



How To Choose The Best **LMS**?

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For an industry driven by technology eLearning, and education in general, is very slow to react to change. While other software-based industries are riding the waves of progress and advancing every day, the eLearning industry has been constrained by old and tired attitudes towards teaching and training. And all of this despite mounting evidence that the old methods just aren't as effective. The good news is that corporations aren't hindered by the same roadblocks as the education sector, and as a result lately the industry has seen rapid growth and change in the corporate sector and the adoption of learning management systems.

They have moved away from simply being a means to deliver and track training – essentially just content management systems – towards something closer to a social portal through which informal and formal, online and offline training can be tracked. While some of the traditional methods do indeed still exist (sometimes there really is no substitute to a teacher in a classroom), they are now complemented by blended learning, gamification, powerful social tools and offline learning, plus many more cutting-edge LMS features. Understanding how LMSs differ from each other is key to you selecting the right one for your organization.

First and foremost you will need to know exactly what the your own training needs are before you even think of contacting LMS vendors. To guarantee successful implementation and adoption there are a number of steps laid out in this eBook which should guide you in what to look for and how to go about finding it.

CHAPTER 1 – NEEDS OF THE COMPANY

- **Begin at the beginning:** The best place to start is by making sure that you understand what you want to achieve with your LMS. An organization chooses to invest in an LMS – often considerable amounts of money – to raise the competency levels of its staff and ultimately make the company more productive and in turn more profitable.
- **Aligning learning with organizational goals:** It is absolutely vital that the learning goals of your organization align with the organizational goals. Defining your learning goals and strategy at the beginning of an LMS implementation project will help guide your decisions on everything to do with the LMS.
LMS platforms are no longer just ways to deliver training to your workforce or partners, but can come with a plethora of exciting, fun and interactive tools that make the Virtual Learning Environment an inviting place for learners to interact, share and collaborate.
- **Some preliminary questions:** Before deciding on individual features or anything technical there are a couple of things that need settling

First ask yourself who will be using the LMS?

- Will it be primarily for your own employees?
- Will you be using it to train your customers?
- Maybe your channel partners could benefit from it?

- **Know the technical capabilities of your audience:**
 - If your workforce is distributed across countries or continents, what equipment will they be using to access their training content?
 - Are they busy professionals who will spend most of their time on a smartphone or tablet?
 - Do they have access to reliable high-speed internet at home?
- **Next you will need to think about the capabilities of your IT department:**
 - Will the LMS be hosted by the learning provider?
 - Or will your IT department be responsible for administering it?
 - Does the IT department have the capabilities to handle what it needs to do?

To make the most out of your LMS your learners should be able to take advantage of all of its features. This way it will have the biggest impact on the largest number.

- Who, if anyone, will be designing the eLearning content?
- Is there a need for an authoring tool?
- Will the content be outsourced?
- Or created in-house?

You need to have this figured out before you start talking to LMS providers as different LMSs come with different authoring tools, or none at all



● What content do you need your LMS to play?

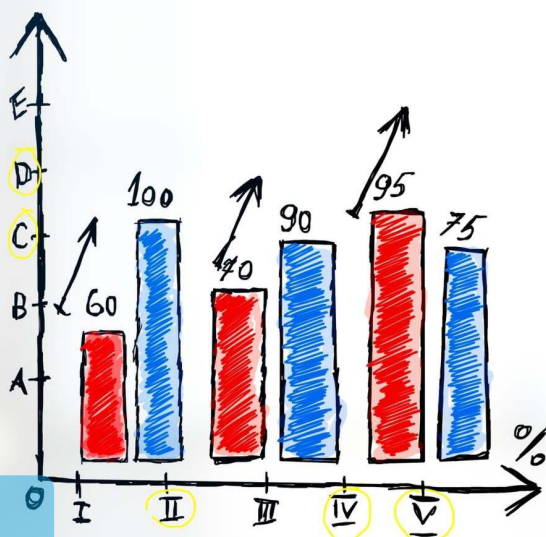
- SCORM content
- HTML5
- PowerPoint
- PDFs

● Company growth and Scalability

Clearly you want your company to grow, and to support that growth you need to ensure that the LMS that you choose is fully scalable. A scalable LMS could mean the difference between the system being a success or failing. It's important to start small and test out the new software with a few users. This way you can iron out many of the teething issues you run into, as well as gauging how users are reacting to the new system.

● Some questions to ask about scalability are:

- Will the LMS be able to handle large amounts of users as the company grows?
- Is the LMS capable of handling increased amounts of data with the rise in users? This is especially important if your courses are media-rich or you plan on integrating various social tools for collaboration
- If you have a distributed workforce, is your IT infrastructure capable of ensuring there is no delay in communications coming from different countries or continents?



CHAPTER 2 – LIAISE WITH ALL STAKEHOLDERS

If you don't have the buy-in of all of your LMS stakeholders then your LMS will not be reaching its full potential. Although you won't be relying on them to provide all of the information you need to put together a learning strategy, involving stakeholders in the process not only helps to give a better overall image of the requirements, skills shortages and current situation, but will also make them more receptive to change if they feel part of the process.

● Focus Groups and Workshops

As you will be engaging with a number of departments and stakeholders, a great way to get their input is to host a series of workshops and focus groups. Through these you can:

- Introduce the new learning plan and sing the praises of the LMS upgrade
- Socialize your vision of the new Learning Management System
- Get feedback on the learning strategy
- Answer any questions over doubts they may have

Management can provide you with the strategic drivers to help define the needs of the organizations. They can:

- Explain how learning goals align with business goals
- Give crucial information about projected growth



The idea is to get everyone on board so that all feel that they have some form of ownership over the project.

If you are replacing your current LMS – perhaps an in-house Moodle just doesn't cut the mustard anymore and you need a professional solution – then it is important that you set up focus groups to find out:

- What features of the current LMS they like
- Which they do not like
- And which areas are in need of improvement

Once a needs analysis has been completed you will want to compile a list of requirements which will form the foundations of your choice of LMS.

Try to make this as clear as possible and organize the requirements into three groups:

- **Functional** - These describe what features and capabilities are needed from the LMS from a learning management
- **Technical** - The LMS will be implemented within your organization's IT infrastructure and so you need to know how (and if) this is going to be possible.
- **Cost** - These tell you how the LMS will fit within your organization's budget constraints.



CHAPTER 3 – WHICH FEATURES ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

As we have already mentioned there are many different LMS platforms with hundreds of different features. Sure almost all LMSs will say that they are easy to use, or intuitive, and this is exactly why you need to know as much about the market as possible. Which features you select depends on what type of company you are – no use having multi tenancy if all you are a small company with only a handful of employees to train.

➔ Performance Management & Reporting

From a learning management perspective this is the most important feature. The ability to track performance not only helps build an accurate image of learner progress and knowledge, but also allows trainers to gauge the effectiveness of their training. Some LMS platforms, such as Moodle and other open-source solutions, come with basic reporting which may be enough for universities and colleges, but won't be sufficient for the corporate sectors. An advanced reporting system will generally be what a corporation needs, and you should have be able to answer a few simple questions about your reporting requirements:

- Which members of the organization will need to see reports?
- Are reports going to be distributed automatically every week or month? Or should certain people be able to create reports on request?
- Do you require any additional custom reporting features which could potentially add more time and cost onto the project?

➔ Social Learning

Social features are a relatively new addition to elearning, and transform an LMS from essentially just a content management system into a portal for elearners where they not only have access to the training content, but also to tools that encourage sharing and collaboration. Some things to ask yourself of your Social Learning needs are:

- What are your workforce demographics? Who will be using the social tools and what are their technical capabilities?
- Does your organization need to foster collaboration among learners from different parts of the organization?
- Does the content you will be using lend itself to Social Learning?

→ Tin can Api

The next step in the evolution of eLearning, Tin Can API lets instructors track learning activities – both formal and informal and on and offline – that take place outside the confines of the LMS. Activities such as reading a relevant article, watching a video or attending a conference or talk can now be tracked and included in learner progress reports.

→ Blended Learning

Blended learning is training which combines elements of traditional learning with new media-rich self-paced methods.

→ Gamification

Gamification is the talk of the eLearning industry as the countless online articles testify. It is the inclusion of game mechanics and design in eLearning courses. Academic interest in gamification is on the rise and there are a large number of studies which show conclusive evidence that gamification helps with learner engagement and knowledge retention, thanks to features such as leaderboards, a points system, badges and rewards that make learning fun.

→ Multi Tenancy

SaaS Multi Tenancy lets administrators create an almost unlimited amount of 'tenants' from just one LMS license and based on the same database. This way each vendor, channel partner or department can effectively have their own LMS, complete with personalized branding and access. The LMS instance administrator – or super admin – can set administrators for each tenant while retaining control themselves, as well as giving unique access rights to each tenant..

→ Mobile & Offline Learning

This feature is especially important to bear in mind when considering the access your audience will have to the training outside of the workplace. Mobile learning opens up training to mobile devices, meaning that learners can access their training on their smartphones and tablets. Offline learning extends access even further by making training available even without an internet connection. Download the Offline Player and any training you need while connected to the internet. Then when an internet connection is reestablished all learner data progress is synchronized

→ Ecommerce Integration

LMS eCommerce integration allows trainers to create another revenue stream by enabling them to sell the courses and eLearning content they create online.

→ Support

Open-source or “free” LMS platforms tend not to come with any support past materials available online. If you are leaning towards a hosted options, then many issues that would usually plague LMS implementation are taken care of by the LMS vendor.

Vendor-sold LMS platforms are **SaaS**, and so are updated automatically by the vendor and benefit from round the clock support. They also make it extremely fast to get a working LMS up and running as there is no installation required.

There are usually a selection of packages that you can choose from for support, but all tend to come with at very least a dedicated technician, preliminary training and telephone support. If your LMS goes down then your training stops, so think about the ramifications of this on your organization. Expert help is the best way to ensure proper functioning of your LMS, and that training never stops in your organization.



CHAPTER 4 – HOW WILL THE TRAINING BE DELIVERED?

→ How will the training be delivered?

As already alluded to before you start contacting LMS vendors you need to be clear in your plan on how you will be delivering the training to your learners. This used to be very straightforward as all LMS platforms were computer-based and content delivery was basic. Nowadays however there are various options available to you, and what you choose will depend on the training you want to provide and the technical capabilities of your audience.

→ Instructor-Led Training (ILT)

ILT is the training we are all used to from going to school. Corporate ILT can be classroom-based in the physical sense, or delivered live over the internet. For certain things there really is no substitute for expert-led training, especially when it comes to fielding important real-time questions and stimulating dialog. For many organizations it is the foundation of their training strategy, and is increasingly being supported by new teaching methods like blended learning and gamification. Training only really sinks in for some learners when they have had the chance to ask questions and interact with others over the topic. For this reason ILT is here to stay.

→ Self-paced training

The general trend in almost all forms of learning and training is a gradual shift out of the classroom and online. Employees are generally quite a busy bunch, and removing them from their post to carry out training - even if it is profitable in the long-run - can be costly.

By giving learners the power over when and how they complete their training brings about a number of benefits:



- **Instructor costs** : with no reliance on a classroom or an instructor allowing learners to complete their training at their own pace saves money.
- **Time savings** : the logistics of coordinating a lesson, delivering it and potentially rescheduling is costly in both money and time. With self-paced learning there are no logistics costs and no problems with scheduling.
- **Engaging content** : you aren't restricted by conventional classroom training and are free to design courses that are rich in media, highly interactive and above all fun. This fresh approach to learning has been shown to help learners retain much more information. Where, when and how your learners will be accessing the training will be a massive factor in your decision.

A distributed workforce brings with it potentially difficult questions regarding language and internet access.

Some questions to ask yourself are:

What device will most of your audience be using to access the eLearning content?

- Computer
- Tablet
- Smartphone

Does your workforce have good access to reliable internet outside of the office?
What language are you wanting the training to be delivered in? Does the LMS support multiple languages?

Once the capabilities and needs of your audience have been assessed you can start to think about the current software employed by your company, and how the LMS can integrate with it to provide a seamless user experience.



CHAPTER 5 – INTEGRATIONS

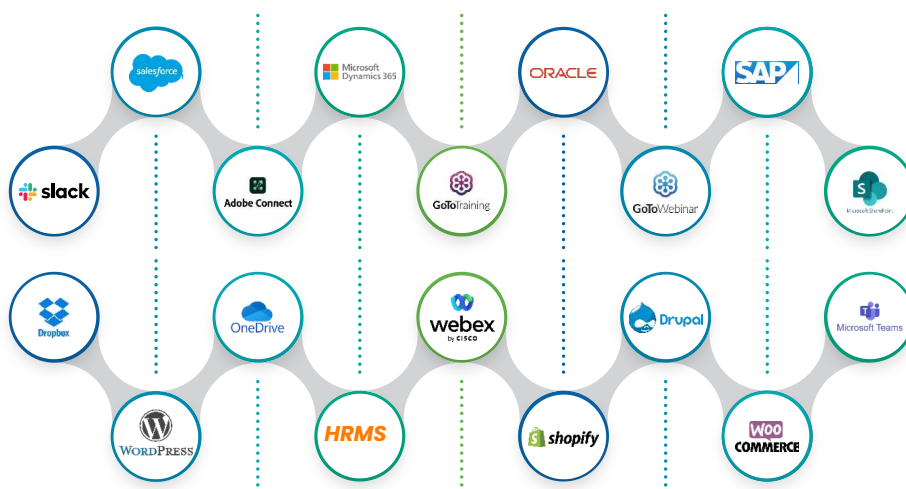
We understand that modern companies rely on more than just an LMS to function effectively. An LMS is just one piece in a suite of software used by different departments and partners throughout the course of a normal work day.

An LMS is something that should always be available, always be there in the background. Training and development are ongoing and always relevant, so it makes sense to have an LMS which works with the programs without which your business couldn't function. The long-term success of your LMS may well depend on its ability to work with the other software that makes your business turn.

First thing to understand is that, like choosing and implementing an LMS, integrations take time. The programs that you use will already have been heavily customized to your business needs, and so it isn't as simple as a one-size-fits-all integration.

Below is a list of some of the programs that can integrate with an LMS:

- **CRM** : Customer relationship management systems are probably the most common integration as so many companies make use of them. LMSs integrate with Salesforce, Microsoft Dynamics and Sugar CRM, as well as many others.
- **HRIS** : A good human resources information system, such as Bamboo HR or Peoplesoft, helps an organization to plan, control and manage HR costs, carry out detailed reporting and effectively recruit new staff. LMS integration ensures that important employee data is kept up to date across both platforms.
- **ERP** : Enterprise Resource Planning systems like SAP and Oracle are for many organizations the backbone of productivity, especially larger corporations. LMS integration keeps important data standardized across the platforms.
- **CMS** : Content Management Systems are an integral part of the work day. For this reason many LMS platforms integrate with well-known CMSs like Joomla and WordPress.



CHAPTER 6 – KNOW YOUR VENDORS

Once your learning plan and strategy have been defined along with learning and organizational goals, it is time to contact a selection of LMS vendors.

If you have already looked into the LMS market you will know that there is a serious amount of choice out there, and wading through all of the different offers is both tedious and time-consuming.

There is no shortcut here – you simply have to put in the time and do the research if you want to be sure you have the best LMS for your business.

As with any big decision the more you know the better choice you will make. You should aim to whittle down all of your potential LMS vendors to a list of 5 or 6 vendors that most closely match your list of necessary features, budget and support.

Work out how each vendor differs

- What is its focus?
- USP

Engage with experts

- Impartial expert advice is a surefire way to get a better understanding of the capabilities of the LMS platforms, so reach out to friends in the eLearning industry.

RFI

- Tailor each RFI to each vendor and don't just send out one big one.

Demos

- Pretty much all LMSs offer guided demos and most are free, so take advantage and get as much experience with the platforms as possible. If possible have someone from IT present at these demos to spot issues you may not see and to ask any technical questions.

Reviews

- Online reviews of LMS platforms are available all over the internet.

Case studies

- Get the LMS vendors to show you case studies of successful LMS implementation projects that are similar to your own.

Conversations with existing customers

- Best way to check out how an implemented LMS system is working is to speak with people who already use it. Companies will often have a client list on their website, so make contact with a handful of clients and find out if it works or not.

The conversations you will have with vendors over demos will be some of the most constructive exchanges you can have when planning your LMS implementation.

Rather than talking abstractly about integrations or capabilities, these conversations are based around real-time experience with a potential LMS, so make the best use of your time as possible.

CHAPTER 7 – IMPLEMENTATION

After having spoken to possible LMS vendors and evaluated all of your options, it is time to think about implementation.

You may be inclined to think that you in the home stretch now, but really the hard work is just getting started and you are entering into possibly the most critical phase of the whole project.

For implementation to be successful both the organization implementing the LMS and the LMS vendor must be committed, and should both follow a few steps to make sure both are aware and ready.

Taking it as a given that the LMS that has been chosen is right for the company and sufficiently futureproofed, there remain a few pitfalls to be aware of.

This period is critical as it is during the implementation phase that there is a greater risk of failure. Below are some of the main things to watch out for:

- **More hidden costs**

Depending on the LMS you have chosen there are still a selection of hidden costs that may rear their ugly head(s) and bite you later on. This is more likely to apply to those organizations that have developed their own LMS in-house from an open source option and the unknown variables that come with that choice, but can also apply to vendor-bought LMS solutions if you fail to read the small print, so check the contract for any charges that you may be liable for further down the line.

Some hidden costs that could add up are :

- **Further customizations** : anything from reports to integrations to branding can potentially be extra.
- **Reporting** : if standard reporting features aren't sufficient for you then you will probably need customizations to the reporting tool, which is the same as any other customization and involves more time and money.

→ **Be sure there is content ready to go**

Content, as anyone in marketing will tell you, is king. You can have the best, most socially-connected LMS in the world, but unless you have amazing, quality content then it is all for nothing.

Whether you are outsourcing content production or taking care of it in-house, you should have content ready to go for when the LMS goes live.

→ **Prepare all stakeholders**

It's not just you and the LMS vendor that helps with the implementation - everyone involved needs to play their part. People and organizations are generally quite resistant to change, and this could be a very big one.

It is worth marketing the new LMS and all of its bells and whistles to your workforce and anyone else that will be using it. By helping them to understand the benefits you are preparing them (and hopefully getting them to do a bit of marketing for you).

Give it time

An LMS roll out doesn't happen overnight. In fact the average time for implementation, taking into account adequate planning, is between 3 and 6 months.

A new LMS is a considerable investment and undertaking, and if done correctly takes a lot of people a lot of time and money to pull off well. Make sure that every stage of the process has been planned and accounted for, and that the right people are in place to help the transition go as smoothly as possible.

Educate stakeholders prior to roll out, ensure they have the support they need during adoption, and encourage those early adopters to help you promote the system and evangelize about it.

Ratings And Reviews

An eLearning solution with near-perfect reviews on g2 & capterra & more.



Thank You

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