



An Introductory Guide to Understanding, Choosing and Implementing a Learning Management System (LMS)

An LMS can offer significant benefits to those who are involved in education and training



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Forward

An LMS can offer significant benefits to those who are involved in education and training, with successful implementation resulting in improved user engagement, knowledge to competency rates, timely achievement, cost savings, administrative efficiencies and commercial opportunities.

However, with over 500 learning management systems now on the market and the endless stream of information on the internet about Learning Management Systems (LMS) it can be a challenge knowing where to start. If you're not sure what an LMS is, whether or not your organisation really needs one, whether your current challenges managing learning can be solved with an LMS, or if another LMS other than the one you are currently using would better meet your needs, then this guide is intended to help you.

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1. What is an LMS?

A learning management system (LMS), sometimes known as a virtual learning environment (VLE), is a software application that enables you to:

- a. Deliver digital learning resources and online courses to users
- b. Access the LMS interface inside a web browser
- c. Create online courses
- d. Organise online courses
- e. Communicate online with users
- f. Assess, grade and feedback to users
- g. Track and evaluate user progress
- h. Run a variety of reports on the data collected by the LMS.

2. How is an LMS Deployed?

A Learning Management System can be deployed as a locally installed software application, or be web based and hosted in the cloud, in a variety of scenarios, as follows:

- a. A downloadable free open source application that can be installed on your local server;
- b. An open source¹ application hosted on the server of a hosting company. The hosting company may be an expert on the particular open source application you are using, or they may just provide server space;
- c. A commercial LMS privately hosted in the Cloud, which means you can do many of the things that you would do if it were hosted on your own local server, but the maintenance and updates are taken care of by the hosting company;

¹ Open source means that the application has a licence in which the copyright holder provides those that use it to study, change and distribute the software to anyone for any purpose².

² Wikipedia



- c. A downloadable commercial LMS application that can be installed on your local server;
- d. An LMS as Software as a Service (SaaS), which is a software licensing and delivery model where the LMS is centrally hosted in the Cloud by the vendor and you purchase a licence to use the LMS application software through a subscription.

3. What are the benefits of an LMS?

The most beneficial aspect of an LMS is that it brings training and education and all the associated administration, support and management of that training into one centralised location, saving you time and money, whilst providing staff and users with a tool to make learning interactive and engaging. Organisations benefit from the following:

- a. Centralised location for all learning resources and related information providing consistency of delivery and the ability to update once and deliver to all;
- b. Delivery of online courses, learning and assessment activities, and support to users anywhere at any time;
- c. Providing just in time learning to meet an immediate need;
- d. Providing immediate assessment feedback;
- f. Centralised location for recording and evaluating user engagement, progress and completion;
Bringing a range of formal and informal learning applications, e.g. social media, blogs into one centralised location for easy and effective use;
- g. Users learning at their own pace at a time that is convenient for them;
- h. A user's manager and tutor monitoring and feeding back on the individual's progress;
- i. Consistent and reliable management reporting.



4. Who uses an LMS?

In a nutshell, the users of an LMS are those who have a requirement to manage the organisation of online learning content, deliver learning content and feedback outcomes to users anywhere and at any time, and manage and report on users' progress. These are most commonly:

- **Employers** small and large requiring delivery of inductions or employee orientation, staff training, to track progress through learning, issue certificates and automate management reporting. An LMS can be critical in managing compliance training, as an LMS can flag up when an organisation could become non-compliant due to out of date staff training;
- **Educational establishments** requiring to manage learners through learning pathways, e.g. apprenticeship frameworks, to be able to create online courses, deliver training and assessment and support learners online, track learner progress and automate management reporting;
- **Not-for-Profit organisations** requiring staff and volunteers to undertake training online, track their progress, issue certificates and automate reporting.

5. What features can an LMS offer?

LMS features are wide ranging and some can offer quite unique functionality, however the most commonly utilised LMS features are:

a. Administration:

- Registering users on the LMS, either individually or in bulk;
- User self-registration;
- Enrolling users on to courses;
- Allocating permissions to different types of users e.g. learners and staff;
- Creating user groups;
- Assigning staff to user groups and courses;
- Sending email notifications to user groups, a selection of users or individuals.



- b. Creation and installation of courses consisting of:
 - o A variety of your existing training resources e.g. PowerPoint presentations, hand-outs, e-books, video and podcasts;
 - o SCORM compliant content. Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM) is a collection of standards and specifications for web-based electronic educational technology;
 - o Embedded online activities/resources hosted elsewhere e.g. Nearpod and YouTube videos;
 - o Activities/resources created in the LMS, e.g. glossary, quiz, web page.
- c. Creation of learning pathways e.g. multiple courses that make up a qualification requirement e.g. an apprenticeship framework:
 - o Creation of assessment activities with automated marking/grading and tutor feedback;
 - o Assignments;
 - o Questionnaires with multiple question types
 - o Video
- d. Awarding of learning credits, certificate creation and awarding of certificates;
- e. Communication and support:
 - o Text chat
 - o Forums
 - o Messaging
 - o Announcements
 - o User, group and LMS wide calendars;
- f. Assess and monitor user progress in real time:
 - o Course access
 - o Level of course engagement
 - o Assessment outcomes
 - o Activity/resource completion;



- g. Management reporting:
 - o User defined reports based on filtering of LMS database
 - o Course enrolments
 - o User, group and course activity and completion reports
 - o Activity/resource completion reports
 - o Export reports into Excel or PDF format
 - o Print reports;
- h. Schedule reports to be circulated to colleagues;
- i. Single sign on providing the ability to login to the LMS and automatically be logged into other external applications accessed by the user, e.g. an e-portfolio system;
- j. Integration of external applications enabling users to access these applications from within the LMS e.g. social media channels, Google Docs, Dropbox, webinar/web conferencing software;
- k. Brand the LMS in line with your organisation's branding;
- l. Configuration of user login screens and dashboard;
- m. Mobile responsive so that users can easily access, view, interact with and navigate the LMS using a mobile app or web browser on a mobile device;
- n. Backup and version control.

Other LMS Functionality

- a. In-built e-commerce with shopping cart
- b. Multi-lingual enabling users to switch between languages
- c. Integrated web conferencing
- d. Online whiteboard
- e. Exam templates
- f. Skills gap analysis
- g. Content sharing
- h. Event/workshop booking
- i. Tin Can compatibility
- o. Blended learning course creation and management e.g. workshop and online content a course requirement.



6. How do we decide which LMS is right for us?

As you can see there are a lot of LMS features and one of your biggest challenges is not just deciding on what your current requirements are, but what they are going to be in the future. Scalability is an important factor, as you don't want to invest a lot of time and effort in building up your LMS content and training staff to find out that the LMS can't provide some vital functionality that you require. You might therefore think that buying into an LMS with as many features as possible will reduce the possibility of you out growing it. However, a word of caution, the more features on offer the more there is to learn, often the less user friendly the LMS becomes and the harder it will be to get 'buy in' from staff and learners.

It is no secret that implementing an LMS in any environment can be time consuming and costly. If you choose the right LMS at the beginning and plan well the whole process will be relatively straightforward. This starts with an Online or Blended Learning Strategy, which will contain the use of an LMS, and aligns with your overall Business Strategic Plan. More information on creating a successful Blended Learning Strategy can be found [here](#). Once you have your Online or Blended Learning Strategy you can then create an LMS Implementation and Change Management Plan.

View the LMS implementation and development as a project and like any project, consider the potential risks to the project and how to overcome, or limit their impact.

If drawing up a blended learning strategy, be clear what blended learning means to your organisation. If you don't know this then your staff can't be expected to know either. Very importantly share your Online or Blended Learning Strategy with all staff in your organisation. Everyone needs a clear vision of what you are setting out to achieve.



Don't choose an LMS based on whether it can replicate what you currently do and that you can utilise learning content you currently own. Although staff might start off by trying to closely map what they do, it should not be your aim to replicate face to face practises. The LMS provides an opportunity to deliver exciting, engaging, interactive and varied learning content, to improve the effectiveness of your management reporting and make learning more accessible to users.

Make a list of the LMSs that might suit your needs and ask for a demonstration of each to show their features and get a feel for the user friendliness and functionality. Staff 'buy in' is the most common challenge faced by organisations implementing an LMS, so top of your priority list should be user friendliness and the opportunity to achieve an outcome, however small, in a short period of time. Shortlist two or three and provide staff with a demonstration so that they can gain an insight into what it is you are going to be asking them do and achieve. Ask for feedback from staff; if they feel involved in the process they are more likely to support its implementation. In a large organisation rather than all staff, this demonstration might be with a project team. Then base your decision on how well the LMS meets your business objectives and receives the best feedback from staff. Once you've decided on one LMS ask for a trial and ensure during this trial that staff from different departments or teams, who will be creating and structuring courses and managing learning, get an opportunity to use some of the LMS's basic functions such as upload resources, create a course and enroll users. If staff find it difficult or confusing to do these tasks then maybe you haven't chosen the right LMS for your organisation.

Whilst speaking to an LMS supplier ask them if they have customers in the same line of work as yourselves and ask if you can speak to them. Usually people will be very honest about what is working well and not so well.

7. How do we approach LMS implementation?

Your Implementation Plan is only as good as the knowledge and experience of those who created the plan in the first place. So it is important to acknowledge that it is very likely that your plan will be enhanced and developed as challenges are faced and progress is made.



Steps to take prior to introducing an LMS to end users:

- a. Firstly develop an LMS Implementation and Change Management Plan
- c. Ensure that staff can understand your vision and provide them with a demonstration of using an LMS;
- d. Assemble a project team ideally consisting of:
 - o A project manager, who takes overall responsibility for the project and keeps the implementation plan on track;
 - o A senior management team (SMT) member who can then report back to the SMT on progress and any concerns that need to be addressed;
 - o A learning technologist, or competent individual who uses learning technologies, who has LMS knowledge;
 - o An individual from each educational team or department who will be responsible for leading the LMS development within their team.
- e. As mentioned above, one of the biggest challenges you are likely to face is staff 'buy in'. However, staff negativity about change and stepping out of their comfort zone is usually down to a lack of confidence, skills and understanding. So it's very important to address this right at the beginning. Draw up a training needs analysis (TNA) and learning and development plan, (both available on our website here), initially for those staff who will be leading on the LMS project. Don't just consider the IT skills of staff, it's equally as important to include pedagogical skills, as the move to delivering online using an LMS will mean changes to the way training is delivered, assessed and supported;
- f. Based on the outcomes of individuals' learning and development plans draw up a company-wide plan to address the training needs of staff. Ideally schedule training opportunities over a year, providing staff with a short training session followed by a period of time to use the skills learnt. It is far more effective to build skills over a period of time, supporting practical activities as staff develop their skills and confidence;



- g. Using the organisational strategy and implementation plan as reference, the project team maps short and medium term actions to meet the strategic objectives, and identifies how they will be achieved. The project team members are then responsible for drawing up action plans with their own team to meet the project team's requirements, monitoring their team's progress against time bound objectives, and ensuring that all members of their team are fully supported and engaged with the project;
- h. Project team members identify a champion in their own team, someone who is excited about the LMS implementation and is keen to develop new skills. This champion helps to drive forwards staff engagement, and development of content creation and online pedagogical skills so that objectives are achievable;
- i. Add content to your LMS which is mandatory for staff to use, e.g. holiday request and absence forms, calendars, and meeting collaboration;
- j. Create an online course for the LMS aligned with the training requirements identified, which provides staff with bite sized chunks of learning on how to perform LMS tasks. The project team's learning technologist, or other identified individual, should support staff on the course to demonstrate effective online support. Require all staff to complete the course, therefore providing them with experience of participating as a learner in an online course;
- k. Devise a staff reward scheme based on the development of skills, building of online content and engagement of learners. Rewards don't need to be monetary;
- l. An LMS evolves over time. As staff develop more advanced skills, content, tracking and reporting will improve. Don't expect staff to perfect the organisation's vision in the early days of LMS implementation;
- d. As with any project, evaluate progress against the target dates of the Implementation Plan objectives.



Getting all your stakeholders on board with the implementation of your LMS, thorough planning and good communication between the project team and staff are key to the success of your LMS.

8. Summary

For further information on whether an LMS is right for your organisation, to receive an LMS demo, support for LMS implementation or acquire online course content for your LMS, contact:

Enquiries@elearningmarketplace.co.uk

or

Tel: 0844 854 9218



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