

## Signaling Credibility

By Geoff Lennon, CMA



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I'm a management consultant who specializes in providing project management assistance and process improvement services to *Fortune* 1,000 companies—perhaps not the most traditional of CMA® (Certified Management Accountant) backgrounds. My projects, while often delivered within the scope of finance and accounting organizations, rarely deal with the tactical (or technical) aspects of management accounting. So what's the value in earning the credential?

For me, the value of the CMA is derived from the fact that I'm not likely to be in this position for the rest of my career. This thought is reinforced by the fact that the average professional changes jobs or companies upwards of 11 times across his or her career. To improve my future marketability, I knew that investing in my own professional development would, to borrow a term from economics, provide me with a "signaling opportunity" that could help me distinguish myself from my peers.

In a highly competitive job market where employers receive countless applications for every posted job and spend only *seconds* reading each résumé submitted, signaling is critical for getting noticed.

Signaling enables job seekers to differentiate themselves and helps hiring managers make more informed decisions in an environment where it can be difficult to identify the best candidates. Of course, having a well-crafted résumé and cover letter tailored specifically to the company and tightly

aligned with the specific job requirements is one way to stand out and provide a clear signal of your quality. But it can easily be mimicked by others, which greatly reduces its value as such a signal.

In order to truly stand out—for a signal to truly make a difference—you need to do something truly original, something that's hard to fake or mimic. This most often means making sacrifices or investments of time and/or money that others choose not to or are unable to make. Accomplishments that are costly to achieve, like obtaining the CMA after many hours of studying and examination, make the best signals because they aren't faked easily.

The CMA is a signal to employers and peers of your skills, intelligence, dedication, and commitment to personal and professional development—all attributes that can otherwise only be shallowly expressed in a cover letter. Being able to show these attributes via a credential is much more impactful and differentiating.

That's my reason for pursuing the CMA. It wasn't just to learn more about management accounting (though that was indeed one of my objectives), nor was it just to demonstrate mastery of the subject matter (another of my goals). Rather, I was focused primarily on developing a credible signal that would broadcast a demonstrated commitment to continuous professional development, an attribute that others can't readily show in a résumé. What's your reason? **SF**