

Five Tips and an RFP Template - Choosing the Right LMS (Apr 15)



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“Selecting an LMS that is the right fit for your organization is an exciting path to be on as it will set your organization up for a future of exceptional learning and growth! There are many options on the market that provide incredible value so I am confident that you will find a robust solution. I highly recommend that you download the RFP template linked here.”

The learning management system (LMS) industry continues to expand. With over 600 different products on the market, research from **Bersin by Deloitte** found that the LMS market was worth over \$2.5 billion in 2014. We can expect this number to grow significantly in the next three years as separate research from **MarketsandMarkets** indicates that the market will grow to nearly \$8 billion by 2018.

This rapid growth is partially explained by the tremendous value that an LMS brings to organizations of all shapes and sizes. Apart from the obvious benefits of being able to provide standardized training to multiple employees across vast territories, my research indicates that organizations are reaping massive benefits by using an LMS for compliance-related training, talent development, and educating external stakeholders (customers, partners, and resellers). Whether you are searching for your first LMS, or looking to upgrade your old legacy system to something more flexible, this article is for you.

Here are five tips for choosing the right LMS for your organization along with an RFP template that will ensure you cover all of your bases when comparing your options.

Tip 1: Determine and define your LMS goals

This may go without saying, but it is crucial to define all that you want to achieve with your LMS before you begin researching your options. Are you wanting to provide learning and talent development opportunities to your employees? What about compliance or health and safety training? Consider what organizational goals you want to achieve with your LMS and, on a more granular level, how these goals apply to the needs of your LMS users. In defining your goals, it is in your best interest to ensure they are SMART—specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound.

Here are some questions that will help you define your LMS goals:

- Who are the stakeholders of your future LMS? (Users, trainers, instructional designers, impacted departments, shareholders, others, etc.)

- What will be their primary interactions with the LMS?
- What actions will be most important to them?
- What shortcomings will frustrate them most?
- What reporting capabilities do various stakeholders need? (Training results, employees' progress and accomplishments, etc.)

Finding an LMS with a reporting tool that meets your specific needs is a whole other topic in its own right. LMS reporting abilities have been identified as one of the largest gaps in the today's LMS market.

Tip 2: Determine your LMS specifications

In an ideal world you will find an LMS that meets all of your needs and wants but it is important to clarify what your "must-haves" are when researching your options. This will cut down the time required when you get demonstrations of the learning management systems you are considering—only demo those that you know meet your "must-have" list. The RFP template attached to this article goes into said "must-haves" in detail. In addition, here are some general questions to consider for your first point of contact with an LMS vendor:

- What out-of-the-box features does the LMS have?
- Is the LMS configurable?
- How many organizations or users are using the existing LMS and what do they use it for? Ensure that the system serves organizations who use the LMS in similar ways to you.
- Is the LMS interoperable—what systems does it integrate with and what is the cost?

Tip 3: Take the LMS for a ride

Demos are key to getting a feel for the LMS and seeing first-hand how it will help you reach your goals. This is where you will really see which LMS shines. It is also the time for you to dig deep and press vendors on specific features, integrations, reporting capabilities, and workflows that will make or break the adoption of your LMS. I recommend that you outline a few scenarios that your stakeholders will experience in the LMS so you can see exactly what this process will look like.

For example, suppose one of your goals is to provide, monitor, and report on mandatory compliance training for your employees. You will want to see what this process looks like for employees, trainers, managers, administrators, and even the compliance officers who receive the compliance reports.

If you have the opportunity to get a sandbox or trial of the LMS, take the time to test out the support and training services. This is also a great opportunity to evaluate the system's ease of use by allowing employees to explore the interface. A quick follow-up survey to gauge usability will prove to be invaluable. It will also give you an idea of how much training it will take to bring your people up to speed to maximize adoption.

Tip 4: Get feedback and check references

Treat this step as you would a product review and seek feedback not only from the references they provide you, but from user groups and communities on the web as well. When checking references, I recommend using a questionnaire so that you can grade answers and compare between vendors. A quick Google search should provide you with blogs or user forums of the LMSs you are considering, but if this is unsuccessful LinkedIn Groups is another great place to start.

Tip 5: Plan ahead—purchase for your present & future needs

Having foresight and a solid understanding of how you plan to use your LMS in both the next five and ten years can assist you in choosing an LMS that will grow as you do. Companies who hopped onto the LMS bandwagon when they first appeared ten years ago are already going through costly process and system changes to meet new system needs. While it is impossible to completely foresee how you may outgrow an LMS, there are a few key considerations to keep in mind when vetting your options.

The first growth factor to consider is users—how many do you expect to have annually in the next ten years? Knowing these numbers will put you in a better position. Be sure to ask about the flexibility of potential solutions in regard to both minor and major changes. One way to gauge the LMS firm's capability to adapt to growth is how they have responded to past market trends. Do they release iterations of their product and how often? Can they provide you with past examples where they have quickly implemented new ideas or technologies?

The second growth factor to consider is functionality. In the past ten years the LMS has already drastically evolved. Locking yourself into an LMS that does not have a history of evolving to meet quickly changing market needs and technologies can be risky. Do your due diligence and check into the history of the company. Where do their roots lie and how far has their LMS developed since inception?

In conclusion

Selecting an LMS that is the right fit for your organization is an exciting path to be on as it will set your organization up for a future of exceptional learning and growth! There are many options on the market that provide incredible value so I am confident that you will find a robust solution. I highly recommend that you download the RFP template linked [here](#). In addition to providing you with a technical checklist and a vendor information form, it also breaks down a project plan to ensure can implement your LMS in a timely manner.

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