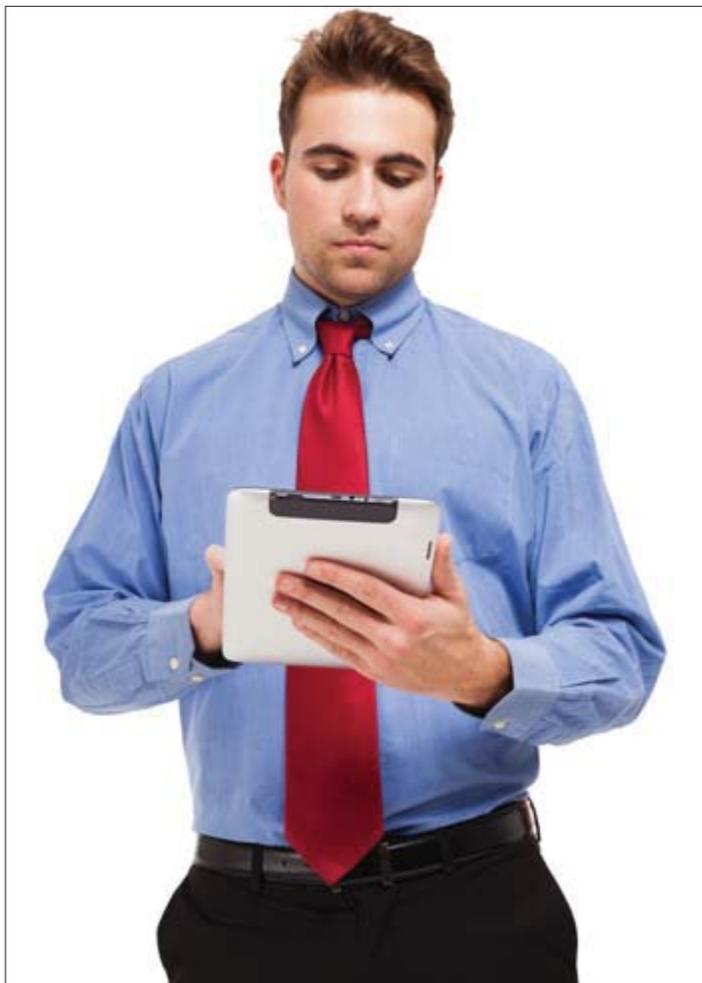# Latest Trends In LMS/LP Industry

Are we there yet?

By Craig Weiss

No time like the present to bring you the latest trends in the LMS and LP industry. I'd include LCMS, but since there are like two top tier ones and then what is left of the rest, nothing to report – except there are two who, if you love LCMSs, they exist and if you don't, well congrats you are in the right place.

Learning Platforms for me have become a separate entity within the entire learning system marketplace. The key difference between them and say the LMS market in general are analytics and reporting – as in not as robust or strong than say on average for the LMS space.

Learning platforms usually focus on the SMB market, with small being important – but as you will see – staying with something that works, well, why do it when there is money in those large companies – money I say!

LMSs can be non-traditional and the usage of "traditional" being tossed around like a Frisbee at the beach is on the upswing from who you might ask? Why some of those learning platforms, and yeah, some LMS vendors who want you to know that they are not-traditional, whatever that means – which to them could mean one thing and to you, something entirely else.

The key trend to remember, regardless of the product you are seeking is, "There is no one size fits all" in the industry. It is by far the biggest trend.

Second biggest trend – look beyond the most well-known names in the industry. Sure, there will be times that a Big Dog vendor will align to your needs, but remember they are not the only players in town. 690 and counting are now in this town, with quite likely another 100 or so, yet to be discovered.

Of the 690, I'd go with 100 or so that I wouldn't have an issue saying that is a vendor to consider (depending on objectives/needs/etc.) for you. Remember that the average age of LMS vendors is in the range of two to four years. Equally remember that just because they are brand new doesn't mean they have all the bells and whistles nor that they are adding the coolest stuff. In just the past few months, I have seen some very cool capabilities coming from vendors who have been around for more than eight years (as an online learning vendor).

Eight years might seem short, but in this industry, it is Dad level. 10 or more? Close to Grandparent. Heck at 12plus – senior discounts should be applied!

Top Trends

Enterprise

First off the term "enterprise" and "extended enterprise" no longer apply in today's business world, but that isn't stopping folks from using each of the terms. If you are unfamiliar with the terms, than having a vendor pitch "Enterprise" isn't going to win you over and most likely you will move on from them – a chance most vendors are willing to take when they pitch "Enterprise".

Enterprise in its simplest form means 10,000 or more people. It equally screams "internal" as in internal employees.

And it is on a hot streak in the LMS and yep dare I say it? Learning Platform market too (but stated on their pricing as 'enterprise' "contact us for more info").

On the LMS side of the house though, "enterprise" is no longer being said behind closed telephones or email, now it is visible front and center.

Some vendors focus solely on the "enterprise" market and nothing else. And yes there are some who focus "enterprise" but if you are breathing and can tie your own shoes and have say 500 learners – come on board!

The problem of course is if my main target is "enterprise" and you are say "SMB" will you still value me as a customer? It's a game some vendors are willing to play, but if I was B2B, I'd say you win – and go elsewhere.

Oh and in case you were wondering why "enterprise" is hot? Money, my friend – money.

Mobile Learning

Another hot one on the market, with the sector pushing forward with such important terms as:

- **Responsive** – Guess what? Nearly everyone is pitching responsive. Now whether they actually are – that is another story
- **Native apps or not using apps because we are HTML sup-**

portive – Either go native app or HTML5 app

- **On/Off synch** – slowly purring along – I wish it was speeding along, but purring is better than not breathing
- **Manager/Instructor features** – For quite a few vendors it does exist, but it is not getting as much play as it should – part of the problem is robustness of it, the other part is that little thing called on/off synch – it makes manager/instructor IMO more beneficial than requiring constant contact with the net
- **SMS notifications** – Should be on fire, it's on slow burn. Vendors who have it are mobile oriented and get it, those who don't – uh, are you sure you understand the mobile scene?
- **We support or have mobile learning** – Always remember that the term m-learning or mobile learning when pitched with a learning system vendor simply means that you can view their system on your mobile web browser

Of all the terms under mobile learning, responsive is dominating.

Machine Learning aka Predictive Analysis

Consumers (buyers) want it – vendors are slugs at doing it. Think of it as an early stage of AI. I've written in the past about Predicative Analysis, but a couple of keys here:

- a. It should appear on the home page of learner – that first page, not page six, not hidden behind box two – right there – on the home page
- b. It is not like "Amazon Search" – Whoever pitches that clearly has never used Amazon. When I use it, I always see products that I wouldn't buy in a million years under "suggestions".
- c. At a base level – Ability to recommend courses based on what the learner has completed or is currently taken (course wise)
- d. Secondly, ability to recommend content/video/media/docs/ etc. based on what the learner has completed or is currently taken
- e. Next, Ability to include other items to enhance recommendation of courses/content Take it up a notch:
- **Tie it to skills by each learner** – but have a vetting option by the administrator; data has shown that people tend to rate themselves higher on skills then they actually are. Thus without a vetting process, the results you receive from the recommendation will be skewed and inaccurate, so the premise of pinpointing learning based variable A and B is gone – since B is misrepresented.
- **Tie it to multiple variables** – lots of options here – the more variables you have the more information you can extract and the more specific and accurate you can build upon their learning (and no, having their profiles as a variable makes absolutely no sense. Although if the variable was a job role and another variable was X course with a variable of tested out skill then the system could recommend blah blah).

You could even generate recommended webinars to attend based on whatever videos they watched and even length of video – what content was covered at that point.

The whole thing is that machine learning is in demand from buyers (they may use machine learning, predictive analysis or adaptive learning as their terms).

Oh and yeah there are some vendors offering the (c) (d) and part of (e), while a couple of others have added skills (minus the vetting) and profiles.

Content Providers HEAR us ROAR

These are folks or even one person who has created a course or courses and is going B2B route. They are truly small business but have big potential and it is a fast and growing market for the LMS/LP space.

Yet, the number of vendors who SEE it is actually quite small. Some content providers may list themselves as a training provider. In one sense they are a start-up, in another sense they could be strong in ILT or paper-based and are slowly or jumping heavily into online learning.

The key to landing them? B2B Pricing Model that is truly B2B and not some funky internal pricing spun for B2B. Oh, and strong e-commerce.

Support is getting better

But still stinks overall. Numerous vendors whose reputations as related to support rated right up there with swamp water are making changes, but still the trend with support is poor (on average). Biggest gripes?

- Does not return calls or e-mails (continues to be a big issue)
- Supported us at the beginning, now no longer does (this aligns more to the "We dropped you off the cliff at six months, but hey thanks for being a client of ours")
- Doesn't see our issue as being a priority (granted it might not be, but if your system is down – yeah, that is a priority)

I can't figure out what the problem here is when it comes to fixing support and more importantly, customer support at that. Here's a novel idea – put your employees through some type of online training.

Quick Trend Hits

- Ecosystem continues to a plus (everything is in here... except maybe an authoring tool)
- Newbies entering the e-learning market – hot, hot hot – which means most folks who do not have a tech background or skill set – so drop the jargon
- Everything is easy to use and modern – it's the marketing spin you have always wanted – and here it is – No one is ever going to say, "Our system is difficult to use and wow, Oscar the Grouch wouldn't even want to hang out in it."
- xAPI vs Tin Can – both terms are trending, but the term to use is xAPI – and yeah, it is still a work in progress – regardless though, I'd want it in my system
- Higher Education here I come, wait.no, uh – Corporate here I come right from Higher Education where I was and uh, still am... – Big name Higher Education platforms rumbling into the corporate market; Blackboard was first (similar to HE version), Instructure was second (Bridge), and Brightcove by D2L is third. There are some smaller folks too, but while the top three battle each other in the HE space – and it is a battle, each one is now also in the corporate marketplace.

Bottom Line

While I did hold back on some trends (best left for my think tank) there are more than enough here to share with your friends and family. **TEL**

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