

# Alinean

 Provides software-as-a-service toolset used to sell more effectively to economic buyers

Toolset creates and delivers interactive white papers, executive assessments, return on investment analysis and total cost of ownership comparisons

Alignment with buying cycle phases improves the efficiency of both demand creation and sales enablement

Once upon a time, b-to-b organizations built sales reps and channel partners countless tools and pieces of collateral, and left them on their own to determine how they should be used, and when. Today, many of these organizations are building assets based upon the processes that buyers go through, then pinpointing the use of these assets for both buyers and sales resources to smooth – and as a result, speed up – buying processes.

An example of a third-party vendor that has refined and matched its offerings to the buying cycle is Alinean, a provider of an online toolset used to sell more effectively to economic buyers. Alinean’s toolset can be used to perform executive assessments and peer comparisons, return on investment (ROI) analysis and total cost of ownership (TCO) comparisons. Installations are configured to support products and/or campaigns with the support of Alinean professional services.

Development and implementation of Alinean’s toolset usually runs between three and six weeks, while pricing ranges from \$15,000 to \$125,000 and includes the professional services required to develop, configure and deploy software-as-a-service (SaaS) subscription services for assessment, ROI and TCO tools, as well as access to Alinean’s ValueBase database, which contains research and metrics used in analysis and comparisons. Each installation carries an annual subscription fee, typically 50 percent of the original

purchase price. Engagements typically begin with a testing phase prior to full release.

### 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 Alinean around these components follows:

- *Functionality presence.* Alinean’s tools are positioned from both a buyer (who is going through a process) and a sales or marketing resource (who is trying to facilitate the process) perspective. On the marketer-to-buyer side, Alinean’s assessment tools (e.g. interactive white papers and assessment calculators) help marketers connect with prospects and enable prospective buyers to self-educate on potential solutions during the education phase; ROI calculators provide buyers with product justification and help marketers better qualify prospects within the solution phase, and TCO calculators enable buyers to perform product comparisons and marketers to engage sales during a vendor selection phase. On the sales-to-buyer side, sellers are able to assist buyers with more in-depth analyses throughout the buying cycle. All tools reside on Alinean’s XcellLive platform, which

## VENDOR AT-A-GLANCE: ALINEAN

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### Client Roster

Blue Coat  
 Citrix  
 Dell  
 EMC  
 HP  
 IBM

### Operations

Revenue: \$11MM-\$20MM  
 Employees: 35  
 Global Presence: Asia-Pacific, EMEA  
 Key Industries Served: Healthcare, High Technology, Manufacturing

provides database support, access to Alinean's ValueBase database of more than 20,000 companies (with data sourced from IDC and Morningstar) and a history of all analytical results. For organizations that have built their own Excel models or tools, Alinean's XcelFactory toolkit converts them to XcelLive delivered rich internet applications without the need for programming or special skills.

- *Functionality capability.* Alinean's toolset seeks to improve demand generation and sales enablement by providing customer-specific benchmarks, company comparisons, benefit assessments and cost analysis that can significantly upgrade the quality of customer interactions without an equivalent increase in workload. Its self-assessment capabilities lead to prospects that are essentially diagnosing their own issues and qualifying themselves while they derive value; this information can be included in a prospect's record to enrich further interactions. Usage of the toolset by both sales and the prospect base can be tracked in order to create custom reports and analytics, enabling marketing and sales management to monitor efficacy and tweak the tools as necessary. For sales reps and channel partners, Alinean's toolset creates highly customized, value-added presentations to build credibility and to satisfy deepening prospect/customer knowledge requirements as the buying processes progress.

- *Vendor vision.* Alinean's goal is to move beyond being a tools vendor to become a services provider whose customer performance database enables clients to benchmark and assess customer trends. The company's engagements tend to be highly customized, with modules configured to customer specifications; as a result, it offers distinct advantages over rep-created, one-off or spreadsheet-based value-assessment tools. Consolidating these tools, the XcelLive platform becomes a workbench for creating custom calculators with access to the ValueBase database.

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

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

- *Integration.* Alinean's suite is a SaaS-based application requiring minimal infrastructure and few IT resources beyond data import and export; Word, PowerPoint and PDF documents can be created and stored as attachments in standard SFA platforms. The challenge faced by most of Alinean's customers is the integration of a sophisticated toolset with typically simpler sales and marketing business processes designed around the creation and usage of spreadsheet-

based tools. Alinean also offers out-of-the-box integration with marketing platforms such as Eloqua and CDC's MarketFirst, among others.

- *Training.* Alinean provides an education and certification course for sales professionals, consultants and channel partners on selling the business value of IT. The vendor also offers a tool-authoring workshop to train subject matter experts and marketing teams to convert, develop and maintain tools on its XcelLive platform. Finally, Alinean has developed an ROI training course to develop business value selling skills.

- *Support.* Alinean's professional services staff works with customers to design individual modules and configure them to ValueBase database. Once operational, Alinean provides continuous support typical of a SaaS application.

- *Best practices.* Alinean provides best practices information through client case studies that demonstrate measurable impact on improving lead flow or reducing discounting. Less tangible, but also measurable is the reduction in time and effort required to create justification reports and the increased quality of those reports.

- *Vendor viability.* Founded in 2001, Alinean is privately funded and has worked with more than 100 customers, creating more than 700 sales tools in the process. Alinean's challenges include breaking away from being predominantly IT-focused, and to develop a suite of product-configuration and price-optimization tools that complement its value-assessment capabilities. As with any private organization, we recommend securing references from similar companies and gaining some financial visibility into Alinean's operations as part of your due diligence activities.

## THE SIRIUS DECISION

Successful reps know that establishing credibility and providing value to a prospect or customer throughout the buying cycle is the difference between closing the deal and losing it. They must ask the right questions, gather data and coherently identify need in the context of an opportunity, then be equipped with the proper tools as the opportunity progresses. Alinean's customer-specific benchmarks, company comparisons, executive assessments, benefit and cost analyses can significantly upgrade the quality of demand creation and sales enablement interactions throughout the buying process, allowing prospects to drive at the beginning through simpler, self-service tools and sales to provide greater depth as the buying process proceeds. When these tools are used in a consistent, process-based manner, they become even more valuable.