The Blackboard Community System

Overview of Product Capabilities
Community Building Tools:
Community Building Tools enable users and groups on campus to collaborate and communicate more effectively. These tools enable campus organizations (for example, clubs or interest groups, student or faculty government associations, fraternities/sororities, etc.) to distribute content, communicate and collaborate, and deliver surveys to their membership through an online environment similar to the course sites with which they are already familiar.

Portal Web Services:
A rich set of standards-based web-services that brings the power of the Blackboard Academic Suite to multiple institutional portals on and off campus. Through these services every portal on campus can have immediate and secure access to online classes, exam results, student e-Portfolios, virtual hard drives and more.

Channels / Modules:
A Module is a container for content or interactive tools. Channels use the RSS content syndication format to deliver regularly-updated headlines and content to users. Modules and Channels are similar to the content boxes (e.g., Finance, Shop, Jobs) seen in portals such as Yahoo!®. Individual users can customize their personal community pages by selecting those modules and channels most relevant to them. Availability of modules is role-based, allowing the institution to target content or application delivery to specific constituencies. The Blackboard software ships with over 100 modules and channels, which can be customized by institutions.

Role-based Information Delivery:
Availability of tabs, modules, channels, tools, courses and organizations can be based on institution roles allowing for targeted delivery of content and information. For example, the institution can create a tab that is visible only to users with the Faculty role, and within that tab, a “School of Business Faculty News” module which is only available to users who are Faculty members in the School of Business.

Multi-Institution Branding and Management:
Facilitates separation of multiple institutions, departments, or groups on one Blackboard server. For example, separate schools can be given their own domain and the ability to manage and brand their domain with the appropriate look-and-feel, including different colors, logos, tabs, modules, and channels. System Administrators can assign management of portions of the system to individuals and groups, enabling different constituencies to independently manage their own content and configuration.
Wireless / PDA:
Blackboard Unplugged, an optional component available through Blackboard Global Services, provides the ability for Blackboard users to access course and community information through a wireless-enabled PDA or other device, such as a mobile phone. Users can access announcements, calendar items, tasks, grades, content and other information or synchronize that information for offline viewing.

e-Commerce:
Allows an institution to charge for items via a student’s campus one-card or credit card. Items can include books, merchandise, a course, organization membership, or other items.

e-Marketplace:
Provides an online storefront capability and allows administrators to create multiple online stores. For example, the campus Chemistry Department can have one online store that sells equipment and supplies needed for labs and Campus Parking can have another store that sells parking passes. This capability enables the creation of a unified online campus shopping environment—a virtual mall.

Enterprise Scalability:
Based on robust, industry standard web servers, application servers, and databases, the Blackboard system has a proven ability to scale to hundreds of thousands of active users. Out-of-the-box load balancing supports easy configuration of additional application servers to allow the implementation to grow with adoption. Likewise, multiple database fail-over support assures a reliable, high-availability enterprise environment.

Multi-Language Support:
Enables institutions to run multiple languages on the same system. Instructors can even set the language of the course independently from the language setting of the overall system. In addition to supporting most European languages, Blackboard supports multi-byte character sets such as Japanese and Chinese.

Standards:
Compliance and interoperability with industry standards is a fundamental capability of Blackboard’s software products. Blackboard is a strong advocate for open industry standards in the areas of system interoperability (IMS, SIF, OKI, etc.); content specifications (IMS, SCORM, NLN, etc.), privacy (FERPA), accessibility (Section 508), and metadata (IMS, Dublin Core, etc.).

Blackboard Building Blocks (Open APIs):
Our open architecture initiative, Blackboard Building Blocks®, provides a public, free software development kit (SDK) that documents application programming interfaces (APIs). Clients and independent software vendors use the Blackboard Building Blocks technology to create new functionality on top of the Blackboard platform or integrate external systems with Blackboard products.

System Integration:
Blackboard’s data and system integration capabilities, enabled through the Blackboard Building Blocks architecture, allow institutions to integrate student information systems, campus authentications systems (LDAP, Kerberos, Active Directory, etc.), and other campus back-office systems with the Blackboard platform.