



Cert Prep, Pricing, and Impact with Letty Kluttz

Leading Learning Podcast
Transcript for Episode 466

Celisa Steele: [00:00:03] If you want to grow the reach, revenue, and impact of your learning business, you're in the right place. I'm Celisa Steele.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:10] I'm Jeff Cobb, and this is the Leading Learning Podcast.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:16] Learning businesses are constantly asked to do a lot—support the mission, satisfy learners, and drive sustainable revenue. This episode offers a real-world look at how one organization is doing all that.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:29] This episode, number 466, features my conversation with Letty Kluttz, senior vice president of membership, education, and programs for APIC, the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:43] Letty shares how APIC developed and launched three new certification prep courses in less than a year, what they learned about listening to learners, and how they balance mission and margin in pricing and portfolio decisions.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:56] We also talk about APIC's shift to more flexible learning formats—including virtual instructor-led programs, microlearning, and microcredentials—and how APIC is using data and collaboration to focus on topics learners most need.

Jeff Cobb: [00:01:11] The conversation offers a useful perspective for anyone managing an education portfolio that has to deliver both impact and income. Here's the conversation with Letty Kluttz.

Celisa Steele: [00:01:27] Tell us a little bit about APIC, what it does in general. Also, I would love—given that we're the Leading Learning Podcast—to get a high-level look at what's in your learning portfolio, what you offer by way of education and learning.

Letty Kluttz: [00:01:40] APIC is the leading professional association for infection preventionists, or IPs, as we like to call them, and our mission is to advance the science and practice of infection prevention and control, ultimately to protect patients, healthcare workers, and communities. We have about 15,000 members in a variety of different settings—from acute care, hospitals, long-term care, home health, you name it—but they are *the* unsung heroes of keeping everyone safe and free from infection. So that is who we are and what we do. As far as education, as you can imagine, with an association, education is so, so important and one of the critical things that

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we do. Education helps our members develop professionally and personally. It also helps them stay on top of all of the things that they need to be aware of when they are keeping patients safe. It is definitely a cornerstone of what we do and what we offer. We offer a suite of different trainings—short, longer, online, instructor-led, asynchronous, synchronous, you name it—because we really want to meet our members where they are in their professional development and education journey. That’s just a very high-level overview of what we offer.

Celisa Steele: [00:02:56] One of the reasons I wanted to talk to you is that I’ve had the chance to hear you speak a few times over the last year or so about some of what you have going on around certification and some certification prep work. For the sake of our listeners, and for my own sake to get to hear it again, would you give us a sketch of what APIC has done and gotten out into the market in an impressively short period of time?

Letty Kluttz: [00:03:21] Sure, and thank you—because we look back, and we’re like, “I can’t believe we actually pulled that off.” This work began in earnest in 2022, and it feels like that should be so much longer ago than it actually is. We saw the need to update and upgrade, quite frankly, our cert prep. At that particular point, it was almost divine intervention and this perfect storm of different things happening at the same time. Our certification body, CBIC (the Certification Board of Infection Control and Epidemiology), was getting ready to launch a new certification, and we knew that the first question our members would ask is, “How do I prepare to take this certification?” That is what sped things up and got the ball rolling when we looked at “Okay, we don’t have the bandwidth or the expertise, quite honestly, to create a cert prep course for this new certification.” And then it became “Okay, our members have been asking for certain aspects as part of cert prep, from flashcards to pre-test to post-test.”

Letty Kluttz: [00:04:25] We took a step back and said, “This is an opportunity for us to upgrade the experience,” and so we reached out to the Holmes Corporation. I had worked with them in a previous life on cert prep, and we put together a timeline and a plan to bring all of this to fruition. We created three separate cert prep courses in less than a year, which I do not recommend for anybody, but it is something that we certainly are very proud of. The feedback has been fantastic. As IPs in particular and in healthcare, this whole concept of continuous improvement has certainly brought forward with our educational experience, especially with cert prep, continuing to listen to what our members want, to what they’re looking for. We just launched an updated version of our cert prep courses, so they have been exceeding our expectations, and our learners have been very, very happy with the materials that we’re providing to them.

Celisa Steele: [00:05:27] You were talking about how the feedback’s been great, how what you’re hearing is really positive. One of the things I would love to get you to talk about is about how APIC goes about listening to member needs, to learner needs, what methods or processes you might use to make sure that you’re hearing what they say they need, and then to what extent you might perhaps augment what they’re saying they need with what you know they might need that they might not even know that they need yet.

Letty Kluttz: [00:05:55] That's a great question. We solicit feedback from a variety of different places. We have all of our cert prep take place in our learning system, and, as part of that, when someone finishes going through the cert prep course, there's a survey that we provide to them that asks questions about what they liked, what they didn't, suggestions for improvement. Sometimes we get suggestions that are unsolicited. When we do instructor-led, we also do a survey at the end of that. A variety of different ways where we want to hear from them. "Did this help prepare you? What are some things you would like to see as part of these courses?" To your point, it's balancing what they say they need with what we know we can provide to them. A perfect example of that is, in the previous version, before we launched the upgraded platform, it was no audio. You just went through; you read. And that was some of the feedback we got: "We would like to be able to listen. We would like to be able to go in our car and put this on audio and study as we're driving to whatever place or have that as an option."

Letty Kluttz: [00:07:05] And so we did just that. That's a good example of listening to where our members and customers are and what they're looking for. That was extremely helpful. And flashcards—it sounds so simple. People love flashcards. They love a good flashcard because it's a good, again, checks and balances to help make sure that they're learning the content. Those are two examples of "We knew that this is something they had been asking for years," and it validated what we thought. Because the other thing is that you don't want to assume that you know what your members and your customers need, and so being able to ask the questions in a variety of different ways helps validate what you think they need at the same time, so that, again, you're meeting them where they're at.

Celisa Steele: [00:07:48] The reliance on post-course surveys or post-learning experience surveys feels pretty common. A lot of organizations do that. How do you go about hearing from folks that might not fill those out? Or perhaps it's required, and so you're getting more feedback there, but again that balance of are you hearing from the vocal minority? Or do you feel like, "Oh, no, we're actually hearing from our membership what they need"?

Letty Kluttz: [00:08:13] What's nice is, in order to get a certificate of completion, you have to take the survey, and you have to provide feedback. That's a little carrot that we dangle. Part of it too is helping them understand that we take their feedback seriously, and we do something with it. It's not just you filling out a survey for the sake of filling out a survey, but we want to make sure that we are providing information and content that they find useful, that they find valuable, and it's worth the investment that they're making—because it is an investment.

Celisa Steele: [00:08:43] One of the things that I know about associations and association learning businesses is that often what they offer in terms of education or learning can end up having to walk a balance beam between being out there because it supports the mission of the organization and also potentially being this revenue driver for the association to help feed some of the other expense areas of what has to happen. I would be curious to ask you about how APIC thinks about that—or how you, Letty, think about balancing mission versus margin in terms of what you offer as education.

Letty Kluttz: [00:09:20] That's a great question. I think it's something that probably all associations struggle with. At the end of the day, no mission, no money, but, obviously, our mission is our priority. I don't think there's anyone who couldn't get behind a safer world, a world without infection, and driving the science and practice of IPC. It's definitely a mission that everyone rallies behind, which I think is a great thing. But you do have to balance that, and you do need to look at making sure that you are bringing in enough revenue to cover the expenses that you're providing because, again, no money, no mission. It is absolutely a delicate balance, and it's something that we struggle with. Something that I have certainly learned throughout this process and this journey is that understanding and communicating the value proposition to the people who are purchasing your education materials is so, so important, and you don't want to undervalue the education that you're providing to your members. And that was an aha moment for me because you can always discount. You can't increase pricing.

Letty Kluttz: [00:10:32] It's having a different approach and a different thought process but having a pricing strategy as an association, as an organization, and looking holistically across the portfolio that you offer about the value proposition that you're giving to your members—it's such a critical part of that conversation when you're looking at "How do we drive revenue, and how do we have those conversations internally?" But, again, educating your members on the value that they get and all of the different features and doing some competitive pricing too is a really important part of the process. Because, again, you don't want to devalue what you're providing to them, but you also don't want to be like the Porsche of the education space, especially in the association, where there is so much price sensitivity, especially these days in healthcare, where everything's being cut right and left. We want to be mindful of that. But it's a balance, and it is a dance between the two, to be perfectly honest.

Celisa Steele: [00:11:29] I appreciate what you're saying there because sometimes what can be missed is the idea that price is perceived, often not consciously, as an indicator of value. If something's priced too low, sometimes ironically then the learner can be like, "Well, it can't be that good if it's that inexpensive." Does APIC keep some things in its portfolio that might be only breaking even because it really does support mission? And then you might have others that still, of course, support mission, but are bringing in more. Do you have any kind of way you try to actively balance what the makeup of the portfolio looks like in terms of the revenue that's being brought in?

Letty Kluttz: [00:12:13] Yes, I think it is a balance, and you have to look holistically. You can't just price one thing in a vacuum. It is looking across the organization and across the portfolio, across the suite of products that you're offering. And we offer a variety of different educational opportunities outside cert prep. We have our online learning courses. We have Webinars that are all a member benefit right now. It is looking and being mindful about what is the strategy behind what you want to price and what the overall objective is because you may have some things that, yes, are, to your point, strictly revenue-producing. Then you have others that you say, "You know what, this is the right thing to do, so we're going to price it accordingly so that we can get more people at a lower price versus fewer people at a higher price"—having those

conversations and being mindful of what that looks like when you're putting new products and services and education material forward.

Celisa Steele: [00:13:20] How often do you revisit pricing? Is that something that's baked into a regularly scheduled review?

Letty Kluttz: [00:13:26] It is now. I started it last year and took the time to put together an entire smartsheet with all of our offerings, and now we review all of our pricing as part of our budgeting, and we have a conversation so that the right hand knows what the left hand is doing, being very mindful of "When do we increase? When do we not?" A perfect example is with some of our signature products pricing hadn't been raised in 10 years, but the breadth of what we had offered had grown significantly. Making sure that we are having those conversations and reviewing stuff yearly. Now it doesn't make sense to increase every year. It just doesn't. When you have updated content that you're rolling out or new content, yes, that's when you look at that, and you look, again, holistically across the suite that you're offering and making sure it makes sense so that "like products" look like "like products." If you have, for example, an online course, and it's two hours, you don't want to price it the same thing as something that is eight hours because that just doesn't make sense. We have much more structure and an actual strategy and a pricing philosophy so that we are reviewing it every single year, every single product, and having those conversations as part of our budgeting process.

Celisa Steele: [00:14:47] As part of looking at pricing, are you also looking not just at the price tag but at the costs that go into making these products?

Letty Kluttz: [00:14:56] Yes, absolutely. Because we're healthcare, we have to review our content every three years and update it accordingly, which is part of when we provide continuing education credit, for example. And so you have to build that factor into the budget, and you have to be mindful of "What does that look like?" As we all saw the past couple of years, you never know. I feel like change is happening so much quicker now, and sometimes those updates don't fit that three-year lifecycle. Because there are costs associated with it, and you do want to make sure that you're covering them as part of those conversations. When you look at updating or revising, does it make sense? That is all part of the pricing conversation—what goes into making sure that we are keeping our content fresh? One of the things that associations don't do well—and I can pick on associations since I work at one—is we don't do well with sunseting material. Part of this process too...not just looking at pricing but looking at sales, looking at does this make sense to continue?

Letty Kluttz: [00:16:06] Sacred cows. There are so many sacred cows. And everyone's stuff is so important to them—but make sure that you are making those decisions that are smart for the association and sunseting material where the juice isn't worth the squeeze anymore.

Celisa Steele: [00:16:22] You talked a little bit about change and how it seems like the pace of change is increasing. Tell us a little bit about how APIC is continuing to evolve its approach to revenue generation, to member value when you look at the next couple of years, given broader shifts—AI, changes in continuing education, all those things that are going on.

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Letty Kluttz: [00:16:48] We seem to be in this shift of reduced attention span. I guess that's not really recent. That's been around for a long time. But, in a lot of ways, what I find fascinating, and one of the few positives to come out of COVID, was the thirst for virtual, for instructor-led in a virtual environment. We have so much engagement virtually, where before we didn't really do anything that was virtual. Everything was in person. And, after COVID, we do a smattering of in-person, but most of it is all online and all virtual. Because, again, a lot of times, with our audience, with our members, with IPs, they don't have the luxury to be able to leave their facility for three to four days, and this allows them to be able to stay at home, to not travel. It reduces costs. Virtual has been a huge game changer for us. We have gotten into microcredentials, these small, bite-sized, flexible ways of learning. That's something that we launched earlier this year in June; we launched our first microcredential on surveillance. It's an eight-hour course. You can do it as quickly or take a year to review the content and take the exam at the end. But that's an example of how we are doing smaller, bite-sized learning opportunities.

Letty Kluttz: [00:18:22] We have our microcredentials. We also have microlearning. So we're talking 10- to 15-minute snippets on very, very specific topics. You have to be specific when you have that short amount of time. But, again, meeting our members where they are. A lot of times they want just-in-time. You know that you want to learn something about this particular topic. Well, I can now go here and find that particular topic that I can spend 15 minutes on as a refresher versus sitting through a three-day course just to learn a part of the content that you want to see. Again, it's meeting people where they are—being able to offer all of the different types of learning. We like to say choose your own adventure when it comes to your preferred method of learning and engaging with content. It gives the learner a lot of flexibility—again, to meet them where they are.

Celisa Steele: [00:19:21] Is the microlearning something that they can earn credit towards maintaining...?

Letty Kluttz: [00:19:26] Yes, it's a couple of different things. For example, the one that we launched in June is on surveillance, eight-hour course. At the end of the course, you take an assessment, and then when you pass it, you get a digital badge. That digital badge is something that they can then put on LinkedIn, on their signature in Outlook, whatever it is. You can also—if you take those microcredentials—earn what we call infection prevention units (IPUs) for our certification that is offered through CBIC. You can use it in a variety of different ways. You can also get continuing education credit, from a nursing standpoint. There are a lot of different options for the learner, depending on what they need recertification or continuing education credits for.

Celisa Steele: [00:20:17] When you think about what's coming, what challenges or opportunities are you seeing for APIC? What's on your mind? What are you tracking?

Letty Kluttz: [00:20:26] This political landscape we're in right now is challenging. It's hard, and it's hard for our members. Healthcare in particular has been impacted by this, and so that is absolutely on the forefront. And, again, it comes down to meeting our members where they are

and making sure that we're providing educational content for them. Some of the things that we've been talking about and brainstorming is "How do we unbundle some of our topics?" One of the things that APIC is working on this year is having what we're calling "expert-informed resources," which is basically our version of a content strategy. Really focusing on specific topics to help us focus on telling our members—and this is all based on data that they've told us—that we know they want information on these specific content areas. That is helping us focus our time and energy into making sure we're providing the education that they told us they want.

Letty Kluttz: [00:21:39] But it's also looking at "What do you already have?" You never have to always create something from scratch. Taking a step back and saying, "What do we have that we can repurpose? Where are the gaps? What do we need to do? How do we collaborate across the enterprise, across the organization, to make sure that we're putting together these different educational opportunities?" Maybe there's a Webcast, maybe there's a microlearning, maybe there's a microcredential, and it doesn't necessarily have to be all of the things for the same content area. I am super excited and really proud that we've taken that step. It's something that we've talked a long time about. And I think it is absolutely going to come back in dividends to us. We're honing in on specific areas where we know our members have said, "This is where we need help. This is where we need more information on...." I'm a big fan of working smarter, not harder, and that is a really good example of what we're doing to ensure that that happens.

Celisa Steele: [00:22:42] Talking about working smarter, not harder, you said you have about 15,000 members. How big is the APIC staff?

Letty Kluttz: [00:22:49] We are small but mighty. We're about 50 employees. There's a lot of collaboration, as I'm sure you gathered from that conversation we were just chatting about. From a content strategy standpoint, it's all hands on deck. Honestly, it takes a village. It doesn't fall on one person's shoulders to bring this forward. Going back to one of your previous questions about our membership, we were spending a lot of time talking about the member value proposition. We're going to be doing a membership campaign, talking about the benefits of being a member, all of the things that we offer to our IPs. Because that's also a critical part of this too—helping people understand the value and that they're proud to be part of an association that is bringing forward all of this information to help them be better and do better.

Celisa Steele: [00:23:41] You've talked about positive feedback. We've talked some about revenue. Both of those are indicators of how you're doing with your learning products and education products. But I'm also thinking about this idea of impact. When a learner comes in, engages in one of these microlearnings, does a microcredential, or does the cert prep, there's the idea of impact. Are they actually learning? You even said about the mission statement is about changing practice or improving practice. Talk about how you think about the impact of what you offer in terms of learning. What are you tracking? Or what would you hope to track that you can't currently track?

Letty Kluttz: [00:24:21] That's another good question. One of the things we're tracking, especially with certification, there's a huge opportunity when you're tracking those who go

through cert prep courses, who obtain their certification—how do you tie it back into metrics that impact infection prevention? How do you tie it back into reduced-HAIs (hospital-acquired infections)? We have a research center, and they have been doing so much research in that regard. They launched a staffing calculator. You put in data specific to your facility; it then spits back a report that says, “Here’s the recommended number of IPs that you should have on staff.” And the data they’re pulling back from that show that there’s a direct correlation between the number of IPs you have on staff and a reduction in the number of infections. That’s golden.

Letty Kluttz: [00:25:23] There’s been so much work in collaborating with our research center with our EIR (expert-informed resources), making sure that we are all tying it back to how we can help them be better and do better. You also get the testimonials and anecdotes, not the hard and fast metrics, but stories that people talk about, how it helped them do X or Y. We have two publications that we offer: *AJIC (American Journal of Infection Control)*, which is our scientific magazine, and *Prevention Strategist*, so we always encourage members to submit their stories, submit what they did to demonstrate the value of the practice of infection prevention and how it impacted patients’ outcomes, what they’d done so others can learn from their own experience. It is holistically bringing in all of those different stories to show people how what they learn and put into practice has an impact.

Celisa Steele: [00:26:34] That’s great. It sounds like you’re doing really good work to be able to make that clear connection between “Here’s what we’re helping you learn, here’s what the IPs provide, and this is what it means in terms of reduced infection.”

Celisa Steele: [00:26:45] This is Leading Learning Podcast, so we always love to ask folks who come on a little bit about their own approach to lifelong learning. Do you have resources, practices, or habits that help you stay up-to-date and on top of your game?

Letty Kluttz: [00:26:59] Yes, I’m a huge proponent of lifelong learning. You never know everything. I think having that mindset and that perspective of “You can always do better and learn more” is important to being a better human and employee. I really do. Whether it’s learning about leadership or infection prevention, how you can better serve your members, being a sponge and constantly reading the articles that are submitted for our publications and reading the research agenda and the stuff that comes out of our research center and staying informed makes you be a better, informed consumer of information too. I read our magazine all the time, making sure I am listening to what our members are telling us.

Letty Kluttz: [00:27:53] As you can imagine, there’s never a dull moment with what’s coming out of the White House right now, so being on top of current issues is so important, but making sure you are approaching it and hearing all different sides. It’s easy to fall into—especially in the political environment we are in right now—listening to one side and not understanding what everyone is saying about different things. That’s a really important perspective, especially in the healthcare space, to have that lens of “Okay, today I’m going to listen to this particular news. Tomorrow I’m going to listen to this one. I want to hear what’s going on.” Our members aren’t shy. They will share their opinions with us, which is a great thing. Yet again, I’m a huge, huge proponent of continuous learning. It’s also the nature of healthcare—performance

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improvement, continuous learning, continuous improvement. Having that perspective, you have to carry it forward when it comes to learning and continuing to develop as a leader.

Celisa Steele: [00:29:00] It sounds like you're walking the walk. If you're going to be talking to your members about continuous improvement, you need to embody it yourself. We've covered a fair amount of ground, so if you wanted to make sure listeners took away one, two, or three points, what would you point them to? What would you want to reinforce?

Letty Kluttz: [00:29:20] I would say don't undervalue what you provide your members. Making sure you are reviewing pricing holistically across your organization on a regular basis—that's so important. The third thing is listen to what your members and customers are telling you, and then meet them where they are.

Jeff Cobb: [00:29:52] We're not done quite yet—stick around for our recap.

Celisa Steele: [00:29:54] You'll find show notes and a transcript at leadinglearning.com/episode466, along with links to APIC's Web site and Letty's LinkedIn profile. And Letty is happy to chat and share from her experience, as she is a big proponent of sharing to help others learn.

Jeff Cobb: [00:30:11] If you got value from this episode, please share it with a colleague or leave a rating and review. Those actions help others find the Leading Learning Podcast and support the work we're doing.

Celisa Steele: [00:30:23] Thinking about all that Letty shared, I was really interested to hear that APIC's research center has data showing the direct correlation between the number of infection preventionists on staff and a reduction in the number of infections in that setting. That's the kind of real-world outcome and impact that learning businesses need to be able to show.

Jeff Cobb: [00:30:45] Another thing Letty said that's very well aligned with our thinking is her admonition to not undervalue what you offer. We're big proponents of value-based pricing and understanding that price is often unconsciously correlated with value—low price, low value; higher price, higher value.

Celisa Steele: [00:31:03] And even though our podcast is free, rest assured that what we offer is high-value stuff. Thanks again for listening—and see you next time on the Leading Learning Podcast.

[music for this episode by Moarn]