. Organize a group session of colleagues and watch the webcast together, stopping it every 15 or 20 minutes to discuss case studies relevant to the points presented in the webcast. For example, a recent ASPPA webcast on “403(b) Plan Audits” talked about common deficiencies uncovered by auditors. A group topic could be how to identify and correct those deficiencies for 403(b) plans serviced by your firm.

2. Contact the presenter:

If you attend a particularly good session at a conference or find a webcast topic or speaker especially relevant, email or call him or her. An experienced and entertaining speaker will be able to present a topic specific to your firm or professional group and deliver a presentation either online or onsite. Speaker fees can be offset with a sponsor or with membership dues in a local group such as an ASPPA Benefits Council or National Institute of Pension Administrators (NIPA) chapter.

3. Remember ethics requirements:

Most credentials, including ASPPA’s, require a minimum of one to two ethics CPE credits. Plan ahead for credentialed employees who need ethics CPE by seeking out those credits before you’re at the CPE deadline. For example, ASPPA provides ethics sessions at its conferences, as well as *The ASPPA Journal* ethics quizzes available online. Most organizations, including ASPPA, schedule at least one ethics webcast each year that can be viewed live or recorded.

4. Make CPE do double and triple duty:

Most webcasts and conferences offer CPE that can be used for multiple credentials. For example, ASPPA webcasts provide CPE for ASPPA and NIPA credentials. CPAs, attorneys, and other professionals may also benefit from the same CPE offerings. Watch out for individual state CPE requirements, however. For example, state insurance licenses have specific state-level CPE requirements that differ by state and usually mandate CPE from state-approved providers. Local groups, such as ASPPA ABCs and NIPA chapters, may offer assistance with filing for state-approved CPE credit and can be a great resource for CPE for those with state insurance requirements.

5. Use conferences for networking first, CPE second:

Conferences offer a concentrated dose of CPE, often as much as 15 or 20 credits over a two and one-half day timeframe. Although they can be costlier than webcasts, especially if they involve extensive travel, they offer a unique opportunity to network with attendees, vendors, and presenters. Don't get so caught up in racking up those CPE credits that you neglect the networking. Because of the expense and the valuable face-to-face time with colleagues, use conferences as a reward for valuable credentialed employees or send those good at building relationships.

6. Seek out firm-level discounts:

Ask about volume discounts for webcasts and conference registrations, especially if the firm has several credentialed staff members. Many webcasts have subscriptions with unlimited access for a specific time period. ASPPA provides an unlimited firm-level license for all of its webcasts during a calendar year. ASPPA and other organizations frequently offer

special registration pricing for firms bringing several staff members to the conference.

7. Free CPE is out there:

Many free webcasts will count for CPE—just double-check and make sure it's approved CPE for your specific credential. Many service providers and some ERISA attorneys will offer free presentations whose cost has been subsidized by a sponsor; LinkedIn groups targeted to retirement services professionals are a good resource for this type of CPE. And, as we all know, nothing is really "free." Someone is likely to be selling you something. Just make sure the content is worth the sales pitch.

8. The most bang for your buck:

Courses—both web-based and live—combined with credentialing exams can give you almost double the CPE you'd receive from a more traditional source. An ASPPA Tax-Exempt and Governmental Plan Consultant (TGPC) credentialed member could earn up to 40 CPE credits through the web courses and exams needed to obtain the Qualified Plan Financial Consultant credential (QPFC). Many web courses are designed in a modular format, allowing you to learn about a specific area of retirement planning without having to pursue an additional designation. A good example of this concept is the Certified Pension Consultant (CPC) modules, which include topics like non-qualified plans, employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs), etc.

9. Teach:

For ASPPA credentialed members, leading a study group or teaching a course earns an instructor four hours of CPE for every hour of instruction. Other organizations have similar CPE policies. Most important, teaching is one of the best ways to really

understand the way the rules work, especially if you include case studies from your day-to-day work.

10. Track it or the end of the CPE cycle could be ugly:

ASPPA has recently enhanced the online ability to track your own CPE. ASPPA will automatically track it for you for any ASPPA-sponsored event, and you can enter other non-ASPPA CPE as earned by accessing the CPE section under your ASPPA profile.

Make it a habit to check CPE guidelines at the beginning of each CPE cycle. ASPPA recently updated their CPE guidelines for 2011-2012 and they can be found at www.asppa.org/CPEGuidelines.



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