

10 factors to consider

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Cloud solutions are the new normal as organizations opt to deploy more business systems in the cloud. For learning professionals, cloud-based solutions provide a wide range of benefits from cost savings to decreased delivery time, to global reach. Before selecting a cloud-based learning provider, you should understand all the benefits and be prepared to ask potential providers critical questions regarding the architecture and management of the service you are considering.

Cloud computing and learning management

Cloud computing, in the most basic sense, is the use of services provided by a number of servers accessible over the Internet. There are a range of cloud providers large and small that deliver a wide variety of computing services from simple data storage to comprehensive applications. Without investing in technical infrastructure and personnel, organizations can enjoy various services and software applications as if they existed within their own data center.

Learning professionals continue to accept cloud technology faster than any other area of HR software due to the convenience, reduced

administration and better user experience. And while learning systems are critically important to maintaining the ongoing health of a business, they are often given a lower priority than other business systems such as sales, finance, and payroll systems. As a result, learning systems are an ideal candidate for the switch to cloud technology. In addition, cloud-based learning allows leaders of learning and development functions, who may not be technologists, to present a viable option and discussion point to their IT team. If you are not using or considering a cloud-based learning system, you are missing out on one of the most valuable opportunities to deliver a comprehensive learning solution to your organization.

A system of engagement

Since the late 1990s, LMSs have helped organizations automate their learning programs by providing resources online. More recently, LMSs have evolved from a system of record to a tool that supports continuous learning with the learner experience at the forefront. Today's LMS needs the right learning assets and delivery options to

enable users to succeed.

Cloud-based LMSs are highly interactive and are scalable for organizations large and small. Organizations with cloud-based LMSs can expect to engage more employees and provide a rich learner experience, whether their employees are in the office or on-the-go.

Choose a provider that has a history of experience with cloud-based solutions as well as a deep understanding of the learning needs you are addressing. To help you make an educated choice for your organization, we've provided information on the top 10 benefits of a cloud-based learning architecture.

Top 10 benefits of cloud-based learning architecture

1. Cost savings

One of the obvious benefits of licensing a cloud-based LMS for your learning needs is the elimination of upfront investments such as building out and supporting a technical infrastructure as well as the human capital costs of installation, configuration and ongoing maintenance. Most cloud providers license by seats, allowing you to pay for what you need and avoid capital expenditures.

2. Global reach

Cloud computing companies invest heavily in architecting solutions that are robust enough to connect with users wherever they are on the planet. This gives you the ability to drive more learning to more people with lowered wait times and a better overall learning experience.

3. Rapid deployment

Cloud learning solutions can be up and running almost immediately, without burdening your IT department. In many cases, self-service features even allow learning and development professionals to be in control of powerful features that allow them to deliver learning to hundreds of employees within minutes. Patches and updates are applied with little or no disruption to the learning experience.

4. Application reliability

Cloud vendors' systems are designed to provide high redundancy and availability. They provide services on a scale out of reach for most corporate IT departments. In addition, cloud vendors know their system better than a corporate IT generalist — making incident response faster. In short, the cloud enables a higher level of reliability at much lower cost.

5. Secure environment

Most vendors who provide cloud-based solutions spend a great deal of time and effort to provide multiple layers of security, ensuring the protection of your data. Cloud vendors must maintain security standards that ensure the integrity of the most security sensitive customer's data and content both foreign and domestic. These high standards are then applied across the board to all hosted customers.

6. Enterprise integration

Cloud-based learning solutions can stand-alone or integrate with your other HR and business solutions. Cloud providers know they have to integrate with other corporate applications so they are more likely to have well-established, standards-based solutions for integration. That said, integration time and ease varies from vendor to vendor so you need to ask what types of integrations are supported and how easy they are to implement.

7. Support when you need it

Licensing a cloud-based learning solution should provide you with access to additional resources that act as an extension of your own team. Support services can extend beyond just technical and customer support to include providing expertise to assist you with delivering the skills development and behavior changes your organization needs. Common services of a cloud-based LMS include content installation,

customer and technical support, learning program support, and examples of best practices.

8. Scalable for organizations of all sizes

Cloud learning solutions are scalable and can accommodate twenty, 50,000 or even a million learners. This can be beneficial for small businesses allowing them to purchase only what they need and scale up easily without any disruptions. It can also be particularly beneficial for very large companies just beginning to develop their learning architecture and taking their first steps in deploying a learning management solution.

9. Consistent performance

With a cloud-based LMS you do not have to run the risk of running out of capacity and delivering a bad experience to learners. Cloud providers predict and plan for increases in capacity. Cloud service providers can quickly scale up and down the bandwidth you require depending upon what you are trying to accomplish.

10. Reduced burden on IT staff

The cloud-based LMS provider is responsible for the entire technical infrastructure required for your users — all you need to provide is Internet access. Your own company's IT department only needs to be involved in assisting in the product selection process and any integration work that may be required between the cloud-based LMS and your internal business systems. This frees up your team and your IT department so they can address other priorities. Cloud learning solutions require no investments in hardware or software maintenance. And, when new innovative features are available, cloud-based LMS customers can easily get them without having to burden their IT department.

Should I consider a cloud solution?

Based on the benefits described in this article, there is a very good chance that a cloud-based LMS can provide significant benefits to your learners and to your learning organization. **TEL**



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