

# Alinean



Provides value assessment tools for comparison, benchmarks, return on investment and total cost of ownership analysis

Individual toolsets are designed for use by customers/prospects for self assessment, or by salespeople/channel partners to facilitate buying processes

Organizations must ensure their internal processes for ROI/TCO match the sophistication of the platform

Alinean provides a suite of value-assessment sales tools that evaluate, quantify and benchmark the business value of a product or solution. Used for demand creation, these tools enable customers to perform online self assessments for peer comparisons, IT assessments, return on investment (ROI) and total cost of ownership (TCO). Modules are configured to support products and/or campaigns with the support of Alinean professional services.

For 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 buying processes progress. Organizations have the option of using subject matter experts to convert disparate, existing spreadsheet-based value tools or to create tools from scratch.

Alinean engagements are customized by client, campaign and module, and typically begin with a specific module in a testing phase before expanding. Developing and implementing each module typically runs between three and six weeks, while pricing ranges from \$30,000 to \$75,000 and includes the professional services required to develop, configure and deploy each module, as well as access to the Alinean ValueBase database. Once deployed, each module carries an annual software-as-a-service (SaaS) fee, typically 50 percent of the original price.

## 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 suite features four self-service modules for customers and four modules for sales reps and/or channel partners. The self-service modules include an IT Benchmark Calculator that compares overall IT spend to that of a peer set, and an IT Assessment Calculator that tracks customer progress aligned against best practices and suggests areas for improvement, while the ROI Calculator and TCO Calculator evaluate a potential solution's financial benefits and cost implications. Each module provides custom reports, including feedback to marketing and/or sales. For salespeople, the Peer Comparison tool provides a set of IT benchmarking and performance metrics for each prospective client, while the ITIL Analyst tool offers comparisons to an established set of best-practice benchmarks. ROI Analyst and TCO Analyst offer solution-specific benefits and cost analyses that can be shared with appropriate audiences. The modules reside on Alinean's

## VENDOR AT-A-GLANCE: ALINEAN

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### Client Roster

Bluecoat  
Citrix  
Dell  
Microsoft  
TIBCO  
VMWare

### Operations

Revenue: \$10MM  
Employees: 25  
International Presence: None  
Key Industries Served: Health Services,  
High Technology, Supply Chain/Logistics

Enterprise ROI platform, which provides database support, access to Alinean's ValueBase database of more than 20,000 companies, a history of all analytical results and the ability to move existing spreadsheet-based tools online.

- *Functionality capability.* Alinean's toolset seeks to improve sales productivity 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. Each tool is aligned to a phase of the buying cycle, enabling reps to bring successively deeper levels of analysis and knowledge in complex and technical selling situations where greater consultation and value delivery are required. Its self-assessment capabilities lead to prospects that are essentially qualifying themselves while they derive value, a real advantage to b-to-b organizations looking to generate higher-quality leads. Usage of the toolset by both sales and the prospect base can be tracked in order to create custom reports and analytics so that marketing and sales management can monitor efficacy and tweak the tools as time progresses. Finally, the Enterprise ROI platform helps organizations to replace spreadsheet-based tools into a common format with database support, the ability to generate either Microsoft Word or PowerPoint documents to be used as presentations or deliverables, and a standard format for future calculators and applications.

- *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 Enterprise ROI platform becomes a workbench for creating custom calculators with access to the ValueBase database. As it grows, it will be able to help reps develop prospect comparisons to industry norms, helping these reps to quickly establish credibility and to develop incremental value for their interactions.

## 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; both Word and PowerPoint customer-facing documents can be stored as attachments in standard SFA platforms. The challenge for most Alinean customers is the integration of a sophisticated tool set with typically simpler sales and marketing business processes designed around the creation and usage of spreadsheet-based tools. Potential users must consider how the inclusion of assessment tools or calculators in demand creation programs, for example, will influence a prospect's experience, and how messages and other deliverables will change as a result. For sales, the timing and positioning of assessments or cost-benefit calculations will require an examination of existing sales processes to determine where – and in what form – they would be most effective.

- *Training.* Alinean provides an education and certification course for sales professionals, consultants and channel partners on selling the business value of IT. The company also offers a tool-authoring workshop to train subject matter experts and marketing teams to convert, develop and maintain tools on its Enterprise ROI platform. Lastly, 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. For an additional fee, Alinean offers access to its team of analysts to teach customers the business value selling approach and hands-on collaboration necessary to create ROI/TCO analysis.

- *Best practices.* Alinean provides best practices information through client case studies demonstrating 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 70 customers, creating more than 600 sales tool modules. Company executives reported that the organization has a 90 percent renewal rate, which bodes well for future revenue flow. 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 company, we recommend securing references from similar organizations 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 compar-

isons, benefit assessments and cost analyses can significantly upgrade the quality of 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 are even stronger and more valuable.