

Practical Insights for Selecting an LMS:

A Solution Enabling an SMB Organization to Offer Services More Effectively to Their Global Distribution Channel Customers

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Company Background



Absorb LMS, 2012.

Social Fingerprint[®] is a program of ratings, training and tools designed to help companies measure and improve social performance. The program focuses on management systems development and implementation and has two tracks.

The first track is the Social Fingerprint[®] Company Program. This track looks at nine categories inside a company. This track is typically used by suppliers.

The second track is the Social Fingerprint[®] Supply Chain Management Program. This program looks at six performance categories to see how a company manages its supply chain and is typically used by brands/retailers. Each works with any labor standard or code. It all starts with its online self-assessment that establishes a company's "social fingerprint" in 9 key categories. Once a company has done that, eLearning courses focusing on each of the 9 categories will help a company improve its score and start to make real and lasting change in the working conditions in their company or in their supply chain.

The Social Fingerprint[®] program starts with a web-based self-assessment, which can be enhanced by a remote independent evaluation. The program also includes training, tools, and tips to drive continual improvement. Companies can use the program to evaluate their own social performance or that of their suppliers. By breaking management systems into component parts, Social Fingerprint[®] defines the path to improvement and breaks the journey into manageable steps.

Company At-a-Glance	
Social Accountability International (SAI)	
Headquarters	New York
Year Founded	1997
Revenue	Not-for-profit
Employees	40 globally



Global Scale	yes
Customers/OutPut, etc.	Corporate members include Disney, Gap, Inc., HP, Timberland, Carrefour, etc.
Stock Symbol or Private	Not-for-profit
Web site	http://www.sai-intl.org

Business Conditions and Business Needs

The case study was conducted with Craig Moss the Co-Founder of Social Fingerprint and Director of Corporate Programs and Training at Social Accountability International (SAI). Social Fingerprint® is a brand service that is offered globally under the umbrella of Social Accountability International (SAI).

SAI's Social Fingerprint® was faced with multiple challenges in dealing with the complexities of the supply chains of their corporate members and other multinational companies. These include companies with 25,000+ direct suppliers, and companies with extensive licensing business. When working to train the suppliers of multinational conglomerates, considerations include the geographic diversity of a workforce and the challenges this brings to the training department. Not only is the training of multinational conglomerates a challenge in itself, but training this population around labor compliance issues, which are often secondary to the core business operation, creates another training challenge.

Over the years in conducting classroom training, SAI has generally found that typically the suppliers would attend anywhere from two to five days of training a year, and once the training was over the suppliers would go back to their jobs and daily responsibilities leaving behind most of what they learned. It was exceedingly difficult for the suppliers to actually implement change based on the frequency of training and follow up.

The SAI Social Fingerprint® management team identified the need for a greater frequency of interaction with the people attending the training sessions. Due to the increased need for frequent interactions, online training became a natural choice for a training delivery method. The strengths of online training for SAI Social Fingerprint's® purposes include its scalability and capacity to deploy training at any location and any time. With the use of online training to support SAI Social Fingerprint's® efforts, it became evident that a learning management system (LMS) was essential in order to support tracking and monitoring of classroom and online learning, and the delivery of distance learning.

System Selection Overview

SAI Social Fingerprint® underwent a comprehensive process in reviewing LMS solutions. They spent over a year on the LMS selection process before choosing Blatant Media Corp's Absorb LMS as their learning platform. Absorb LMS was chosen based on their flexibility with customization, simplicity of design, and their modern user interface.

SAI felt that Absorb LMS was simpler to operate than some of the other products they were evaluating and that it would provide a solution that would be easy to use by both their trainers and customers. SAI Social Fingerprint® engages with clients in countries all over the world who have varying degrees of computer sophistication and the last thing that they want is to encounter issues with the user interface. The simplicity and elegance of the Absorb LMS's interface was most attractive to them. Ultimately, the user interface was critical to SAI Social Fingerprint® and a deciding factor in their decision.

Figure 1: Absorb LMS Interface



Source: Absorb LMS, 2012.

SAI Social Fingerprint® also insisted on a shopping cart, which was not offered by Absorb LMS at that time, but was developed based on SAI Social Fingerprint's requirements and necessity to provide training to multinational suppliers. They created a strong partnership and Blatant Media Corp worked on providing most of the key requirements that SAI Social Fingerprint® desired in a learning management system.

System Design and Delivery Overview

SAI Social Fingerprint®, with the use of their new LMS, was now able to offer both classroom and online courses through their system. They train a variety of groups that may require different types of courses and delivery methods. In addition to training suppliers or factory managers, SAI Social Fingerprint® also trains social compliance auditors around the world.

SAI Social Fingerprint®'s new learning management system now allows the company to create bundles where someone will register for a classroom course, then be required to take an online prerequisite course, preceded with a test to assess their skills. This approach provides information on learning gaps and helps the learner improve what they need to know to pass the certifications.

Developing scored surveys was essential for SAI Social Fingerprint® in being able to provide the supplier a comparison of their answers based on independent expert opinions. The rating program they designed was called Social Fingerprint®, which allows suppliers to complete self-assessments; following completion of the survey the system automatically generates their scores in nine different process categories. Based on the outcome, they then align the training to help them improve their performance in each of the nine process categories. Blatant Media Corp was helpful in custom designing a scored survey where each of the survey responses is associated with point values.

Blatant Media Corp built a custom flash module providing a pop up window displaying the scores to each of the nine categories to the tester immediately after they have answered the survey questions. The rating offers a benchmark of the average score of people in their country in comparison to the average score for people globally. This enables SAI Social Fingerprint® to help their suppliers improve and guide them more effectively on the types of training they should be focusing on delivering to their employees.

Figure 2: SAI Social Fingerprint®



(1) Social Fingerprint: Getting Started in Your Company 2012

Category	Points
Management Systems	4
Internal Social Performance Team	4
Worker Involvement and Communication	3.5
Complaint Management and Resolution	2.8
Level and Type of Non-Conformances	3.2
Progress on Corrective Action	4.4
External Verification and Stakeholder Engagement	2.6
Training and Capacity Building	3.9
Managing Suppliers and Contractors	3.5
<i>Total may not equal sum of all categories due to rounding</i> Total	
	31.9
SAI Social Fingerprint™ Rating	
	3.5

Print

Tips for Improvement

Source: Absorb LMS, 2012.

SAI Social Fingerprint® uses Absorb LMS for its registration, payment, and generating certificates. However, SAI Social Fingerprint® needed additional reporting and database capabilities, and they are designing these pieces on their own with the goal to integrate seamlessly with Absorb LMS.

The global network of trainers now has access to material updates, exercises, case studies and relevant information through the LMS. They are now more effectively supported and kept informed on what they need to be successful in helping their customers.

Change Management Efforts

Once SAI Social Fingerprint® selected Absorb LMS it took about three months for the organization to be up and running and delivering some of their courses. They were able to register customers for classroom and online courses shortly after implementation. In the two years since SAI Social Fingerprint® began using the system they continue to enhance and make updates, including the integration of new reporting functionality, and a benchmarking tool.

Selecting a new system and creating new procedures is an ongoing process that requires continuous support, communication, and reinforcement to be successful. Key steps that enabled an effective internal adoption of the learning management technology included:

- Offering repeated webinars which providing tips on how to use the system and its benefits.
- Providing continuous messaging including discussions on the new process and why it is important.
- Retraining the trainers by equipping them with insights on how to access information and retrieve materials.
- Retraining accounting so they would be able to understand the types of reports and information they could expect to pull from the new system and use it to match their current accounting system to help improve billing and collections.
- Ceasing former process and production of old materials: only producing what was required for the new system and processes, so they eventually had to adopt the change.
- Turnover: in some cases the organization experienced people changes, it can be easier to train a new person on new processes and systems versus training those that are resistant and lacking the ability to embrace change positively.

Business Impact

Dealing with a global audience SAI Social Fingerprint® required an LMS that was flexible, cost effective, and easy for their customers to use. They found Blatant Media Corp to be very accommodating and partnered well with them towards customizing their application in order to find the right solution to fit their needs. Selecting the right LMS was critical for their business and a necessity to drive change inside supply facilities around the world.

Some of the key benefits SAI Social Fingerprint[®] received from Absorb LMS included:

- The ability to run three times the amount of courses from the previous year without increasing staff and resources.
- The development of new products.
- The deployment of different types of opened and closed courses, promoted through various channels allowing for a greater reach and market penetration.
- The increased efficiency of document management for classroom training, which freed up more time for the delivery of classroom training.
- The ability to track their customer's progress and report back to the customers so they can measure their success and improve where needed.
- Excellent client satisfaction in the area of data security.

Future Outlook

Social Fingerprint[®] is a brand service that is offered globally under the umbrella of Social Accountability International (SAI). The Social Fingerprint team was very pleased with the relationship and results provided by Absorb LMS. This satisfaction led them to recommend Blatant Media Corp's Absorb LMS to other organizations they work with, including CREATE. CREATE was founded by Microsoft and they focus on intellectual property protection for global supply chains.

SAI Social Fingerprint[®] will continue to enhance the system to make the utilization of the reporting functionality of the Social Fingerprint[®] program more attractive to its customers. They will also continue to run larger numbers of courses and offer greater bundle packaging with the goal to drive change with positive improvements for their clients.

Anytime an organization embarks on a systems selection and implementation there are many considerations and lessons that learned along the way.

A few lessons the team at SAI Social Fingerprint[®] learned are as follows:

- Make sure you understand the challenges you will be faced with when providing technologies to a global user base. These include access, i.e. user's bandwidth can vary greatly from country to country.
- Changing job descriptions and roles may be required in order to accomplish the results and systems adoption. Changing behavior can be rather difficult for some so make sure you plan for future administrative and training needs.
- Any system changes requires leadership and daily involvement to ensure that the system is managed and operated properly - systems don't run by themselves, they require a talented team for greater organizational impact.
- Customer service is critical and organizations need to have a process by which they can respond to customers in a timely manner, ideally within twenty-four hours.

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