

Blackboard Learn for Salesforce

 Offers Learn for Salesforce, a learning management solution that enables organizations to deploy, manage and track the consumption of sales enablement content

Integration with Salesforce.com allows the correlation of sales training completion to subsequent behaviors and outcomes

Training participants and instructors can collaborate via Salesforce Chatter groups before, during and after a Blackboard learning program

From end users to C-level executives, a sales rep must be knowledgeable enough to engage with sophisticated buyers in today's b-to-b world. He or she must be equipped with a toolkit of skills to excel across an increasingly complex b-to-b sales process and keep pace with an accelerated flow of product launches and updates. A key challenge facing sales enablement leaders is to provide an ongoing learning path that efficiently and effectively ensures that reps, managers and sales engineers are equipped to outsell the competition.

To meet this challenge, many corporations have implemented learning management systems (LMSs), which are essentially online portals that allow users to register and attend courses and administrators to track the completion and mastery of those courses. Until recently, a missing component for most of these solutions has been the ability to integrate them with sales force automation (SFA) systems. Enter Blackboard Learn for Salesforce, a cloud-based LMS offering from education technology vendor Blackboard that's designed to integrate with Salesforce.com.

Blackboard Learn for Salesforce is licensed on an annual basis; pricing for this LMS offering is based on the number of users. Additional professional services including course framework design and training best practices are available.

FUNCTIONALITY AND VISION

The presence of functionality is a dimension that SiriusDecisions uses to evaluate a vendor's offerings; in addition, vendors must demonstrate the functionality is capable, and have a vision for continuous improvement. Our analysis of Blackboard Learn for Salesforce around these components follows:

- *Functionality presence.* Blackboard Learn for Salesforce includes the core functionality expected with an LMS, including the ability to create an online catalog of courses that users can search, enroll in (e.g. a self-paced learning module) or attend (e.g. an instructor-led workshop). Users can also save a list of courses they may want to attend in the future, and find out about any prerequisite courses or other qualifications for taking each course. Managers can view the courses their team members are enrolled in, and both users and managers can view the status of courses (e.g. pending, enrolled, completed), the results (e.g. did the participant receive a passing grade) and the completion date.
- *Functionality capability.* Blackboard Learn for Salesforce is a cloud-based LMS offering that's built on the Force.com platform

VENDOR AT-A-GLANCE: BLACKBOARD LEARN FOR SALESFORCE

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and integrated within Salesforce.com, so the application's look and feel is familiar to Salesforce users. Due to single sign-on functionality, users switching from Salesforce to Blackboard do not need to enter an additional user name and password. One of the integration's more compelling aspects is the ability to correlate sales performance data from Salesforce.com to Blackboard training data. For example, it's possible to track within Blackboard the close rate of a group of sales reps before and after attending a training program to see if there has been any improvement. Blackboard also can custom-build dashboards that provide sales and training managers with course utilization, ranking of reps by course completion and attainment, and the popularity ranking of courses by user feedback. Blackboard has integrated Salesforce.com's Chatter social media platform into its tool, allowing users and instructors to create groups (e.g. for a training class) and collaborate before, during and after a learning program. Within Blackboard Learn for Salesforce, users have the ability to receive a "badge" image or completion document when the course is completed.

- *Vendor vision.* Blackboard has stated that future versions of Learn for Salesforce will allow for the automatic certification of a rep based on the completion of specific courses. Building on the trend of sales organizations using gamification principles (applying concepts popular in online gaming environments to score and rank individuals using non-gaming technologies like an LMS), look for future versions of Blackboard Learn for Salesforce to offer capabilities to track and rank reps against one another, and to create incentives based on rep accomplishments.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

As important as features and functionality is a vendor's ability to deliver and implement its solutions. Our analysis of the Blackboard Learn for Salesforce offering along this dimension that we call "essential elements" is as follows:

- *Integration.* Currently, Salesforce.com is the only SFA system that integrates with Blackboard Learn.

- *Training.* Blackboard offers five to 10 hours of administrator/management training via instructor-led online workshops. Customized training programs are also available at an extra fee.

- *Support.* Once operational, Blackboard Learn for Salesforce provides continuous support typical of a SaaS-based application. These include regular software updates and 24x7 global support via its Behind the Blackboard support site, where administrators can download reference material and contact help desk resources.

- *Best practices.* Blackboard offers professional services to help its clients implement best practices in learning content creation, managing learning paths and integrating into other systems (e.g. talent management solutions).

- *Vendor viability.* Founded in 1997 and originally focused on providing a complete suite of learning solutions to the K-12 and higher education markets (which still produce most of its revenue), formerly publicly traded Blackboard was purchased by private-equity firm Providence Equity Partners and a group of investors for \$1.64 billion in 2011. The company claims over 10,000 customers in total, with the corporate market representing a major new growth opportunity.

THE SIRIUS DECISION

The vision of making the SFA system the single point of entry for all of the sales applications that reps use (e.g. LMS, content portal, configuration/pricing/quoting, compensation management) continues to evolve. The premise is simple: With easier access to these applications, reps will use them more frequently. For Blackboard, this vision must evolve beyond the benefits of single sign-on to more functional integration within Salesforce.com; an example would be contextual guidance (e.g. just-in-time learning on negotiations if the rep is at that stage in managing an opportunity). We would also like to see Blackboard broaden its integration to include other SFA providers and sales content portal vendors (e.g. SAVO, iCentera, Qvidian), allowing users to access learning within these applications (e.g. linking from a sales playbook to a Blackboard course).