Commercial and Academic Learning Systems:

SCIDEA and Sakai

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After discussing various learning management systems (LMS), two were identified for further discussion. This paper highlights the advantages and disadvantages of SCIDEA, a corporate training and administrative solution, and Sakai, an open source educational software platform.

Scitent is a technology-based company that provides eLearning services primarily to healthcare providers. SCIDEA™ is the company’s proprietary learning management system that facilitates comprehensive administration and course management for Scitent’s eLearning programs. The LMS integrates several operating platforms that add strategic value to the overall system’s capability. A “real-time” competency tracker evaluates a participant’s actions and responses when engaged in a course to determine any knowledge or learning gaps. The competency tracker can adjust the course’s design to provide additional assistance or eliminate mundane information and exercises based from the analysis. SCIDEA’s DirectLinks™ can offer connection to a client’s internal LMS or performance management system to provide a bridge of additional resources that are proprietary to the client. An eCommerce platform is available to clients who want to offer in-course purchases or upgrades to their participants. Scitent also offers a Distributed eLearning Module (DeM) that offers their clients the administrative functions of the LMS for client courses distributed through SCIDEA™. For example, eLearning courses developed by a client such as the American Heart Association (AHA) can be hosted and distributed through SCIDEA™. The system further provides the AHA’s clients an ability to track, document, and report on courses their participants attended.
The downside of using a learning management system like Scitent’s SCIDEA™ is the ongoing cost of its use and future developments. Another disadvantage is the lack of control to quickly customize solutions based from the company’s fluctuating needs. Organizations that mitigate these disadvantages will enjoy the use of Scitent’s gold-standard LMS, SCIDEA™.

Sakai is an open source educational learning management system that is used by over 350 colleges and universities around the world. The software is developed by the Sakai community, which consists of user volunteers and commercial affiliates whose focus is providing a community-based alternative to proprietary learning systems. One advantage of this set up is that improvements to the LMS are based on feedback from people who are using the software on a daily basis.

In addition, each institution is also able to customize Sakai to their students’ needs. For example, Texas State University launched an application to allow students to access Sakai on mobile devices, but it is completely managed by the university’s developers. Some of the Sakai tools have been optimized for mobile devices as well.

The flexibility Sakai provides could also be a disadvantage. For example, an individual could be an expert on their institution’s version of Sakai, but moving to a new institution who had implemented different features could leave them feeling just as lost as if they were learning a completely new LMS. The more customizations institutions make in Sakai, the harder it is to relate when discussing pending issues and updates within the Sakai community.

Other disadvantages of open source learning management systems are funding and collaboration. It can be difficult for volunteers to find time outside of work for meeting
and discussing areas that need improvement, and implementing changes takes a lot of time and effort.