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# Compass Guide to WCM, Q4 2011

## Evaluation of Bridgeline Digital

**By:** Tony White



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# Bridgeline iAPPS Content Manager 4.7 Product Evaluation

**By:** Tony White

**Date:** November 22, 2011

## ARS LOGICA

## ARS LOGICA POSITION

Bridgeline Digital's iAPPS 4.7 is a well-integrated WCM-eCommerce-eMarketing-Analytics platform that offers an extraordinary price-to-functionality ratio. The platform's usability is among the best we've seen, due in large part to its elegant and intuitive user interfaces. Because the iAPPS framework was developed specifically to support all four product modules, its architecture is very clean. Bridgeline Digital is in a strong technological position to become a recognized leader in the re-emerging WCM-eCommerce space, but the vendor will need to significantly ramp up its marketing initiatives to claim this position.

## NOTES & RESOURCES

### **Compass Guide Vendor Questionnaire**

Some company and product information contained in this report was collected via Ars Logica's 172-item Vendor Questionnaire. Vendor responses were always independently verified through customer interviews, implementation monitoring, Ars Logica's comprehensive knowledge base, and hands-on product testing.

### **Hands-On Product Testing**

Ars Logica conducted hands-on product testing at Bridgeline's headquarters in Woburn, Massachusetts. Subsequent product updates supplement these results.

### **Customer Interviews**

Ars Logica interviewed users of every product covered in the Compass Guide, including Bridgeline.

### **Implementation Monitoring**

Since the 1990s, Ars Logica founder Tony White has kept close tabs on ongoing WCM implementations. Some of this knowledge is represented in the Compass Guide reports.

### **No Vendor Influence**

Ars Logica retains complete editorial control over the Compass Guides and receives no funding in their production.

## Bridgeline Digital Vendor Overview

Bridgeline is a midsize WCM-eCommerce-Marketing Campaign-Analytics vendor based in Woburn, Massachusetts with sales offices located across the U.S. and a development site in Bangalore, India. The company was founded in Lexington, MA, in 2000 and it released Bridgeline iAPPS Content Manager 1.0 in 2007 after seven years of growth as a CMS professional services firm. The vendor currently targets companies with revenues of \$100 million to \$1 billion and .NET/C# technology environments. Bridgeline leads the industry in developing elegant, highly intuitive user interfaces, which receive consistent praise from non-technical business users. The combined platform is unique in the industry for its integration of full-featured, high-value modules across a range of product types that promise to satisfy the requirements of both content specialists and online marketing/sales managers at a wide range of enterprises.

### Company Profile

Year Founded: 2000  
Headquarters: Woburn, Massachusetts  
Employees (or FTE equivalents): 230  
Geographies: North America  
Revenue: \$35 million  
Product Types Offered: WCM, eCommerce, Analytics  
Commercial or Open Source: Commercial  
Strategic Implementation Partners: Undisclosed  
Top Competitors: Sitecore, Ektron, Microsoft, FatWire (Oracle), Clickability, Interwoven (Autonomy/HP), Day Software (Adobe)  
Key Vertical Industries: Healthcare, Financial Services, Associations

### Product Profile

Product Name: Bridgeline iAPPS Content Manager  
Version: 4.7  
Next version release date: Q2 2012  
Market segment: Enterprise Challenger  
Average Sales Price: \$50,000 (Perpetual License), \$1,500/month (SaaS)  
Technology Platform: .NET, C#  
Key Strengths: Superb Usability, Best-of-Breed Marketing & Sales Tools, Excellent Integration of Product Modules  
Key Limitations: Mind/Market Share  
Highest-Value Use Case: Enterprise at the Higher End of the Mid-Market (\$500 million to \$1 billion) with requirements that span WCM, eCommerce, Analytics, and Marketing Campaign Management

## Vendor History & Product Evolution

Founded in Lexington, Massachusetts, in 2000 as a professional services firm and developer of customized content applications, Bridgeline Digital did not release its first product for some seven years. Much of the company's early work was highly proprietary, non-standards based application development that addressed the needs of small to midsize companies with specialized CMS requirements. Customer satisfaction levels during this time remained very high, causing Bridgeline to believe – rightly so – that its offerings should be productized.

However, Bridgeline recognized that its existing service-based model did not bode well for corporate growth, and in 2005 began developing from scratch a set of product modules based purely on .NET and C# technologies that spanned the range from WCM to analytics to eCommerce to marketing campaign management. While the individual product modules were conceived and developed simultaneously, Bridgeline first released the complete “iAPPS platform” (a set of robust common services shared by all product modules) over time and subsequently released the remaining modules in the following order: WCM, Analytics, eCommerce, eMarketing. Development of the platform's underpinnings was completed in 2007, at which point the first two modules were officially launched. Work on the remaining modules continued over the following year, and the eCommerce and eMarketing modules were released in 2009.

As with other solutions conceived and developed as a whole from the beginning, the platform's architecture is unusually clean, representing a services-oriented architecture (SOA) approach to product development. For this reason, not only are the modules well-integrated between and among themselves, but they also integrate well with other enterprise applications. And not surprisingly, implementation and customization of the platform proves straightforward compared to solutions assembled over long periods.

## Key Recent Developments

Versions 4.6 and 4.7 of Bridgeline's product suite focus on improvements to Analyzer and Commerce, respectively. Analyzer can now suggest actions that non-technical marketers should take, based on behavior trends among website visitors; and Commerce sports improved multi-currency support and availability in several additional languages.

Other significant improvements from v. 4.5 include enhanced landing page optimization), an easy-to-use wizard-driven campaign builder, integration with Salesforce.com, and improved overall product usability. Cross-suite implementation of enterprise-scale ISYS Search software and the introduction of a search engine optimization (SEO) module effectively link the platform's strengths in WCM, eCommerce, eMarketing, and Analytics to a powerful tool for maximizing a website's relevance given specific search parameters on leading search engines such as Google and Bing.

## Profiling the Ideal Buyer

The ideal buyer of the iAPPS platform will exhibit one or more of the following characteristics: the cost-conscious customer for whom the  $n^{\text{th}}$  degree of functionality in any given feature category is not as important as the relationship between feature-functionality and price. Simply put, this eliminates the extremes, but attracts many companies with moderately robust requirements across the range of product types represented in the iAPPS suite. In all likelihood, this may estrange customers of all kinds who need only one of the product types available in the iAPPS suite. But regarding iAPPS, buyers should be aware that the suite really is greater than the sum of its parts. The synergies that accrue to an integrated suite of this kind easily double or triple its overall value in terms of product performance, decreased long-term integration costs, and staffing requirements. At the risk of not including *all* customers who should shortlist Bridgeline, Ars Logica believes that the product is an ideal fit for companies with moderate but proliferating content volumes, a corporate brand whose identity is largely maintained online, company revenues more than half of which come from an online channel, and customers who arrive for the first time primarily from internet search engines.

- **Customers with Needs that Span WCM, eCommerce, Online Marketing, and Analytics**  
Bridgeline Digital's iAPPS platform is unique in the industry for combining a comprehensive set of high-quality WCM, eCommerce, Online Marketing, and Analytics modules.
- **Midsize Enterprises with .NET and/or C# Development Environment**  
For enterprises seeking .NET or C# based WCM solutions, iAPPS is one of five or six that should naturally come to mind.
- **Companies for Whom Value-Based Pricing and Excellent Usability are "Top 5" Requirements**  
iAPPS is a – if not *the* – market leader in both functionality-to-price ratio and ease-of-use.

## Bridgeline Will Not Be a Good Fit, If...

Since iAPPS is .NET and C# based, customers with a preference for Java and PHP technologies should not consider Bridgeline. As mentioned above, much of the value of the platform stems from the synergies of using multiple modules. Thus, for customers considering only Analytics, for example, there are products on the market that would likely be a better fit. And although a very good value, iAPPS should not be on the shortlist of companies with budgets of less than \$70,000 – \$35,000 for product licenses and another \$35,000 for implementation. The SaaS version reduces this cost by some margin.

## Key Product Strengths

Bridgeline Digital’s user interfaces are among the best Ars Logica has ever seen. Their design is visually appealing, intuitively structured, and in general, very easy to learn. Customer interviews validate Ars Logica’s opinion on this point. Not once did a Bridgeline customer have anything negative to say about poor user interface design. Furthermore, the time required to learn how to use the application is among the lowest – if not *the* lowest – in the industry. This is a significant product strength, as good UI design is positively correlated with high user adoption rates and negatively correlated with application abandonment. In short, non-technical business users will likely never complain about menu organization, redundant steps in performing tasks, or the time required to gain an overall understanding of how the application is laid out. Finally, UI design is completely consistent between modules. Unlike some other multi-module solutions, iAPPS modules were conceived and designed simultaneously.

Bridgeline Digital is one of the first software vendors to emerge with a high quality, tightly-integrated WCM-eCommerce-eMarketing-Analytics platform after the eCommerce market came back to life in 2006-2007. Therefore, while its WCM module positions the vendor against other mid-market WCM applications, its eCommerce and analytics functionality pits it against leaders in the eCommerce market such as ATG. The modules were not designed to compete at the extreme limits of scalability, but high-value modules in each of three categories will make Bridgeline Digital the best overall platform for sub-\$1 billion companies seeking a synergistic pre-integration of robust WCM, analytics, and eCommerce functions.

**FIGURE 1** Bridgeline 4.7, Key Product Strengths and Limitations

**Below are several key product strengths and limitations that potential buyers should keep in mind when assembling vendor shortlists.**

KEY STRENGTHS	KEY LIMITATIONS
Excellent usability	Scalability for implementations beyond the Fortune 1000 single-division level
Best-in-industry online sales and marketing tools, due in part to integration between WCM, marketing, and analytics modules	Limited marketshare and mindshare
High functionality-price ratio	Potential for the vendor to underinvest in marketing may diminish vendor/product viability.
Strong combined technical/marketing position from which to emerge as eCommerce platform leader	Not well suited for Java-centric technical environments

Source: Ars Logica, Inc.

Source of Information: Product testing, customer interviews, Vendor Questionnaire

While iAPPS platform represents one of the best values in the industry in that its functionality-to-price ratio is extremely high, there are other products with similar “value points,” such as Sitecore, Kentico, GX Software, and Magnolia Software. But none of these offer a *bona fide* eCommerce application. This fact will tip the scale for customers looking for an overall WCM-eCommerce platform. And although the vendor claims that its “lead product” is WCM, Ars Logica expects the market to identify Bridgeline Digital’s unique value proposition as the WCM-eCommerce-Analytics combination.

Finally, because of the above-mentioned strengths, Bridgeline Digital is in a strong combined technical/marketing position from which it may emerge as a market leader, much as ATG and BroadVision did just over 10 years ago. As a vendor-neutral firm, Ars Logica does not endorse products, but we would encourage any \$100 million to \$1 billion company (or Fortune 1000 divisions) looking for a WCM-eCommerce-Analytics combination to give proper consideration to iAPPS.

## Key Product Limitations

From an analyst’s point of view, Bridgeline’s primary limitation is the dissonance between the product’s considerable strengths and the vendor’s lack of mind/market share. Too many times in the past, admirable technologies have not survived – because of myriad market forces. Consequently, Ars Logica’s score of 6.1 for “Market Presence, Product Viability” combines a bright prognosis for the product and a concern that Bridgeline will not effectively communicate its strongest value proposition.

Next, Ars Logica does not believe that the iAPPS platform would scale adequately for enterprise-level deployments in very large organizations. Bridgeline has targeted midsize companies as customers, and it therefore serves an installed base with mid-range scalability requirements. Bridgeline has briefed us on their long-term product strategy that may – if executed well – resolve the scalability issue beyond the Fortune 1000 divisional level. Until then, the product’s sweet spot remains in the mid-market/large enterprise division.

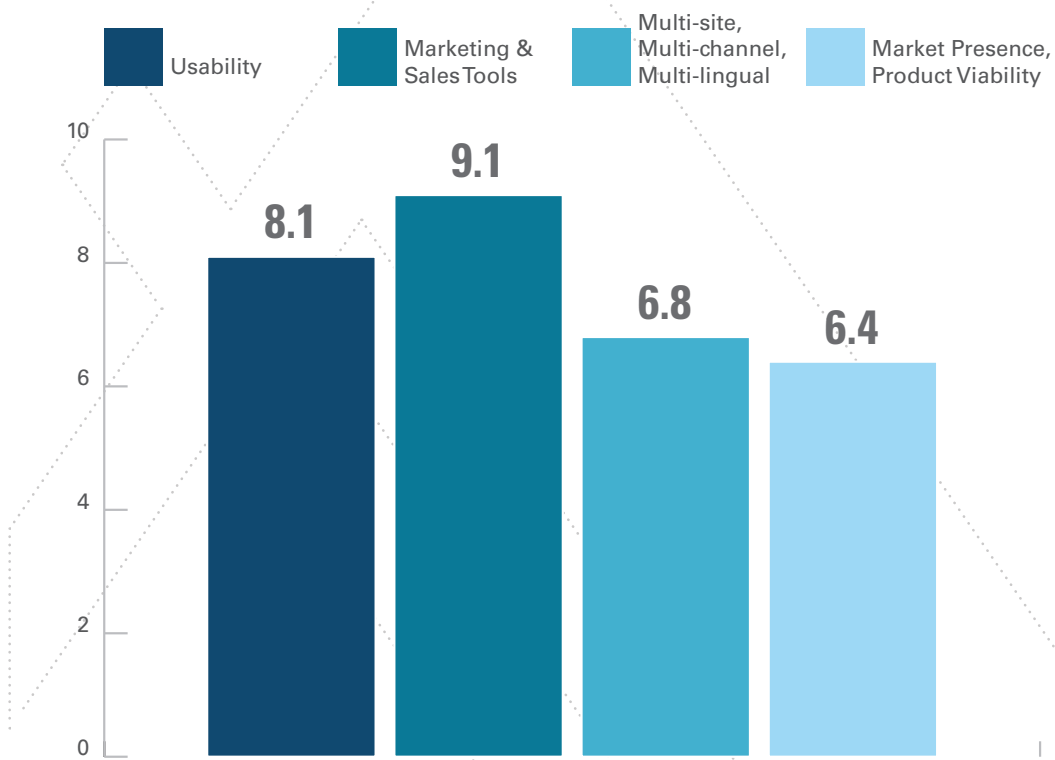
Finally, because the product was conceived and developed on .NET and C# technologies, it exhibits integration limitations in non-Microsoft environments. Much like Sitecore and Kentico, Bridgeline consciously chose to build a .NET platform, understanding that Java-centric enterprise clients would look elsewhere. So while this is a “Java weakness” to some, it is a “.NET strength” to others. The bright side of this “weakness” is that customization of the platform is relatively inexpensive due to the high availability of .NET developers.

## Vendor/Product Report Cards

The features, functions, and technical underpinnings of WCM products vary wildly, as do the customer requirements they are intended to satisfy. For this reason, the only reliable way to ensure the best product fit for a particular client is to spend anywhere from several weeks to several months assessing the client's specific needs and analyzing product capabilities line by line. Still, Ars Logica is frequently asked to rate products in categories such as those in Figures 2 and 3. In using these ratings, please take care not to compare products in different market segments (see the Product Profile section of Page 4). For example, a Scalability score of 9 for an "Enterprise" product does not equate to the same score for an "Entry Level" product.

**FIGURE 2** Bridgeline Report Card for the Business User

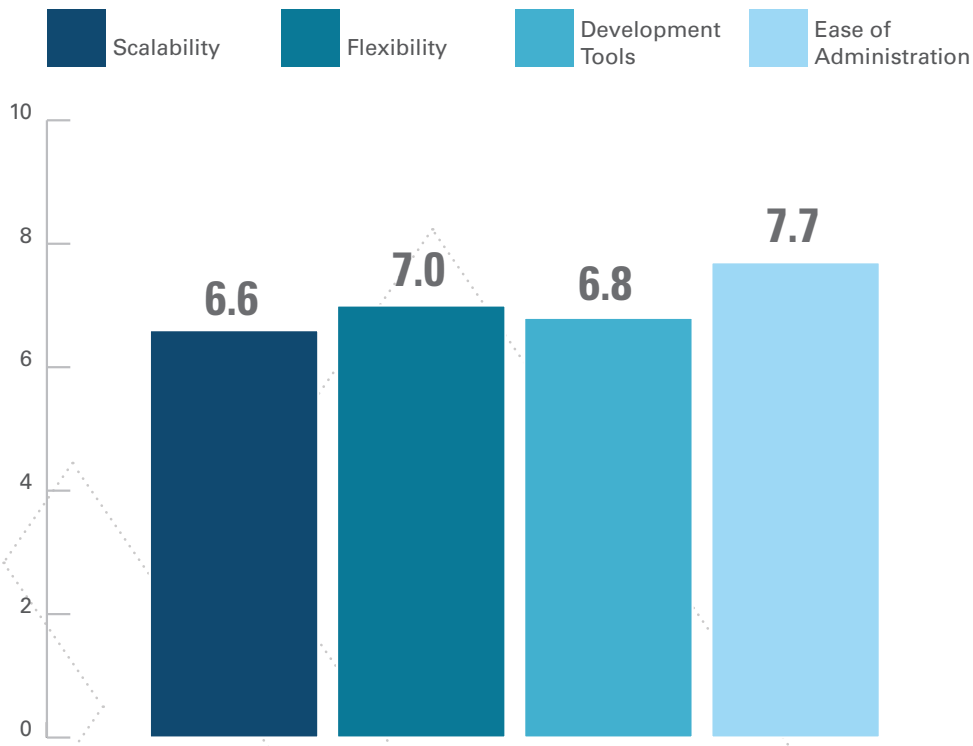
Figure 2 shows Ars Logica's rating of Bridgeline iAPPS Content Manager 4.7 in four categories of critical importance to business users. Refer to Page 11 for an explanation of the evaluation criteria.



Source of Information: Product testing, customer interviews, Vendor Questionnaire

**FIGURE 3** Bridgeline Report Card for Technologists

Figure 3 shows Ars Logica's rating of Bridgeline iAPPS Content Manager 4.7 in four categories of critical importance to technologists. Refer to Page 12 for an explanation of the evaluation criteria.



Source of Information: Product testing, customer interviews, Vendor Questionnaire

## Report Card Evaluation Criteria

In the process of analyzing WCM solutions, Ars Logica has established a set of evaluation criteria, which at the highest level can be separated into four categories for non-technical business users and four categories for technologists. Scores in these categories represent averages of a large number of detailed criteria, and are meant to be used as a means of quickly comparing products within the same market segment – not as a substitute for painstaking requirements and product matching.

### Criteria for Business Users

- **Usability**

Usability refers to the relative ease of learning and using a WCM application. For non-technical business users, factors contributing to high scores in this category include intuitive and consistent user interfaces, streamlined task completion (i.e. minimal number of steps to complete a task), integration with the desktop, contextual editing capabilities, and documented high user adoption rates among a vendor's customers.

- **Marketing & Sales Tools**

Increasingly, enterprises are relying on marketing and sales tools within WCM applications to improve sales conversion rates, increase average transaction amounts, draw customers back to their Web sites, analyze online behavioral patterns, and so on. This category rates the presence and quality of such tools.

- **Multi-Site, Multi-Channel, Multi-Lingual Capabilities**

This category assesses a product's ability to support multiple sites; deliver content to multiple channels on multiple devices; and create, store, present, disseminate, and/or translate content into multiple languages. Scores in this category represent an average of a product's capabilities in all three of these broad functional areas.

- **Market Presence, Product Viability**

The Market Presence, Product Viability category rates both a vendor's overall market presence relative to competitors and its dedication to the continued development of its WCM products. If these two factors are not aligned with each other, an explanation of why will be included.

## Criteria for Technologists

- **Scalability**

Scalability refers to the ability of a product to function well as system demands increase. Factors contributing to scalability are database size, query efficiency, bandwidth consumption, ease of system management, caching efficiency, load balancing, and mass content deployment capabilities.

- **Flexibility**

Flexibility denotes a product's ability to integrate easily with existing enterprise infrastructure, including operating systems, Web servers, databases, directories, development tools, and other enterprise applications such as ERP, CRM, document management systems, search, portals, and so forth.

- **Development Tools**

This category describes the quality of a product's integrated development environment (IDE), the technologies that the IDE incorporates, and overall ease of customized application development. Although this category refers primarily to development frameworks (Eclipse, e.g.), other ad hoc tools are also included, such as page templates, HTML/XML editors, WYSIWYG editors, PDF generators, and any other software that enables or eases the production, formatting and dissemination of content.

- **Ease of Administration**

Some WCM products require significantly more work to administer (sometimes 5-10 times more) than others. This category rates the relative resource intensity required to keep the system running smoothly, where higher scores reflect less work. Roughly speaking, higher scores also indicate better coordination of application components due to more methodical system design.



## SERVICES

### Advisory Services

Ars Logica is a vendor-neutral analyst firm helping companies evaluate their WCM requirements and select appropriate WCM software. To address clients' content management-related questions and problems that arise throughout the year, Ars Logica offers unlimited direct analyst access through its Analyst Anytime advisory services. These annual, subscription-based services provide guidance by phone or email within 24 hours on a wide range of issues. The number of inquiries submitted throughout the year is not limited.

### Software and Technology Selection

In our Software and Technology Selection engagements, Ars Logica maps clients' functional, technological, and strategic requirements to potential WCM solutions and identifies the software vendors whose products best satisfy these requirements. We maintain a continuously updated comprehensive matrix of the feature-functionality of most WCM vendors' products and solutions. We also receive frequent briefings from these vendors and have in-depth conversations and consulting engagements with their customers, ensuring that we always understand the actual state of vendors' offerings as well as their forward-looking strategic directions.

### Custom Engagements

Ars Logica's expertise in WCM and related technologies such as digital asset management, records management, marketing campaign management, search, and portals, gives us the open-ended ability to help clients on a wide range of projects, including: building the internal business cases, assessing technology requirements, analyzing software products and vendors, selecting and assembling software solutions, crafting Web strategies, and running corporate educational seminars. We also assist vendors in developing strategic roadmaps, and we and present our view of the WCM market at industry conferences and end-user events.

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## Contact

Tel: +1 617.943.5611  
Fax: +1 617.226.4575  
75 Arlington Street  
Suite 500  
Boston, MA 02116  
[www.arslogica.com](http://www.arslogica.com)