

Now is the Time to Consider

Open Source Learning Management Systems for enterprise

 By Sally Ann Moore



B Background and Introduction to Open Source Software:

Open source software is the term used to describe free software whose source code is made freely available through license, allowing the use, modification and distribution.

The concept of free software and code sharing has long been established but Open Source as a term and a development model came into its own with the growth of the Internet, gaining prominence towards the late 1990's. The Open Source Initiative was established in 1998.

Some familiar names and success stories of open source include:

- Linux – operating system
- Firefox – web browser
- Drupal – content management system
- MySQL – database

Since then a whole industry of open source support has grown up and a variety of applications and platforms have emerged, including several learning management systems, starting with Moodle.

Moodle – the first open source learning management system

MOODLE (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) is a free software e-learning platform, also known as a Learning Management System, or Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Launched in Perth Australia on 20 august 2002, designed for the education sector, Moodle is the leading open source learning management system.

The stated philosophy of Moodle includes a constructivist and social constructionist approach to education, emphasizing that learners (and not just teachers) can contribute to the educational experience. Using

these pedagogical principles, Moodle provides a flexible environment for learning communities. (The second largest implementation so far is the UK Open University)

As of June 2013, it had a user base of 83,008 registered and verified sites, serving 70,696,570 users in 7.5+ million courses with 1.2+ million teachers.

This means that the world has a very solid experience with Moodle and the software and its support is mature. There are many vendors that host Moodle such as Remote-Learner and MoodleRooms - which was recently purchased by Blackboard. Because Moodle is open source software, Moodle can be customized to fit academic needs for students, instructors and the Moodle administrators.

More recently, Moodle has been adapted to meet the needs of the corporate sector, and the time appears to be right for open source LMS to become *mainstream* in the world of business. *Open source is no longer a risk.*

The Time is Now:

Something close to a tipping point is reached when ground up adoption of open source technologies meets with government recommendations and directives around open source friendly policies and private sector uptake. For example, In France, on the 19th September 2012, the prime minister's office issued a letter and guidelines, recommending the use of open source software in the French public sector and private enterprise. Check [here](#).

This, the maturity, the variety of offerings and the benefits of open source learning management systems are a whole set of reasons why companies in France, and worldwide, with e-Learning projects should be looking very seriously at open source LMS for the coming years.

The Advantages of open source LMS systems:

- **Free and Freedom** - Whilst the 'free' aspect of an open source license is an attraction, it should not be overestimated. Any LMS implementation project needs a budget and will incur costs, if it is to be successful. Of more on going and transformative potential for an organisation is the *freedom* that open source brings; freedom to extend, customise and modify the product to suit specific business needs; no need to wait for the vendor's roadmap to catch up with your vision for what the LMS should look like .

- **Cost-savings** – No license fees, unlike a commercial proprietary system can mean significant cost savings. Investment can be focused on change management rather than the technology in itself. Large organisations who have switched from proprietary LMS platforms to Open source LMS designed for enterprise (such as TOTARA, Docebo, DOKEOS, eFront and Ganesha in France), report typical implementation cost savings ranging from 60- 80% . Recent, documented examples include:

- **UK supermarket retail giant TESCO** was an early adopter of Totara and [reported 80% costs savings](#) on their implementation compared with a proprietary product.

- **Northumberland County Council** reported cost savings and efficiencies to their training program of 80% with [the use of Totara](#)

- **Hotel chain Jurys Inn** are switching top Open Source for employee training – around [3200 courses completed per month](#)

- **AXA Insurance** used Ganesha LMS in France to [train insurance 1000 brokers](#)

- **Security** – A once traditional key criticism of cautious organisations and IT departments is that open source is more prone to security issues. The 'many eyeballs' theory argues the opposite, that software code will be more secure when it is open to wider scrutiny. Without this access to source code the end user is dependent on the software

vendor and their roadmap and priorities placed on fixing software bugs.

- **Maturity** – Open Source LMS systems have now reached mainstream enterprise and there is about 3 years of solid experience in the corporate world. Totara, for instance, already has 300 plus subscribers across many sectors including; retail, government, healthcare, hospitality, energy. From small businesses to large global organisations with over 200,000 users. Including: Sony, Vodafone, Cable & Wireless, EasyJet, Michelin China, Logica. Another nice example is "The Council of Europe" Founded in 1949, The Council of Europe is the oldest international organisation working towards European integration, It has a particular emphasis on legal standards, human rights, democratic development, the rule of law and cultural co-operation. It has 47 member states with some 800 million citizens. The council have selected the open source LMS Dokeo for the renovation of its training offerings for its members. This brings Dokeos users over the 2 million mark. <http://www.dokeos.com/en/node/642>

How to get going now!

At iLearning Forum, Paris on 11th and 12th February 2014, training managers and IT managers can discover Open source LMS for themselves. The free conference features a dedicated track of four moderated presentations illustrating real case studies and strategy for open source LMS in France and Europe.

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“Open Source LMS for enterprise has arrived showing real cost-savings, increased efficiencies and product adaptability to corporate needs. You may not be too concerned about whether a product is open source or not, but the documented benefits are hard to ignore.” TEL



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