

11 Things to consider when choosing your LMS

A short guide by Virtual College

Introduction

Selecting the right Learning Management System for your organisation can be a difficult and even stressful process. There are around 600 known LMSs on the market, each with their own strengths and qualities, so choosing the right one to suit your needs can be an overwhelming task.

With over 20 years' experience of e-learning and learning management systems, Virtual College understands the challenges of deciding on the right LMS, which is why we've used our expertise to pick out 11 things you should keep in mind when buying an LMS.



1. Usability is vital for learners...

It's essential to keep the learner experience fully in mind at all times. Learners are the primary users of the LMS, meaning that a good LMS is one that provides a brilliant user experience. The importance of a modern and engaging User Interface (UI) cannot be underestimated – a UI should encourage learners to learn, and not be a barrier to learning.

Learners are often time-pressured and need to be able to complete tasks as efficiently as possible. If they cannot access and find learning easily and quickly, your investment will quickly devalue.

2. And equally important for administrators

It's crucial to remember that an LMS will be used by your administrators, as well as learners. With this in mind, an LMS needs to be easy to use for administrators so that your organisation can fully reap the benefits of the system.

Easy to use reporting means that administrators can effortlessly track learner progress and assess when further courses need to be assigned. An efficient system means administrators can get more work done, saving your company time and money.



3. Does the vendor understand learning and technology?

An LMS is a fusion of technology and learning, meaning that the best LMSs are those that are created with both learning and technology in mind.

The LMS vendor you choose should therefore be knowledgeable about both learning and technology – an LMS is not a simple app, it is a system dedicated to enabling learning to improve people's performance. Look for a vendor that can evidence its expertise in both learning and technology, and pay careful attention to the track record of the vendor.

4. A two-way demo is best

The demonstration is a crucial part of choosing an LMS. Therefore plan your demo and engage with your stakeholders to ensure that your requirements are being addressed. Spend time thinking through how you plan to use the LMS and share this with the LMS vendor.

Do not be passive and just listen to the sales team, be engaging and ensure the LMS is demonstrated in the context of your needs.



5. Specifying your needs

Determining exactly what you need and want from your LMS is essential. It can often be overwhelming wading through endless lists of LMS features and benefits, but it's important to keep in mind exactly what you need your LMS to do and stick to it.

Having an objective method of how to evaluate your needs is a great place to start as it enables you to draw meaningful comparisons between different LMSs. For example, you may need mobile learning and content authoring, but have no need for social learning – by conducting this evaluation you are better informed about exactly which LMS you need.



6. Differentiating between price and cost

Price is important but an LMS should be bought on more than just the headline price. You need to understand the different license models available and how they can change over time. Relate the number of licenses you buy to how many people in your organisation will need access to the LMS.

Remember that training is an investment in productivity and performance. It can also be a good idea to consider investment when looking at the price and cost of ownership compared against Return on Investment (ROI) figures.

7. Discussing the Service Level Agreements and on-going support

Selecting a vendor and understanding what kind of Service Level Agreement, as well as the level of support, offered is vital when choosing the right LMS. Few LMS vendors offer first line learner support, which could be crucial to you and your learners, so it's important to keep this in mind when deciding on your LMS.

Another key aspect to keep in mind is future proofing. Is there a clear roadmap that outlines the future development of the LMS? What new learning technologies are coming down the line and can the vendor clearly communicate what they are about in the context of learning, not just technology? Equally, how does the LMS vendor go about collecting your opinion of the LMS and future development plans?



8. Working together with IT

In Tip 2 we discussed the primacy of learning over technology. When choosing an LMS do not let this become an IT-led procurement, but do ensure that the LMS vendor can satisfy your IT department's concerns.

It is important to have an LMS vendor who is able to bridge the divides between IT and L&D and who can make sure the LMS will be able to work with an organisation's existing computer systems. Whilst keeping IT in mind is important, it is not paramount for the management of a successful LMS.

Their concerns should be considered but not taken as gospel. L&D and HR departments must be closely involved as they are key to deriving the benefits of an LMS and convincing IT that an LMS is worthwhile.

9. Remembering an LMS is useless without quality content

Remember that the purpose of the LMS is to deliver and record learning, and in particular e-learning. An LMS vendor that can support you with developing and delivering e-learning is crucial. An LMS that is bought without content is unlikely to succeed and your investment will likely be wasted.



10. Recognising the power of the reporting feature

This is where the value of the LMS fully reveals itself. Pay close attention to how learners and learning activities can be reported on.

Look for an LMS with evidence of usage and powerful reporting features. It's crucial that you see the real power of reporting. Aim to find an LMS that has been well used and tested, and understand what reporting is capable of now and going forward as usage becomes more sophisticated.

Pay attention to the Audit and Analytics capabilities, as these are crucial tools for many organisations which will grow in importance.

Audit is particularly useful as it allows you to easily compile large amounts of information together and generate reports that can highlight areas for improvement and prove compliance.



11. Remembering to consider the future

We noted above a commitment to a development pathway for the LMS that will deal with standards and new technologies.

Look for an LMS vendor with both a track record and vision of the whole learning landscape, from policies such as apprenticeships to learner performance and competencies, but above all a demonstrable track record and a powerful vision of how an LMS utilising e-learning can improve an organisation's performance.



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