

SECURITY, INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND PROTECTING THE PUBLIC .....	1
CLIENT CORNER: FSMTB .....	2
BEHIND THE SCENES AT PCS .....	3
REMARKS .....	4

## SECURITY, INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND PROTECTING THE PUBLIC

By: Andrea Bledsoe, Chief Customer & Compliance Officer, Professional Credential Services, Inc.

Since I began working in the testing industry in 1997, ensuring the security of intellectual property (i.e. tests or examinations) has been an ongoing challenge for owners of intellectual property and those who handle and distribute that intellectual property while providing test development, test administration and forensics related to scoring.

My first involvement in a security breach was following the administration of a high-stakes national paper and pencil examination, given on the same day and at the same time across all jurisdictions. When the scores were processed, it was discovered that a certain, large group of people scored higher than all other test takers, with scores as high as 99 percent. In almost all cases, scores should not be this high. An investigation revealed that each individual attended the same review course. All of the candidates in question took the examination in the same jurisdiction, which was a different jurisdiction from where the review course was supposedly located. During the next scheduled administration, a group of private investigators were retained to "work as proctors" at all testing locations in this jurisdiction. I had the "privilege" of being on site and watching this unfold. The site of the review course involved was shut down and this type of occurrence was prevented from occurring in the future.

Other incidents have included:

- A proctor who was caught selling a high-stakes paper and pencil examination; and
- A young lady scanning the examination with cameras, a transmitter and battery-packs sewn into her jacket.

Today, there are fewer paper and pencil examinations administered because so many organizations have transitioned to computer-based testing in hopes of accomplishing several things. One example is added convenience for the test taker. In addition, organizations hope that computer-based testing may help mitigate cheating. Even if true, time has proven that the test takers still search for ways to outsmart the technologies that have been developed. As a result, the threat of breaches is ever present. That means that we, as testing vendors, must constantly discover ways to thwart these efforts. It is a costly and serious business.

What does this all have to do with protecting the public? In the regulatory world, it is the responsibility of State appointed board members and State staff to ensure that those who seek to obtain a license to practice a profession are determined to be minimally competent to practice so that the public is not harmed. For we vendors who have the privilege of partnering with regulatory associations and/or state regulatory boards, we share in this primary mission; and we take our responsibility very seriously. As consumers, we all use many of the services of the very professions we collectively regulate. Today we are witnessing an unprecedented number of jurisdictions that are trying to "deregulate" certain professions. The politicians who seek to do this apparently have not seen what many of us regularly do. If I go to have a facial or have any service that involves chemicals, I want absolute assurance that the person working on me is qualified to do so. Why? I have seen first-hand what can happen to people when a licensed professional is not legitimately qualified. Death and/or life altering damage can occur because of people who are not adequately vetted by those who have responsibility to ensure they are. Some professions are being used as a front for human trafficking



in mass numbers and, yet, there are some jurisdictions who seek to deregulate - many times for what seem like solid reasons; including cost savings to both individuals and the state/jurisdiction.

Requests for Proposals are issued each and every day that many times fail to include provisions designed to protect the public. Some contract award determinations include granting an organization "extra points" based on whether they qualify as a minority business, a woman-owned business, etc., or do business with these firms. While we whole heartedly support these businesses, when it comes to protecting the public and intellectual property, which requires stringent data security protocols, we sometimes question the wisdom of granting special "points" for these qualifications. We recently responded to a Request for Response that requires "application processing and licensing on the spot" if the candidate passes the examinations. Knowing what we see in most jurisdictions, without sufficient time allowed for vetting applicants and then fully processing forensics on examination data, this practice is worrisome. Some associations that have spent millions of dollars in test development are now allowing other, sometimes competing companies to have access to their content. The rationale is that with their content access, the competitor can then administer the association's examinations. It seems that the ultimate goal is to provide superior (and speedy) service to constituents; however in so doing, risks are being taken.

Yes, as usual, times they are a-changing. Employees are now expected to be more like investigators than processors of applications. In addition, the options for testing are plentiful: Paper and pencil, computer-based testing with linear fixed exam forms, Linear on the Fly Testing (LOFT), Computer-Adaptive Testing (CAT), computer-based testing that is server based vs. application based. There are pros and cons to each, and none can guarantee that a breach will not occur. The types of cheating surfacing today include, but are not limited to, testers who have content prior to testing or receive help during the exam, use of cell phones, head phones, calculators, etc., proxy testing, tampering with test results, copying answers, stealing content electronically, harvesting (memorizing) test content, and others of which we are almost certainly unaware.

PCS, as a testing vendor and partner to various regulatory boards and associations, is committed to helping our partner organizations work through the important decisions and problems they face. While no vendor is perfect, we at PCS are passionate about the responsibilities we have to our clients and to the public. We have developed many procedures and processes including software that we believe can help protect their intellectual property and assist with their missions to protect consumers. We are committed to strategizing with our clients to improve every day.

## CLIENT CORNER: FSMTB

Since 2007, the Federation of State Massage Therapy Boards (FSMTB) has been one of PCS' most important partners. PCS provides a wide range of administrative services for FSMTB, including the processing of all applications for the Massage & Bodywork Licensing Examination (MBLEx), of which about 25,000 are processed annually.

2013 was another exciting year of change and growth for FSMTB. In August, the organization unveiled a revamped website, complete with a new logo and color scheme. In addition to the website, the organization continued plans to create the Massage Therapy Licensing Database, a central repository of massage therapist licensing information designed to empower massage therapy boards through safe and secure exchange of data, including personal, licensing and disciplinary information.



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About FSMTB

Member Boards

FSMTB Board of Directors

MBLEx

Forms and Publications

License Renewal

### Member Boards

[Member Boards & Agencies](#)  
[Member Services](#)  
[Unregulated States](#)  
[Annual Meeting](#)

### The Newsroom

[FSMTB Notices](#)  
[Press Releases](#)  
[Government Relations](#)

### Licensing Exam

[MBLEx FAQ](#)  
[MBLEx Content Outline](#)  
[MBLEx Candidate Handbook](#)  
[Which States Accept the MBLEx](#)

### Consumer Info

[FSMTB](#)  
[Consumer FAQ](#)  
[Regulation By State](#)  
[Public Service Announcements](#)

### Newsroom

**MBLEx**  
Online Application

In addition to the retooled website and database initiatives, both PCS and FSMTB welcomed new staff members in 2013. PCS hired Brandi Goldstein in August as FSMTB Program Manager. In addition to performing the various administrative functions required of a Coordinator, Brandi was brought on to work closely with FSMTB Executive Director, Dr. Debra Persinger, and other FSMTB staff members, to continue to enhance the close working relationship between the two organizations. FSMTB brought Colby Dixon (Assistant Examination Coordinator), Joshua Scott (Government Relations Specialist), and Lee Hawkins (Director of Operations) on board back in July of this year.

In October, FSMTB held its eighth Annual Meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, which hosted over 80 representatives from state licensing boards and agencies, along with delegates from various businesses and professional associations. During the meeting, several new members were elected to the FSMTB Board of Directors, and meeting attendees discussed several important issues affecting the massage therapy profession, including a possible blueprint for entry-level massage education.

In addition to the Annual Meeting preparation, several PCS staff members, including, Andrea Bledsoe and Jonathan Totty, worked diligently with Dr. Persinger to complete a new FSMTB Annual Report. The team put together a vibrant, user-friendly document that presents a wealth of information

about the organization's finances, testing program, activities from the past year and upcoming initiatives. The report was received enthusiastically by FSMTB leadership and was a hit at the Annual Meeting.

PCS takes great pride in the personal and efficient services it provides to help FSMTB accomplish its mission to support Member Boards in their work to ensure that the practice of massage therapy is provided to the public in a safe and effective manner, and looks forward to providing many more years of exceptional service.



## BEHIND THE SCENES

### Matthew Cook

Matthew has been employed with PCS for 12 years. Matthew has served in his current role as Operations Manager for 10 years. He previously served as Engineering Specialist/Coordinator and Exam Operations Supervisor. Matt is a graduate of Sam Houston State University with a Bachelor of Science in Law Enforcement and Police Science. He also received a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Houston.



### La'Tonja Young

La'Tonja joined PCS as an Engineering Call Center Associate (CSA) in 2004. Currently, she is the Assistant Manager for PCS' CSA/Data Entry department. La'Tonja received her Bachelor of Business Administration from Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee in 2004 and her Master of Business Administration from the University of Phoenix in 2011. She is an only child, and her father and his siblings each have one child (four girls and one boy). These cousins consider themselves to be siblings. In her spare time she enjoys shopping, going to the movies, traveling, and going to Zumba. Additionally, La'Tonja is currently busy planning her upcoming wedding; scheduled for November 2014.





# ReMarks

*from the desk of Mark Setash*


Let me begin this Newsletter by wishing all of our readers a Very Happy New Year. May it be a safe and prosperous one for each and every one of you. As I am wont to do, at this time of year I like to report on PCS' holiday charity efforts. Last year, we collectively raised over \$5,000 for the local chapter of the Make-A-Wish Foundation. This year, led by Ms. Francine Rananto, we collected toys for Toys-For-Tots and monies for the Martha O'Bryan Center. The latter "empowers children, youth, and adults in poverty to transform their lives through work, education, employment and fellowship." I'm extremely pleased to announce that both efforts went exceedingly well and we are very proud of ourselves (and know that we will be making some local families very happy). A representative from Martha O'Bryan stopped by to accept our donation and to briefly explain the benefits derived from our generosity.

Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, and Christmas have come and gone and reportedly PCS employees had a pleasant "break". My children joined me in Nashville at Thanksgiving as we cooked and overate ham, turkey, potatoes and the rest of the traditional fixin's. I was so glad to have their company and I was reminded how much I miss seeing them each day. I hope that you were able to spend part of the holidays with the people you love.

At PCS, our dedication to customer service continues and is reinforced with me on a regular basis. Recently an employee here provided me with an article from The Tennessean,

penned by a local acquaintance of mine, Mr. Ben Hanback. In Ben's article, he talks about how important it is to thank someone (friends, clients or customers) and lists ways to say thanks to your customers and clients. I'm pleased to share a few of Ben's thoughts and to acknowledge that we (PCS) are fortunate enough to have customers and/or partners who regularly thank us for our efforts.

1. One of the highest compliments you can give is to do business with colleagues you are thankful for or refers clients to them.
2. Support a cause close to their mission. Find out what causes or charities your clients support.....make sure you and your team support them with resources or time.
3. Call and say "thanks." It takes two minutes to pick up the phone and thank a client, leave a voice mail or simply check in and see how things are going.
4. Make sure they get your very best. Treat each customer like they're your only one – or at least make them feel that way.
5. Surprise them. This doesn't have to be flowers each birthday. In fact, sometimes the best gestures are totally unexpected.

Ben concludes his article by saying "be grateful and authentic." We agree wholeheartedly with Ben and are truly grateful for our readers, customers and partners. Happy New Year to you all. 

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