

6 Point Checklist for Choosing the Right eLearning Outsourcing Development Partner (Oct 15)

Developing eLearning in house is a very expensive option. Maintaining an internal team of Instructional Designers, content developers, and eLearning creators not only adds to the costs, but also adds to the management headaches. Therefore, with access to experienced eLearning content development talent, rapid completion, quicker turnaround, less management headache and cost savings are some of the common reasons why organizations consider outsourcing as an option.



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“eLearning doesn’t just “happen”! It requires careful planning and implementation.” - Anonymous

According to the research report released by Global Industry Analysts, Inc., with a five year compound annual growth rate of approximately 9.2%, the global eLearning Market is expected to reach \$107 billion by 2015. Many reports like this and several other studies have confirmed that eLearning is only going to grow. While traditional learning methods will stay, businesses of all types, right from schools to large corporations, are increasingly opting for online training.

As developing eLearning in house is expensive, most organizations consider outsourcing as a viable option. A research by Bersin by Deloitte has found that that an online course development project could cost 20-40% less in India. India, with its large number of English speaking professionals and faster turnaround time, has become a preferred eLearning outsourcing destination.

But, before you finalize your eLearning outsourcing partner, here are few things which you need to carefully evaluate:

1. **eLearning Background.**

Let's be clear that eLearning development is not only a technology job. It is a highly skillful work which requires an understanding of not only the eLearning tools but also the business goals, the learning preferences, and needs of the learners. Only the trained professionals who have instructional experience can provide the real value. Unless eLearning development is their core business, your partner will not be able to deliver the quality output to you. eLearning development requires the involvement of Instructional Designers, visual designers, learning experts, testing experts, Subject Matter Experts, and also authoring tools experts. Only a company which has been working in this domain for a considerable period can have such a cohesive team. Look for companies which are profitable and have been in business since long – that will actually be your insurance. I would go one step further and suggest that look for companies wherein the founders or key team members have a solid eLearning background.

2. **Experience.**

If you don't want to be the Guinea Pig, you must evaluate the vendor for its experience of working on similar eLearning projects and its experience of working with multi-cultural teams. Don't hesitate to ask for demos and sample work. Select a vendor who has won the praise and trust of well-known names in the corporate world. If required, speak to their customer and understand their experience on timely delivery, quality of output, technology competence, costs etc.

3. **Project Management And Processes.**

Yes, I know I have mentioned that eLearning development is not a technology development. But let's accept it, eLearning project development is going to require adherence to the principals of project management. When you are looking for a vendor, look for someone who has well-established project management tools and processes and the teams are trained on those. You are going to need periodic reviews, demos, and status updates, and the vendor needs to have the required setup in place to facilitate this.

4. **Quality Assurance.**

The quality of output is probably one of the prime concerns with [eLearning outsourcing](#). Unfortunately, unless the output is seen, it is hard for you to know the quality. However, by looking at the past work samples, demos, and quality assurance processes and systems which the vendors might have, you can take a call on how well a job the vendor can do on the quality aspect. The important aspects of quality checks in case of eLearning projects are linguistic testing (ensuring that there are no grammatical errors in the content and it is developed as per the learners' backgrounds), technical appropriateness (ensuring that the content is adaptable to the technical environment of the learners), and the quality of the content.

5. **Flexibility And Scaling.**

Outsourcing your eLearning development to a small company with a couple of people might give you a cost advantage, but do know that you are running a huge risk of essentially depending on couple of people. Ideally, outsourcing should give you the flexibility to scale up or scale down the team size at a very short notice and there should not be a strong dependence on any one person in the team. Getting the right people on the job should not be your headache – really.

6. **Bells And Whistles: Licensed Software, Image Banks.**

You don't want to get into legal troubles because of your eLearning vendors non-adherence to compliance. Make sure you confirm that the vendor has the licensed copies of the eLearning tools and technologies and access to licensed images. There is no excuse for using free images or pirated tools in the development cycle. You might also want to check which Learning Management System the vendor uses for checking and certifying the course compliance.

We always believe that the eLearning vendor needs to work as a partner to the company and needs to be invested in it. The vendor needs to invest in building the understanding about the client organization and should always work towards continuous improvement.