

Ellucian launches a much-needed option for institution-wide CRM

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Author: Nicole Engelbert

OVUM VIEW

Summary

In response to the maturing needs of the higher education industry for relationship management capabilities, Ellucian recently announced that it is building a new CRM solution, called Ellucian Enterprise CRM. Composed of Recruiter, Student Success, and Advancement modules, the system aims to support the entire student lifecycle in an integrated and sustainable way. Built on the Microsoft Dynamics CRM platform, Ellucian Enterprise CRM is designed to combine higher education specificity with enterprise-grade functionality. With support for both on-demand and on-premise deployment, it allows institutions to migrate to the cloud when and if it makes sense. While the product will not be fully available until 2014, Ovum believes it addresses important industry needs and is likely to experience strong market uptake.

Requirements for CRM in higher education are maturing

Around the globe, more effectively managing relationships with students is a top priority at nearly every college and university. However, in the past 12 months institutions have dramatically expanded how they intend to use constituent relationship management (CRM) solutions for this purpose. They are putting into motion plans to move from supporting a collection of point solutions, primarily in the admissions and development offices, to deploying a single, enterprise-wide system that truly delivers "student lifecycle and beyond" capabilities.

This is a major – and long hoped-for – shift in direction for CRM, suggesting that higher education is maturing in its understanding and usage of this solution area. It also signifies a parallel change in the features and functionality that institutions will require to support their relationship management needs. Deep integration with student information system (SIS) and learning management system (LMS)

products, expanded multi-channel communications, workflows that support multiple departments, embedded analytics, flexible deployment options, and role-based views will all become increasingly important CRM capabilities in the higher education market.

Leveraging the Microsoft Dynamics CRM platform avoids 'wisdom of Solomon' dilemmas

Building a CRM solution from scratch is not a small undertaking, especially as some capabilities, particularly multi-channel communications, evolve rapidly, requiring significant ongoing development investments. Many higher education-specific CRM solutions have failed to keep pace, and as a result client institutions have found themselves waiting for functionality widely available in the horizontal marketplace. Rather than forsake capabilities to support higher education-specific interactions, such as relationships with secondary school guidance counselors or academic advisement, many institutions have sacrificed access to more modern technology.

Ellucian's decision to build its Enterprise CRM solution on the Microsoft Dynamics CRM platform obviates the need for institutions to make such a "wisdom of Solomon" choice. Instead, enterprise-grade CRM functionality, developed and maintained by Microsoft, is delivered with higher education capabilities built and maintained by Ellucian. It is truly the best of both worlds and enables institutions to make better long-term CRM investment decisions.

Ellucian Enterprise CRM also allows colleges and universities to avoid another "wisdom of Solomon" dilemma – whether to opt for on-premise or on-demand delivery. While the future of CRM is likely to be largely in the cloud, institutions can deploy Enterprise CRM in either mode, and those wishing to move from one option to the other can do so without a re-implementation.

Putting it all together must be the next step for Ellucian

While the announcement of Ellucian Enterprise CRM is exciting news for higher education, there is still much to accomplish. The Recruiter module of Enterprise CRM is currently available and in use by more than 250 institutions, but the Student Success and Advancement modules are scheduled for delivery in 2014. Given the brisk pace of CRM adoption in higher education, driven in large part by the need to differentiate on student experience in a cost-effective manner, there is a high level of urgency for solutions to be available and ready for prime time. Institutions cannot afford to wait.

Because Ellucian is building Enterprise CRM on a mature and market-leading CRM platform rather than developing from scratch, Ovum is confident that the product roadmap is achievable under the current timescales and that availability will not be a problem.

On the other hand, market confusion does pose some risk to Ellucian. In the coming months, the vendor must communicate a clear and concrete path for clients seeking to migrate from existing relationship management solutions in its product suite to Enterprise CRM as well as illustrate how still other products, such as Course Signals, are complementary and deliver valuable extensions. Without such clarification, some institutions may delay investments or look elsewhere. One of Ellucian's greatest strengths is the number of options it offers client institutions, but as a trusted vendor partner, it should also offer clear guidance on when and how to implement which solutions.

APPENDIX

Author

Nicole Engelbert, Practice Leader, Industry Technology

nicole.engelbert@ovum.com

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