

March, 2011

## Absorb Briefing

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This briefing adds to existing information for the Absorb Anywhere LMS profile in the Brandon Hall Research Center's LMS KnowledgeBase. For a complete overview of the Absorb LMS, please read this briefing report along with the Absorb entry in the LMS KnowledgeBase.

### Company Background

Absorb is a privately owned Canadian corporation based out of Calgary, Alberta. It was founded in 2002 by Michael Owens, BA, PLSC, and Mike Eggermont, BA, MET.

Absorb provides end-to-end training strategies and implementation. Services include custom content design, instructional design, and media development as well as development, support, and, implementation services for the company's flagship products, the Absorb Anywhere LMS and Absorb SMARTLAB.

Absorb has over 1,000 clients across many industries, including construction, retail, government, medical, manufacturing, and academic, with a total user base of more than 1,000,000. Client organizations range in size from 114 users to 125,000 users. High profile clients include Adobe Software, who uses the Absorb LMS for both internal and external training around the world, and Rolls Royce Motor Cars.

Upgrades to the LMS are provided quarterly, and most installations are hosted under a SaaS model. Hosting is provided via a tier one data center in Dallas, Texas.

Absorb has recognized the growing trend toward 'extended enterprise' training and has developed the Absorb SMARTLAB product as an extension to Absorb LMS to address these challenges.

**Absorb was the recipient of two Brandon Hall Excellence in Learning Technology Awards in 2009.**

# Absorb LMS, Absorb SMARTLAB and BloomFire

March, 2011

## Company At-a-Glance

Headquarters	Calgary, Alberta, Canada
Year Founded	2002
Employees	22
Customers	1,000+
Market Focus	Extended Enterprise Training
Key Industry Verticals	Construction, Retail, Government, Medical, Manufacturing, Academic
Top Key Clients	Adobe Software, Rolls Royce Motor Cars, NASM, DOE, CIGNA

## Core Products

Absorb has taken a very client-centric approach to both its business model and its product design. The licensing is straight-forward, and pricing is provided up-front, with implementation fees being at the low end of the scale.

Core software products include the following:

- The **Absorb LMS** - an extended enterprise LMS
- **Absorb SMARTLAB** - a fully integrated content management system for Absorb
- **BloomFire** - a third-party social media platform that integrates with the Absorb LMS through single sign-on and customizable branding

## Absorb LMS

The **Absorb LMS** is designed to be easy to use while being powerful enough to address the requirements of a global workforce. It offers a lot of flexibility in how you can structure your business units and segment your learners/users. This, in turn, allows you to be very precise and targeted in both reporting and managing course visibility and learning plans.



Source: Absorb, 2011

The user interface is clean, contemporary, and modular; and administrative menus and buttons can only be viewed and accessed according to your security privileges. This reduces screen clutter and increases ease of use.

In terms of security, the Absorb LMS treats all key functions as security objects, which gives you complete control over which type of user is allowed access to which functionality. This level of customization is particularly valuable to large or geographically disparate organizations with localized or distributed governance models. This is essential where, for example, core LMS support or administration happens at the head office, but course creation, delivery, and reporting need to happen at multiple business levels or office locations.

A real bonus with the Absorb LMS user interface is the use of context sensitive menus. This is similar to right-clicking in an application and being given a pop-up menu for functions or tasks that apply to your current "location" in the application. With a complex LMS, there can be a lot of clicking to navigate between different administrative functions; context sensitive menus really eliminate time wasted looking around for buttons or toolbars. Productivity increases; frustration and support calls decrease.

March, 2011

**Other key features (please see the Absorb LMS profile in the LMS KnowledgeBase for full details):**

- Currently available in 17 languages (but translated as needed)
- Ability to upload learning resources such as supporting materials or documents
- E-commerce enabled
- Robust assessment engine

## Mobile Learning

Support for mobile learning has, at this time, focused primarily on the Apple iPad. However, SMARTLAB works just as well on the Galaxy and other tablets. Organizations with iPad users are given the ability to upload iPad compatible (HTML 5) content for any course in the LMS. Typically, this would mean you would author two versions of a course, one for browser-based/PC clients and one for iPad users. The Absorb LMS will auto-detect whether or not the user is connecting with an iPad or with a computer and will load the appropriate version of the course.

## The Absorb LMS on the iPad:



Source: Absorb, 2011

# Absorb LMS, Absorb SMARTLAB and BloomFire

March, 2011

## Absorb SMARTLAB

Absorb SMARTLAB is an extended enterprise learning platform that extends the capabilities of the Absorb Anywhere LMS. Absorb describes this as the first "smart" global learning system. It was developed in response to the growing trend of non-HR or non-training department clients wanting to shape how training is delivered to the company's core audience. CEOs and sales VPs are taking an increased interest in choosing the platforms and tools that are used to train direct and channel sales personnel. Often, they want the solution to look and behave more like a marketing portal, and they demand more of a contemporary "Web site" look and feel while maintaining the core LMS functionality on the back end.

Absorb SMARTLAB was designed with an emphasis on supporting the following:

- Branding, beyond simple logo and color scheme support, to supporting corporate culture
- Multi-language audiences through on-demand content translation via API integration to MotionPoint (the interface is currently available in eight languages)
- Multi-generational audiences
- Multi-cultural audiences
- Robust content management system

SMARTLAB extends the core LMS functionality by adding a rules-based content management system (CMS) that supports creating and managing news, contests, course rankings, and frequently asked questions.

When SMARTLAB is enabled on the Absorb LMS platform, the LMS administrative interface includes a CMS administrative area. It is through this set of administrative tools (available only to users with the appropriate security privileges) that news items and other content can be created. The power of this feature involves sophisticated filtering that can be applied so that content only goes to the group of users for whom you deem it of interest or appropriate. Approval rights for newly authored content can also be distributed amongst different regions, allowing local content supervisors to block or promote content to their users.

As an example, if your company is a sporting goods supplier that sponsors several professional athletes or teams around the world, you can publish news releases related to those athletes. You may, however, want to publish news on a Spanish athlete to users in Spain only, or perhaps make it available to all of your European users, but not the rest of the world. Alternatively, you may want to publish news on an

# Absorb LMS, Absorb SMARTLAB and BloomFire

March, 2011

internationally recognized athlete to ALL sales representatives globally that sell a related product line. This is accomplished by creating groups of users, which are then used as filters for publishing and distributing content. This approach gives you great flexibility to manage your audience by different criteria such as location, age, personal interests, product line, or company division, for example.

If that content needs to be translated for different countries, a translation request button sends your content out via an API to the translation services team at MotionPoint, a third-party translation services company. Typical translation turn-around is about 24 hours. MotionPoint can translate dialogue and even graphics within a video and can also provide closed captioning. For more information on MotionPoint, please see the company's Web site at [www.motionpoint.com](http://www.motionpoint.com).

What SMARTLAB really does is it takes the standard corporate LMS user interface and gives you the ability to present learning content in a way that is more appealing to the Gen X/Y learner. The LMS becomes more of an information hub; content is fresh, frequently updated, and targeted to your personal interests. Course completion credits can be presented as "points," and points can be accumulated to qualify you for prizes or for entry into much more valuable awards contents. The idea, clearly, is to make learning more enjoyable and rewarding for a younger audience. This creates a natural fit for SMARTLAB in retail environments where the workforce is typically younger, more transient, and more demanding (at least where technology is concerned).

SMARTLAB content does not need to be in the form of a fully authored SCORM package. Using SMARTLAB, videos can be uploaded and streamed (including in full screen view), and short quizzes can be created and added to the video page. Successful quiz completion can be used to measure comprehension and to track the points used for contests.

In keeping with the "Web site" look and feel on the user side, learning resources (documents) can be made available as "downloads."

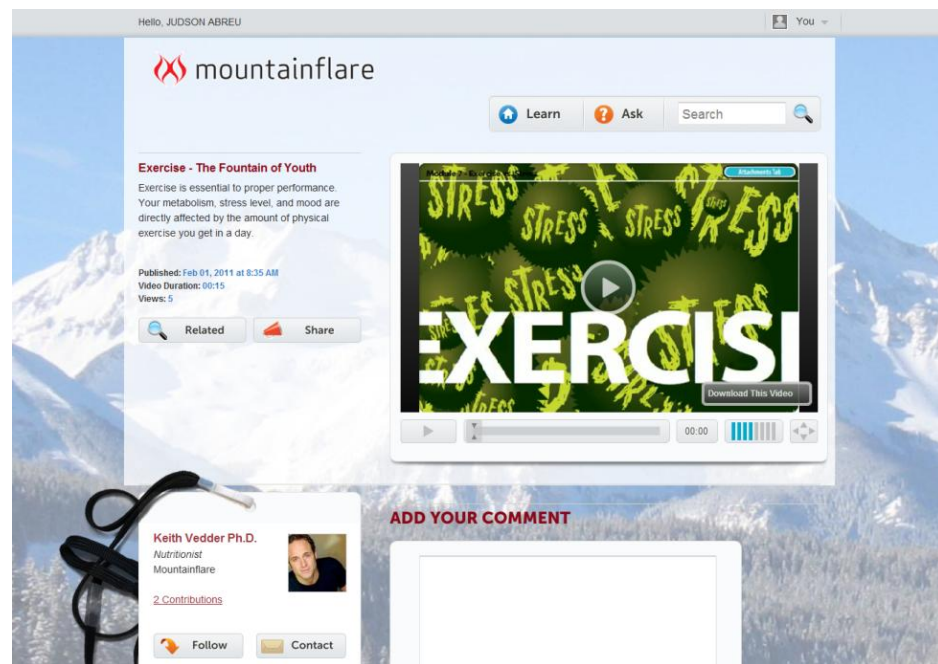
Although SMARTLAB uses Flash extensively, it also comes in an HTML 5 version, which fully supports Apple's iPad.

When SMARTLAB is installed, a "CMS" menu area is accessible within the Absorb LMS administrative interface. CMS functionality is made available through customizable security roles so you have full control over who gets to publish, edit, or approve SMARTLAB content.

March, 2011

## BloomFire Social Learning

Peer-based learning is addressed by integrating with the BloomFire social networking platform. The BloomFire platform provides Absorb LMS users with an account in a BloomFire portal. This means that learners can seamlessly move between the two. Posts made in BloomFire, including snapshots of videos, can be seen in SMARTLAB, and various usage statistics are fed back for reporting in the Absorb LMS.



Source: Absorb, 2011

## Highlights

Absorb has made a business decision to address the needs of a specific type of client and to narrow the company's market focus. In so doing, Absorb has actually created a suite of solutions that leap frog multiple LMS products in many ways, which may result in broader adoption.

Absorb excels in the area of social learning, as evidenced by both the company's SMARTLAB and BloomFire offerings. Many companies struggle with the adoption/marketing aspect of deploying learning technology. They often fail to engage

# Absorb LMS, Absorb SMARTLAB and BloomFire

March, 2011

learners and struggle, at great expense, to make their learning platforms look and feel like popular Web sites, such as YouTube or Facebook, while retaining robust LMS back-end administration and reporting. Absorb gets full marks in these areas.

If support for smartphones or mobile devices other than iPad is not a requirement for your organization, then the Absorb products are a "must consider" option.

# Absorb LMS, Absorb SMARTLAB and BloomFire

March, 2011

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