



WHITE PAPER

How to Select a Learning Management System

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Selecting the Best Learning Management System Starts With Your Needs

The steady increase of technology-based training tools on the market and demand for truly engaging online learning experiences continue to meaningfully impact how smart organizations evaluate their existing and potential future training strategies. The adoption of an LMS (learning management system) provides extensive benefits to both employees and management.

What is an LMS? It's a solution for learners to intuitively access online training tools and organizations to track and manage various learner data including employee performance. Many training organizations rely on their LMS as a single point of access for all eLearning content and learner records. They are a key enabling technology for "anytime, anywhere" access to learning content and administration (ADL Net, n.d.).

Organizations looking to upgrade existing training methods can quickly find themselves exposed to a bewildering spectrum of technology-based options and LMS vendors. When making the decision to invest in an LMS solution, the pressure to navigate through the various tools, platforms, approaches,

An effective LMS solution will align with an organization's business plan.

architectures and price models available in the marketplace can be so overwhelming that prioritized business requirements are forgotten. However, a disciplined decision-making process will ensure that decision makers have adequately surveyed options and evaluated them based on what eLearning needs to provide to relevant human resources. It's imperative that the LMS solution aligns with the organization's business plan needs and staff development requirements to be effective.

The most obvious benefits of learning management systems center not only on providing attractive, cost-effective and tailored learning options but how effectively they will address your self-described business and learner needs. Therefore, selecting a learner provider that works to understand specific business objectives and needs is imperative. This white paper illuminates three common scenarios suggesting how organizations may proceed in evaluating and selecting a learning management system and provider.

Scenario 1: An Organization Has Limited Online Training without an LMS in Place Or the Organization Built Its Own LMS

If eLearning is already part of the overall training strategy, even though not delivered and managed

through a comprehensive LMS, the benefits of using an LMS derive mostly from the automation and centralization of functions that accrue from adopting almost any enterprise system (ADL Net, n.d.).

In some instances, organizations have built their own LMS, however frequently the proprietary LMS software becomes out-of-date, incompatible with newer media and expensive to maintain. Switching to a vetted LMS company not only decreases cost and maintenance, it often represents an easy transition process to a cloud-based model.

Scenario 2: An Organization Is Enhancing Training Strategies By Moving Toward An Online Training Model And Lms Solution

When an organization modifies its training strategy from primarily classroom instructor-led training (ILT) to eLearning integration, multiple benefits typically impact decision making.

- Reduced travel and facility costs with eLearning and online tools
- Improved time-to-market training of sales, customer service and business partners—including ways to support multiple languages worldwide
- Self-paced learning opportunities which improve company performance; ensuring the employee training plan strategically aligns with employee development needs
- Reliable, flexible, adaptable eLearning software solutions with the inclusion of eLearning contracts the organization manages and controls
- Data accumulated to determine learner assessments and evaluations quickly and accurately

Advantages of Using Vendor-Supported LMS

The convenience of using a vendor supported LMS is undeniable. Companies often overlook the factor of experience. Ideally, an organization buys an LMS system and uses it for a long time. For companies purchasing its first LMS, the level of expertise that comes along with building software that is used by hundreds of different organizations is incredibly valuable. A vendor product is the result of extensive testing and collaboration with many different experts. Furthermore, they learn from their mistakes and modify their product in a way that allows it to work for companies and government agencies of all types. Those skills only come with experience (Gawliu, 2015).

Whether an organization is adopting an LMS for the first time, enhancing existing training strategies or moving classroom training to online learning tactics, key factors should be considered when selecting an LMS. This white paper is designed to support an organization's decision-making process.

This guide to selecting an LMS addresses three essential categories:

1. Research and planning
2. Vendor evaluation
3. Finalizing selection and acquiring the LMS solution

Each category includes applicable tips to key stages within this selection process.

Research & Planning

Stage 1: Analyze Needs and Define Requirements

When selecting an LMS or upgrading training strategies, it's imperative for organizations to first evaluate and outline concrete business needs and objectives with the buy-in of senior management. The LMS program and selected provider should align with the organization's interests, needs and requirements.

#1. Make the learning strategy a priority.

Time evaluating and outlining an overall strategy prior to becoming consumed with the back and forth of numerous vendors is often cited as the key to success when dealing with enterprise IT initiatives. A stakeholder and leadership coalition helps drive successful training solutions and achieves buy-in consensus among decision makers. Organizations should create quantitative and qualitative training objectives including steps addressing implementation timing, procedures and clearly defined goals that align with both the organization's strategy and individual learner needs. For organizations that have an eLearning strategy in place, ensure it is up-to-date, meets the aforementioned goals and includes clear instructions on how to integrate with an LMS.

#2. Determine business goals and objectives.

Answers to key questions should shape LMS training objectives and goals. Consider the following:

- What are the learning and training requirements as an organization? What is the expected outcome from the learner using these tools? Possible answers include:

- Advance learner productivity and performance
- Encourage innovative teaching methods
- Improve engagement and retention
- Launch effective enrollment and on-boarding training
- Who is the audience and what are their preferred learning needs?
- When, where and how will learning be delivered?
- Will this strategy require new technologies or ways in which it can be integrated with an existing system?

#3. Define learning categories. To further determine the type of learning required for an organization and its audience, fundamental learning categories are valuable references. As defined by Advanced Distributed Learning (ADL), in an instructional sense, LMSs are generally designed to account for five basic categories of learning:

- **Initial learning**—acquiring skills and knowledge for the first time.
- **Continued learning**—extending skills and knowledge in a domain.
- **Remedial learning**—refreshing skills and knowledge for learners whose knowledge has declined.
- **Upgrade learning**—moving to a higher level of competence in skills and knowledge already acquired.
- **Transfer learning**—transferring of skills and knowledge learned in one domain or context and transferring them to a different one.

#4. Learning preferences and needs

assessment. Capturing expectations from leadership and learner focus groups can determine what's working, what needs improvement and what learner preferences must be met to ensure user engagement.

Organizations with an LMS system in place must continually evaluate how it's performing and received by its users. *Canvas by Instructure* recommends surveying the community to understand current LMS experiences. Self-assessments regarding usage of the current training system should target all users to discover how they use the current LMS, as well as what they hope to receive in the future LMS programs. Suggested survey questions:

- Who is using the current LMS (role, title, disciplines, kinds of courses, course size, etc.)?
- How much time do they spend in the current LMS?
- When and how do they interact through the current LMS?
- What percentage of that time is spent on designing, teaching or learning?
- How confident are they in the current LMS's reliability?
- What are the major strengths and drawbacks of the current LMS?
- Can they share an example of how technology has both improved and inhibited their teaching or learning?
- Presuming no limitations, what one thing could technology do to make teaching or learning better and easier?

If an organization is without an LMS, questions are focused on how the business currently manages learning and training today addressing

challenges they face—both operationally and financially dependent on the audience. Relate leadership questions to strategic company goals, and how employee's performance impact these goals. Address IT technical requirements or constraints that may need consideration

For example, survey the audience with the following suggested topics related to needs and requirements:

PERSONALIZATION	How customized and tailored is your training to learning needs?
LMS PERMISSIONS	How many users and administrators are required?
AUTOMATION	What percentage of time is expected by the training administrator to update content? What percentage of time is acceptable for automation tools to replace manual processes?
SYSTEM INTEGRATION	Does the LMS need to connect to other internal programs?
LMS CONTENT DELIVERY	What are the preferred methods of content (online courses, templates, gamification, etc.)?
SOCIAL MEDIA	Is there a learner preference to access available forums on Facebook®, X® or other common social media apps to discuss their experiences, questions or insights?

#5. Review and analyze collected feedback.

Once the organization conducts initial research, apply this data and develop the organization's training objectives, requirements and implementation timeline. Develop a requirement list to

improve the vetting process for LMS providers and products. As a reminder, this list should highlight key learning practices and functions, technical considerations, system integration and budget requirements.

Vendor Evaluation

Stage 2: Vet And Evaluate Available Products And Lms Providers

#1. Applying the requirement list. Initial vendor evaluation begins with matching the requirement list to research showing what LMS solutions and providers are a potential fit for the company. Organizations can simplify the requirement list by organizing needs from the data collected during the surveying process (outlined in Stage 1) into three common categories: functional, technical and cost. Functional requirements describe what the learning management system must be able to do. Technical requirements describe how the system must fit into the broader IT enterprise infrastructure. Cost requirements describe how the system matches up with the organization's budget considerations, constraints and expectations (Requirements, B. P., n.d.).

Hypothetical Customer Scenario and Requirements List

Functional Requirements:

- Administrators must be able to track safety and compliance training when on-boarding new employees.
- Learners must be able to access HR administered training across all regional offices.
- The LMS automation generates customized content and progress tracking data.
- For the organization's continuing education program, the LMS offers accredited material and course credits for learners.

- Blended training options for any learning preference include in-person seminars, online quizzes, videos, webinars and e-books.

Technical Requirements:

- A learning environment requiring no specialized IT installation, cost or downtime included with year-long learning plans.
- The LMS meets security and accessibility regulations.
- The LMS can host and enable client-created material.

Cost Requirements:

- Determine a competitive rate for an LMS platform that grants access to all learning—live and online.
- The LMS pricing model must be cost-effective for the anticipated number of users in the organization and can manage the increase of users and user needs as the organization grows.
- The LMS must include templates with minor customization that meet the skills of current administrators and support staff. Costs to hire additional support is not an option.

#2. Product vetting. An organization that creates necessary standards for their LMS products and provider, ensure the product vetting will focus on core business needs and helps effectively eliminate LMS providers that cannot meet their criteria.

Here are examples of common requirements businesses use when vetting:

- Standards and language options in terms of training for multiple languages.
- Security and accessibility regulations.
- SCORM LMS Compliancy. Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM) is a set of technical standards for eLearning software products. It's an industry standard for developers to use and reference how online learning content and LMSs communicate with one another. Essentially, if the vendor has a SCORM compliant LMS, it ensures online training material can be shared across systems making LMS implementation and ongoing updates easier and effective.
- Technical requirements and LMS features.
- LMS system requirements and integration that's a seamless, automated process to avoid data redundancy and version control issues.
- Programming and platform requirements including hosting options.
- LMS templates and personalized options.
- Training infrastructure and performance analysis.
- Robust training categories and curated content ranging from accounting, communication, compliance and workplace safety to customer service, HR, IT, leadership, OSHA, project and time management and more.
- Blended training options for learning preferences such as in-person seminars, online quizzes, videos, webinars and e-books.
- Dedicated client support for corporate and government accounts.
- Pricing models that fit business needs. LMS prices vary in terms of licensing fees, number of administrators and learners, permissions, customization requirements, up-charges for content and more.

Finalize Selection & Acquire the LMS Solution

Stage 3: Select The LMS System and Provider

After business training strategies are defined, initial vetting of LMS products and vendor LMS reviews are conducted, the next stage in choosing the right LMS is the formal selection process. Businesses should take advantage of requesting more information from a narrowed list of top contenders. Three suggested elements for an organization to make their final decision include:

#1. Request a vendor RFI. A request for information (RFI) contains a list of business requirements for vendors to answer. Vendors should accurately and formally describe how

they meet each requirement so that nothing is left ambiguous from previous vendor evaluation work.

#2. Referrals and case scenarios. Referrals and customer references are common during this stage of evaluation. Organizations that ask direct questions from references are more likely to understand the vendor's strengths and potential weaknesses.

Organizations may request the LMS provider complete a case scenario. The scenario is created by the organization so as to be realistic and relevant to their operations. The LMS provider is

instructed to demonstrate how they'd address a scenario specific to the organization's training needs. This demonstrates how accurately the LMS provider can meet business objectives and support requests.

#3. Product evaluation and RFP. The final stage in selecting the LMS can be completed through a formal request for proposals (RFP) with questions that relate LMS functionality to institutional goals. Objectively compare learning management systems and responses from each vendor. In some instances, an organization may follow up with

the LMS provider to ask additional questions that help them better understand options or pricing models that another vendor has proposed. LMS comparison initiatives, for example reflected in a detailed matrix, are beneficial particularly when dealing with vendors that seem to mirror each other in meeting requirements. LMS vendors who prove they can offer the best solution, are consultative, responsive and flexible are strong indicators that they may be the right fit for the organization. Their ability to service and support the client will typically outweigh a minor difference in price.

Start with the End in Mind

Selecting the right LMS requires dedicated time to research in order to create a learning strategy, evaluate requirements and work with providers to create the best platform and training solution for your organization. Outlining the organizations goals, creating a requirement list and authorizing a formal selection process as suggested in this white paper is one way in which a business will see greater return on investment and a successful LMS.

About Pryor Learning

Fred Pryor Seminars and CareerTrack, divisions of Pryor Learning, create one of the most respected international providers of professional training. Since pioneering the one-day seminar in 1970, our organization has built a reputation for high-quality, convenient, and practical business-skills training around the world, in every industry and sector. Our recent name change to Pryor Learning, LLC better represents our full line of training which includes live seminars, online training, and enterprise solutions.

Today, with more than 13 million satisfied customers, we continue to pride ourselves in providing the superior training you've come to expect. Our cutting-edge research and course development are designed to meet the adult learning needs of your employees and your organization.

At Pryor, we offer training for any learning type—in-person and through live seminars, online with videos, quizzes, e-books, webinars. Every learning style is an option based on the company and

employee needs. As a cloud-based LMS, learning is three clicks and three days away from adoption of learning plan.

Tracking and measurement can be cost-effective and simplified. Drive accountability and ROI with Pryor's advanced admin features. Admins can assign, track, and report on training in real-time with single-click reports or export to Excel. Learning objectives can be tied to professional development goals to more accurately gauge employee performance around review time.

With the Pryor LMS turnkey solution, businesses can be up and running quickly. Ongoing support and maintenance is covered. You can save money on resources and manpower to launch and train employees on how to use the system. Built-in custom marketing campaigns are available to aid in the launch and roll-out of company directed business goals such as employee emails or poster campaigns to welcome new learners; and reminders to existing learners on where to access to all online and in-person offerings. ■

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