

## Economic Transformation Through e-Learning

More than fifty years ago the government of Colombia made a commitment to its population that worker training would be an important part of the services that citizens and corporations could expect in return for their local corporate taxes. Today SENA, the Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje, provides face-to-face training to more than six million Colombians, of which in 2007 more than 1.2 million took courses online using Blackboard®, making SENA one of the largest online learning providers in the world.

Designated as the government's official training institution, SENA was established in 1957 as a joint initiative of workers, industry owners and the Catholic Church, with support from the Organización Internacional del Trabajo (OIT) - the International Workers Organization. Since its inception, SENA has served the Colombian nation well as an independent national public institution with financial autonomy and as a division of the Ministry of Social Protection. Financed by a 2% payroll tax to which all corporations contribute, SENA is an organization tasked with achieving major social and economic goals for the Colombian nation.



*By land and by sea!*

The primary objective of SENA is to increase and improve the educational resources available to Colombians by providing professional development for working professionals, continuing education, job training and technical training for individuals who seek work. The reach and impact of SENA is broad and deep: the organization serves 100% of the Colombian territory, and currently hosts 278 facilities and 114 training centers in 1,099 municipalities. Because the Colombian Government funds education, citizens do not have

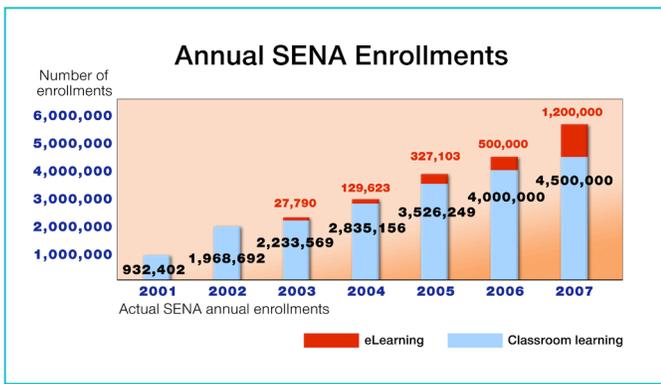
to pay for their studies but they have to meet certain requirements in order to receive their diploma or certification.

In 2003, the organization realized it needed to expand its reach with a solution that would enable it to go where the people are - in the villages, in the countryside, and in the places where people may have access to a PC but do not have access to one of the



*SENA Mobile Learning Lab*

main centers. After a comprehensive review of available options, SENA implemented an e-Learning program, using Blackboard, to train professionals and offer capacity-building courses to Colombians who have difficulty accessing higher education. The services offered by the organization through its Blackboard® deployment, coupled with Blackboard Managed Hosting<sup>SM</sup> and Blackboard Training, have provided working Colombians with tremendous benefits.



## The Solution:

When SENA implemented its e-Learning program in 2003, the organization had 200 tutors, 86 training modules and a virtual library developed by the organization itself, which reached 27,000 people. These programs grew so quickly that in 2007, SENA enrolled 1.2 million Colombians into distance virtual education courses. Currently, SENA has 3,300 tutors and 400 training modules with programs lasting 40 to 200 hours. These courses were developed almost entirely by SENA, and contain modules that offer rapid results and enable students to obtain accredited training certifications in specific vocations.

When SENA started with Blackboard in 2003 they were hosting Blackboard, however they wanted to focus on developing programs and content rather than maintaining hardware needed to support their rapid growth; as a result, in 2005 SENA moved to a Blackboard Managed Hosting solution.

This strategic move to managed hosting has enabled SENA to focus on a pedagogical model while solving their issues of access. According to participants in the SENA e-Learning program, a primary advantage of virtual distance learning courses is that they enable students to enroll and participate from anywhere in the country—there are no limitations based on a student's geographical location or time schedule. Furthermore, the flexibility of e-Learning programs also

“Blackboard’s managed hosting has supported our rapid institutional growth, allowing us to focus on new blended learning programs with cutting edge student engagement and institutional assessment models.”

Darío Montoya Mejía  
SENA General Director

empowers students to strengthen their skills with, and knowledge about, people from other areas of a city or regions of the country. Virtual online learning promotes access to technology and information, and helps support the regions that typically have been marginalized. SENA’s e-Learning program has also enabled the organization to expand its reach to Colombians living outside of the country, in other parts of world, fulfilling the commitment to education for all Colombians regardless of their geographic location.

In addition, SENA provides students and instructors with the latest technological resources, such as distance learning labs, which provide results to participants in real-time. Along with these new resources, the organization provides bilingual training through a real-time voice recognition tool and the electronic submission of certificates by e-mail. Another unique characteristic of SENA is that the programs began in a fully distance learning mode and have recently added a blended learning model to enhance their face to face programs. Starting in 2008 all SENA students will be using Blackboard whether it is for distance learning or blended learning.

A further reason for SENA’s success is that it has developed and implemented a training model that promotes the advancement of technology in Colombia’s industrial sector. In 2007 SENA trained 1.2 million people in virtual online courses through doubling the number of computers made available to students from 20,000 to 50,000, while also offering free access to the Internet from anywhere in the country.

By partnering with Blackboard’s Managed Hosting and Blackboard Training to create its easily accessible and comprehensive e-Learning program, SENA has achieved its strategic e-Learning goal of dramatically increasing enrollments each year. SENA’s hard work and dedication to delivering education to Colombians has been nationally recognized - having recently won awards for the Best Education Portal in Colombia, Best e-Learning Portal, and Best Social Project for Colombians granted by President Álvaro Uribe.

SENA is a unique example of how a national challenge was overcome through the combination of a scalable operational model utilizing technology and a willingness to move quickly. SENA believes partnering with Blackboard has been critical in realizing high quality education for all by allowing the organization to focus on the business of learning and assessment whilst Blackboard delivers the infrastructure. In sum, SENA has created a true enterprise solution that is enabling a nation to build a knowledge economy with social returns that will be measurable far into the future.