

Choosing an LMS

A Guide for the Learning Administrator



Ease of Use for the Administrator

Let's face it, a complicated LMS can easily scare away the very people that need to use it, learners. But, ease of use is just as important for administrators who are the key to your LMS success.

After all, they are the daily users and ambassadors of the system!

When considering an LMS, it's crucial to think about what kind of User Experience (UX) it provides for administrators. Just like sales teams rely on a CRM to do their work, administrators rely on an LMS to do theirs. So, the ability to use the LMS with ease is critical and equally important for your business.

The administrator is the single point of contact for all LMS-related issues. They are the liaison between the LMS and your stakeholders. So, when those people ask questions, they need to know how to answer.

Creating awareness about how the LMS is an invaluable asset is part of the job of an administrator. But, if they are not happy because they can't figure out how to upload content or assign learning paths, this only sets the stage for others having problems as well.

What features will help Ease of Use for the LMS Administrator?

Ease of Use for the LMS administrator usually come down to a few simple features:

1. **Simple User Interface.** A good user interface will make it easy to do the tasks you want to do.
2. **Automation.** Automation frees up time to do other important things instead of trying to manage the LMS.
3. **Reporting.** An administrator must track progress and reports should be easy to pull from within the LMS.
4. **Personalized Learning.** An administrator needs to be able to automate individual learning paths. This removes several administrative steps and tasks.

When choosing an LMS, these features should be top of mind when it comes to Ease of Use for the administrator.

The Selection Process

According to Brandon Hall Group, about 50 percent of companies are looking to replace their LMS. User experience was a big reason for the switch but also high on the list was the need for an improved administrative experience.

So, what does this mean?

Ease of Use is critical for LMS success. When selecting an LMS, consider your learners first. But, also consider the needs of the LMS administrator.

Ease of use for the administrator

What will they need to do with the LMS? What are their content creation, assignment and reporting needs? How will the LMS help them be more efficient and effective at administering your training program?

With over 600 LMSs on the market, selecting one can be daunting. To make it a little easier, draw up a list of considerations to help prioritize potential systems. As an example, if you have SharePoint then you might put an LMS, like ShareKnowledge, on your shortlist. Regardless, Ease of Use should be at the top of your list, not only for your learners but administrators as well.

Ease of Use for Employees

One of the most critical aspects of a Learning Management system (LMS) is to develop and grow the skills of employees. If the system creates a barrier for employees to learn, it defeats the entire purpose of an LMS.

As a result, employees aren't getting on-boarded efficiently, compliance training falls through the cracks and learning programs are stalled indefinitely.

This creates a huge problem.

Not only has your investment gone to waste, but now you're left looking for another system.

Remember, aside from the interview process, your LMS is often times the first interaction your employees has with your company.

And, you never get a second chance at a first impression. If your employees can't log in to the system or are unable to complete assigned courses, this makes for a very bad user experience.

Employees need a great learning experience to succeed in their job roles. And, the biggest challenge to this in general is a terrible user experience.

What LMS Traits Create a Better User Experience for Employees?

In this fast-paced world, learners want an LMS that is easy to use, with an interface that provides access to content anytime, anywhere and with hassle-free navigation.

As you're evaluating learning systems, these attributes will appeal to the ease of use needs for employees:

1. **Familiar Platform.** People like what they know. Choose an LMS that provides a familiar experience that they already understand and use (e.g., Microsoft Office).
2. **Single Sign On.** Remove the barrier of forgotten passwords by selecting an LMS that utilizes single sign-on.
3. **Personalized Learning Paths.** Create enthusiasm with an easy to navigate personal home page that details what courses have already been taken, what courses are coming up and suggestions for other talent development options.
4. **Integration.** Make it easy for employees to streamline all their tasks with an LMS that is integrated (e.g., sync with calendar, webinars).
5. **Flexible and Customizable.** An overly cluttered home page is confusing and can cause employees to feel overwhelmed. An LMS that can be customized ensures that only the features needed are available.

During the LMS selection process, keep these features top of mind while exploring additional requirements.

The Selection Process

Ease of Use for Employees

Ease of Use is one of the leading factors why a business chooses to replace their LMS. Therefore, it should be a leading feature to consider when choosing an LMS.

While creating a team to evaluate potential LMSs, be sure to include your employees. They will be the primary users utilizing the system and should have their input heard before selecting an LMS.

There are a few questions that should be asked during the process:

- **Is the system too complex?**
Simple is a good thing when it comes to an LMS. The more complex it is, the more confusion it creates. User adoption suffers as a result. Don't get sidetracked with flashy 'bells and whistles.'
- **Will the user be able to go from section A to section B easily?**
Really pay attention to the number of buttons and how many clicks it takes to do simple learning tasks. Also look for common symbols that the user would recognize.
- **Will the LMS work anytime?**
Be sure that the user can access the system from a variety of different situations (e.g., online-offline availability, availability in low connectivity areas etc.)
- **Is the text readable? Are the images loading correctly, are the videos optimized?**
This is often overlooked but don't forget the details. They're important.

While this isn't a complete list, it's a good idea to put yourself in the shoes of the end user. This will give a better picture of the types of features that will make the system easier to use.

When an LMS is selected with ease of use in mind for the learner, you'll reap the benefits.

Namely, it will improve employee performance and increase engagement. This is because an easy to use LMS motivates the learner to interact with it in a meaningful and intuitive way.

Employees will thank you if they have an LMS they love to use.

There are many different things to consider when selecting an LMS. It should be enjoyable, effective and easy to use. Plain and simple.

The more your employees are learning, the better for your business. An easy to use LMS will lead to efficient learning and a system that is actually useful and accomplishes the goals it has in terms of skill development, engagement and employee satisfaction.

On-Premise & Security

The more connected our world becomes, the more security has become a concern when it comes to purchasing software.

Is my Learning Management System (LMS) secure?

This question should be at the top of your list when it comes to selecting an LMS. Any new software immediately becomes part of your business ecosystem – and as they say, a chain is only as secure as its weakest link.

An LMS usually contains sensitive information. This includes employee data and confidential product or strategy details. A breach of the LMS could be disastrous. You could lose competitive advantage, or worse, commit a compliance infringement.

Would you want your LMS to be the weakest link in your enterprise network?

Data security is a huge issue. Thousands of websites are hacked every day causing businesses to lose their data and reputation. It can also cause financial harm, emotional distress and clients' confidence lost.

There is a trend toward training in the cloud, but this could potentially put the safety of your business at risk. Some Cloud LMS providers don't perform security audits, they might not deliver your data over secure connections or even store all of your personal and learner data in plain text.

It's really very simple. Once you put data into a SaaS system, you give permission to unknown entities who can and will access your data. So, it's imperative that you feel confident that the LMS provider you choose takes security as seriously as you do.

So what makes an LMS secure?

Here are some things to consider when choosing an LMS that will help keep your LMS secure:

1. **On Premise Deployment.** On-premise is the only way to have full control of your security, information and data.
2. **Single Sign-On with Active Directory.** An authentication system demonstrates who is accessing the system.
3. **Two Factor Authentication.** In addition to SSO, it's important to authenticate users outside of the system who access the LMS.
4. **SSL.** Encrypted communications provide optimal security conditions by industry standards.
5. **User Role Setup.** User roles determine what activities users are allowed to perform, what data they have access to and whom they can work with.

The Selection Process

Choosing an LMS is no small task. In order to have the best chance of success, it's imperative to put a team together that represents all stakeholders and their needs.

On-Premise & Security

The IT department should be center stage when choosing an LMS. They bring useful insight about technical requirements needed in an LMS, such as:

- Deployment models
- Integration ability
- Customization strategy
- Feature development
- Enhancements
- Security

In the past year, 31 percent of LMS buyers switched to a new LMS system. Not meeting IT security requirements is one reason why they switch. Another issue is the LMS not integrating with other business systems.

Security is important in the selection of an LMS. Ask yourself these questions: Does the vendor provide enterprise-grade encryption? Do they show you a service-level agreement with clearly defined data policies? Does the platform comply with regulations for your industry (e.g., HIPAA, PCI-DSS, GLBA)?

For some companies, the nature of their business requires ultimate security. That means the cloud will never be an option. Even with the popularity of the cloud, larger organizations are still more likely to be running on premise. And, this generally comes down to the need for control.

Choosing an LMS isn't for the faint of heart. It takes a lot of work and due diligence before making a final decision. Your IT strategy must be considered and positioned as a top priority. As a result, there will be a higher chance that your LMS will fit cohesively within your business environment and contribute successfully to the goals of your company.

Feature Set

Shopping for an LMS can easily turn into what many experience when they visit Costco or Target. You write a checklist of essential items but leave the store with a bunch of other things and a huge bill.

It is important to choose an LMS based on your business goals and select features that fit the big picture.

Part of choosing an LMS, which is often forgotten, is eliminating systems that come with too many frills. As a result, the system will be cluttered and hard to manage even simple tasks. This makes the process less efficient.

And, the last thing you need is an inefficient LMS.

When you focus on so many 'what if' situations or the latest buzz words in the industry, you wind up with a bloated LMS and underutilized feature sets. But the catch is that you'll be paying more for all the extras of the system even if you're not using them.

Complicated feature sets are well-known for derailing business software roll-outs too. Even companies that do well with change have a hard time with adoption and user satisfaction.

What are the top feature sets every LMS should have?

Every business will have unique needs, but there are certain features that are universal. This is because they provide definable value, either in increased Return on Investment (ROI) or improved Key Performance Indicator (KPI).

These features enable an LMS to perform its essential functions for administrators, and encourage the highest adoption rate amongst an audience.

- **Reporting.** Analytics are important for any training program in order to demonstrate how it has impacted your business goals.
- **Content Creation and Delivery.** There is no LMS without content so it's imperative to have a seamless system that can be scaled accordingly.
- **Skills/Certification Tracking.** Certifications provide assurance that those extended enterprise groups are properly trained in your product. Besides the training aspect, certifications elevate an organization's brand value and build an ecosystem of users.
- **Integrations.** An LMS will never operate independently so having integration capabilities is crucial so it can link with systems such as a CRM or HRIS.
- **Personal, Automated Learning Paths.** Automation makes your job easier while personalized learning supports career development.

The Selection Process

When selecting an LMS there are a few things that can be done in order to not be paralyzed by 'choice overload.'

It's easy to get distracted by the availability of 'extra' features that will only add unnecessary cost and complexity. Try to focus on the subset of LMS functionality that is essential for your business.

The first thing you'll need to do is create a high-level features/requirement list created by your LMS team. Think about your company goals as well as some future projects coming up. These use case scenarios will set the stage for what features will be essential for your business goals and needs.

Some questions to think about include,

1. What tasks am I going to perform with the new LMS?
2. If there is an existing LMS before, what features weren't utilized and why not?
3. How will I show that my goals have been achieved?
4. What processes do I need to set up?

Each member of your LMS selection team should come up with several use cases that are pertinent to their job. Then it becomes easier to map back specific feature sets that are 'must haves' and then rank the 'nice to haves' afterward.

Using this strategy, you clearly define a set of features and functions that your LMS absolutely needs to have in order to be a good return on investment.

Feature Sets

The feature sets of an LMS are very important which is why it should be high on your priority list. Creating use case scenarios is the best way to narrow down only the features your business will need and use. Remember that the longer the feature list the more difficult it will be to check if everything is really working; you may end up having all boxes checked and a Learning Management System that doesn't really suit you.

Updated Software Versions & Feature Sets

Choosing an LMS and implementing it comes with its own challenges. But, it doesn't stop there. It's important to think about the continuing support of an LMS such as updating software versions.

Bypassing this crucial detail in the LMS selection process could result in additional costs and staff hours.

Not to mention, if the LMS doesn't have regular updates, you'll be the proud owner of an outdated system that is no longer useful.

An outdated LMS is a big reason why companies choose to replace it with another system every few years. This can cause a significant investment in cost, time and potential disruption to your organization.

An LMS should be a helpful tool for the training and productivity of your employees – it shouldn't slow you down or get in the way.

It's important for your LMS of choice to have regular software updates. If not, this opens the door for huge security risks and means you'll miss out on improved functionality, too.

So, what should I know about software updates and an LMS?

Software updates are a given with any system. But, they are necessary.

Depending on the LMS system, there could be a huge discrepancy between software updates that are a breeze and those that are chaotic, time-consuming and generally a bad experience.

Here are a few key things to keep in mind that will help avoid this situation:

- **Existing IT Infrastructure.** An LMS that 'plays nice' with your existing IT infrastructure will make for an easier, seamless software update process. Staff in charge of updates will also have the benefit of familiarity.
- **Product Roadmap.** It's important to know not only what features an LMS has but also what the plans are for feature development. In order to access those new features, be sure to ask what kind of upgrade costs, if any, are involved.
- **Scalability.** A scalable LMS will continue to accommodate your business as you grow, saving you the time, effort, and resources it would take to find and implement an entirely new LMS.
- **Customization.** In order to not get outdated, an LMS should be able to be tailored to your specific training needs. Is it easy or difficult for IT staff to implement these changes?
- **Integration.** As times and needs change, integration is essential. Implementation of an LMS and any updates it has should be non-disruptive to your business. Utilizing your existing technology will help avoid lengthy, complex updates.

The Selection Process

The IT team has their hands full making sure all software for your business is up and running. **It's important when looking for an LMS to not only consider current features but also to understand the process of software updates and what that entails.**

Software updates are a critical piece of the LMS puzzle.

If an LMS hasn't been updated within a year or two, it's simply not keeping up with what is going on in your industry. You can do better.

Every time the software is updated it incorporates new user-requested features and also provides security patches for any issues that may have arisen.

During the selection process, ask a few simple questions regarding features and software updates:

- How frequently do you update the software?
- What is the process for installing updates and upgrades?
- What will it cost you to get upgrades?
- Will the IT staff need specialized training to maintain the LMS once it's installed?
- Will we be able to integrate other tools and technologies into the platform?
- Do they have plans to improve or upgrade the LMS platform?

Just as with any software, an LMS will fall behind in security and functionality if not properly upgraded. As your business changes, your LMS should also grow and change with the times. However, it shouldn't be a big ordeal. **Software updates should be hassle-free with minimal service disruption.** Software updates and features sets should be at the top of your list when choosing an LMS.

Financial

A Learning Management System (LMS) is a big ticket software purchase. But, hidden costs and other 'add-ons' could take you by surprise.

One that you didn't expect.

The purchase of an LMS should create a learning experience that ultimately impacts your bottom line in a positive way.

Does the software provide employees the ability to sell better, save better, be more aware of how they're using company resources or make them excited to come to work every day?

If not, your LMS is not providing the return on investment (ROI) that it should.

It's easy to get distracted by fancy feature sets during the LMS selection process. If you're not paying close attention, there will inevitably be hidden 'gotchas' that come up along the way in the form of unplanned expenses and labor costs.

Choosing the wrong LMS has profound financial implications.

Research shows that companies, on average, switch LMSs every few years. This could be because the LMS is difficult to use, it doesn't evolve with business needs or is not able to integrate with other systems, among other things.

Do you really want to make a very large LMS purchase every few years?

Not to mention, all the staff hours it would take to get it up and running as well as a loss in productivity.

So, how can an LMS increase profitability and productivity?

If you want to make a good financial LMS decision than keep these things in mind during the selection process:

Financial

- **Leverage Existing Resources.** By utilizing technology you already have, this not only reduces costs dramatically but increases efficiency. Even when it comes to maintenance, your staff already know the system and can quickly and easily make updates when needed.
- **Integration.** Systems that are not integrated result in significant increases in cost and resource consumption. It's wise to choose an LMS that has the ability to easily 'talk' to all your other business systems.
- **Talent Development.** It costs a lot of money and a loss in production when employees leave. An LMS that engages employees and supports their career journey will save in the long run.
- **Reporting Analytics.** A good LMS will have top notch reporting capabilities so you can drill down to specific information that can connect training performance to essential business results.
- **Compliance.** A breach in compliance can result in huge financial penalties. An LMS should have thorough compliance tracking capabilities in case of an audit.

During the LMS selection process, keep these features top of mind while exploring additional requirements.

The Selection Process

It would be natural to assume that choosing an LMS would be a straightforward process. However, there are certain things during the selection process that may not be obvious and could potentially have a financial impact on your business.

Hidden LMS costs should be considered when selecting an LMS.

The most common hidden costs include,

- **Implementation and Setup Fees.** Some vendors charge an extra fee for setting up your system, others don't. If they do, they should mention it. If they don't mention it, you should ask about it.
- **Licensing Fees.** Some vendors give a license for a limited period of time — six months, one year — and demand a recurring fee after that. You need to pay attention if this fee exists, why it does, and how much it affects the overall cost.
- **Upgrade Fees.** Not if, but when your business grows, will the LMS handle it and what kind of cost does that entail?
- **Customization Fees.** Anything that will be custom to your business and is not 'standard' can cost you. Be sure to ask beforehand on what the vendor's policy is.
- **Maintenance Fees.** Who is responsible for maintaining the LMS?
- **Support Fees.** It is inevitable that questions will come up with the LMS. If you have a question or concern, will it cost you? Some resources are free, but others can be an extra fee. Be sure to know which is which before purchasing an LMS.

Financial

Utilizing existing technology can reduce or completely limit the hidden costs of an LMS. It makes the most of your organizations existing infrastructure, processes and know-how, resulting in lower overall costs in upfront acquisition, annual per-user license fees and expenses related to support, deployment and integration.

There are many reasons why one LMS may be a better fit than another for your business. Cost usually plays an important factor. By digging deeper into the true cost of ownership of an LMS, you'll discover that utilizing existing resources can help increase profitability and productivity of your business.

Flexibility

Choosing an LMS that isn't flexible creates a lose-lose situation.

If it no longer suits your learning needs then you face paying excessive amounts in time and money to break your contract and switch to something else.

Or, you continue using an LMS that remains inflexible but misses the mark on potential learning opportunities that could create a profound impact on your bottom line.

This is a painful mistake to make.

It's important when choosing an LMS to think about how the LMS will not only meet your current goals and situation, but also how it can adapt to your changing business needs.

An LMS that isn't flexible can cause a ruckus of other problems too.

Some LMS systems claim to be flexible but when the time comes you're faced with hours of labor from your IT team, additional costs or both.

What the vendor didn't mention during the selection process was that flexibility doesn't come easy.

But, it should.

Change is a given. And your LMS should be able to easily roll with the changes of your business. Simple as that.

So, what makes an LMS flexible?

Flexibility for an LMS usually come down to these things:

- **Scalable and Adaptable.** As your business grows and changes, it's important for an LMS to easily be able to accommodate without a fuss.
- **Integration.** No LMS functions in a bubble. It must be able to integrate with a variety of business systems.
- **Permissions.** An LMS with flexible permissions gives a variety of people, from front line managers to learning administrators, access to the LMS and more freedom to do their jobs.
- **Reporting.** Flexible reporting options can give crucial insight into your learning programs and is a very important feature to have.
- **Features.** An LMS should offer the flexibility to do whatever kind of training you need. Create your ideal learning processes that are the most beneficial and effective ways to develop your people.

During the LMS selection process, keep these features top of mind while exploring additional requirements.

The Selection Process

There is a small percentage of companies that purchase an LMS and use it as-is. More often than not it will need to be customized to some extent.

In fact, according to a report by *eLearning Guild*, more than 62 percent of companies purchased an LMS and customized it to fit their needs.

So, how can you make the most of your investment, now and in the future? The answer is flexibility.

But, it's not good enough to just ask if an LMS is flexible.

Go into the process with specific questions that will help paint a picture of how the LMS will fit into the big picture.

- What types of learning paths are offered?
- Can the user interface be adapted?
- What are the authentication protocols?
- Can you adjust the look and feel of the LMS?
- What flexibility comes out of the box and what must be customized?
- How difficult is it to customize and how much man power will I need to get it to do specifically what we need?
- Does the vendor customize or will that fall on my staff?
- What kind of costs are associated?

Of course, it's also important that once a vendor is chosen that you maintain open lines of communication about what your business needs. In this way, the vendor can take your suggestions and possibly work those new features into their planned roadmap.

Choosing an LMS is a complex decision with lots of things to consider. Flexibility should be at the top of your list of 'must haves.' In an increasingly fast-moving world, it provides companies the ability to stay agile and competitive. It also improves training effectiveness because it creates a learning environment that is most conducive to the way people learn. Be sure an LMS with flexibility is top priority.

Flexibility of Content

Content is the foundation of any Learning Management System (LMS) and an important piece of the 'learning puzzle.' However, if the content piece doesn't fit quite right, you're faced with a very big problem.

Every business stores a wealth of knowledge that is conducive to learning programs. Examples include Word documents to PowerPoint presentations and video, to name a few. Content is also located across multiple departments and platforms.

So, what happens when your content doesn't play nice with your LMS?

- The onboarding process could be stalled or impaired
- Issues arise with professional development – especially when it comes to promotions and salary increases.
- Risk of noncompliance

And, these examples are just a few of the potential issues that could happen.

Do you have extra budget and loads of time to spare within your department? Because, that is what will be needed if your LMS only accepts SCORM courses or requires a tedious process to move external files into the system.

Another thing to consider is the process of updating content within the LMS. Will there be issues every time you need to update something? What version do people have access to? Who lets people know there are new versions?

An LMS shouldn't make working with content more difficult.

Since content plays such an integral part of a learning program, it's essential to pay close attention to LMS features that promote flexibility which makes working with content easier.

So, what makes working with content in an LMS easier?

Flexibility with content is important and usually comes down to these features in an LMS,

- **Content Management linked to the LMS.** Linking the two systems will create a more cohesive way to transfer content without a fuss.
- **Centralization.** File storage located in one, centralized location avoids duplicate content and ensures everything is up-to-date with versioning.
- **Organization.** Applying classification to content makes it easy to find the information you need, when you need it.
- **Updated Learning Content.** If content is used in a number of courses or curriculums, simply update it once and all of the uses/appearances of that pdf will also be updated.
- **Personalization.** Personalize learning content based on enrollment rules. If there is a change in employee status, their assigned courses would automatically be updated.

During the LMS selection process, keep these features top of mind while exploring additional requirements.

Flexibility of Content

The Selection Process

Since content is such an important part of an LMS, it makes sense that it should play just as important of a role during the selection process.

Do you know what kind of content you'll be using the most? A flexible LMS should welcome both SCORM and non-SCORM content.

This could be anything from your current SCORM courses to other files such as Word documents, PDF, XML, PowerPoint presentations and video streaming.

Be sure to ask potential LMS vendors what type of content the system accepts without issue – paying particular attention to the content you'll be using the most.

For some companies, they might have all of their materials in common business software formats and then find out that the LMS doesn't allow for them to simply be imported and modified.

And, nobody wants to recreate a course from scratch!

Signing up with an LMS shouldn't mean throwing out all of your current training material because it's too hard to recreate in your Learning Management System. Creating new courses and making use of old training material should be a simple process.

It's also common practice that departments frequently develop learning materials that remain outside of the LMS. But, how nice would it be to have a truly flexible LMS that integrates all of this important data in one central location?

Keep in mind your future business plans as well. Would you like to get into micro learning using short video clips? Be sure to look beyond what you currently use for content.

Because of the nature of working with content that changes a lot, it's to your benefit to look for ways that an LMS can streamline processes.

For instance, when everything is centralized in one location, you can link the same source document with others in the organization so it keeps everyone up-to-date, improves reporting and makes better use of everybody's time, effort and attention.

Content is a big part of any Learning Management System. And, the one thing that is a given is that it will always be changing. So, it's important to choose an LMS that provides the flexibility to grow with your content needs. As a result, you'll save time, be more productive and enjoy a stress-free process when it comes to your learning programs.

Customization and Flexibility

When choosing an LMS, customization should be a nonnegotiable feature.

It's more than just the look and feel of your site— customization encompasses functionality and administration.

Every organization and industry will continue to grow and change, as will their training needs.

If an LMS doesn't provide the flexibility to adjust than you'll be stuck with an outdated LMS that is unable to perform the way you need it to.

Are you prepared to go through the buying process again in a few short years when your LMS no longer suits your needs? Do you have an unlimited budget to waste on inefficient systems?

Customization gives an organization the ability to alter an LMS to perform in a specific way that suits your unique training requirements.

If you have an inflexible infrastructure, you can only produce rigid training initiatives.

It's that simple.

So what improves flexibility and customization of an LMS?

Flexibility and customization in an LMS usually come down to these things:

1. **Flexible User Interface (UI) and User Experience (UX).** Be sure you can choose the features and functionality you want for both users and administrators.
2. **Organizational Structure.** Your LMS should be able to allow you to map different departments, teams or any other group as you see fit.
3. **User Management.** Do the right people have access to the LMS, not just an administrator? Can you configure the system to allow department heads or any other person access the systems.
4. **Workflows.** Are you able to streamline your processes and efforts?
5. **Integration.** The LMS should be able to easily integrate with all your other important business systems for ultimate flexibility.
6. **Corporate Branding.** An LMS should offer the flexibility to customize the site to align with the look and feel of your business.
7. **Flexible Training.** We all know that people learn in different ways so it's imperative that an LMS is flexible to allow a variety of different styles of training from ILT to blended learning, micro-learning and gamification.

During the LMS selection process, keep these features top of mind while exploring additional requirements.

The Selection Process

Customization and flexibility are important features to consider when choosing an LMS.

Customization and Flexibility

A system that can 'go with the flow' as your needs change is a huge benefit.

Who wouldn't want an LMS that is efficient and always able to address your needs when you need it to? And, without a fuss!

Be sure to think about what your current use cases for the LMS will be but also what the future might hold. How might planned business initiatives affect training? Do industry regulations constantly change the way you train - because different skills are sometimes better taught in a different way?

A couple more questions to ask during the selection process that are very important.

- What kind of fees, if any, are there for customization?
- During vendor upgrades, how does that affect any customization code?

In addition, it's not enough to just make sure your chosen solution supports the features and functionality you need, but it's also important that it provide intuitive administrative options that allow you to tweak how you use the system.

Choose an LMS that provides the flexibility to use it how you need now and in the future. By doing so, you'll save time and money because you won't have to buy a new LMS every few years. Customization allows you to see the LMS perform to its fullest potential - all while providing you the ability to reach your training and business goals seamlessly.

Reporting

Simple and *easy* generally aren't words used to describe creating reports. More often than not the words *time consuming* and *tedious* are used.

Reports play a very important role in learning and development which is why it should be one of the top things to consider when choosing an LMS.

Creating a report is so much more than providing a document with checkmarks showing a staff member took a course. It should tell a story that clearly defines how your training initiatives have impacted your business goals. And most importantly, how to continue down the path of training success.

If front line managers have difficulty pulling the information needed, it's impossible to check what is working and what is not.

Common challenges that happen when it comes to reporting include,

- Difficulty accessing information due to permission restrictions.
- Creating a report that is too complicated and too many steps involved.
- There isn't an option to customize the report to fit specific needs.

These example scenarios are just a few of the problems that could be avoided by choosing the right LMS.

Information is power. That is why choosing an LMS with excellent reporting features will give you the tools to help make informed decisions about all aspects of your business.

So, what reporting features are a 'must have' when choosing an LMS?

It's true, no two businesses are alike and not everybody will have the same needs. But, here is a list of some of the most valued reporting features:

- 1. Simple and easy.** When you need to pull information quickly, it's imperative that the report can, not only be created, but reviewed in a few simple clicks so managers can get the information they need to make business decisions.
- 2. Integration.** The LMS should be connected to all your business systems so any report can easily and quickly be analyzed against data from your HRIS or any other system.
- 3. Customization.** One size does not fit all when it comes to reports. Excellent data reporting tools can compile records from a variety of categories and organize them in any way you see fit.
- 4. Permissions.** The LMS administrator shouldn't be the only person able to create and review reports. Each front line manager should be able to access the system without issue and create reports for their department or team.

Reporting

5. Automation. Nobody wants to spend hours every month recreating the same reports over and over again. The ability to save templates so that data can be shared each month automatically allows more time to analyze and use the data versus time spent compiling the data.

The Selection Process

There are a variety of reasons why a company chooses to switch their LMS. According to *TechnologyAdvice.com*, about 66 percent of the time it has something to do with issues related to reporting.

This means that a little more attention should be paid to reporting features during the LMS selection process.

One of the biggest reasons for an LMS to have great reporting capabilities is that it should demonstrate a return on investment for your organization. And if your learning program is not meeting expectations, the report will help you identify where improvements can and should be made.

A helpful tip is to create scenarios of how you will use the LMS and what types of reports you may need. This will provide a guide outlining the various types of reporting features that will be most useful.

For instance, department managers often times need to run reports for their departments but some training systems only allow LMS administrators access. So, in this case, they will need an LMS that allows permissions for managers to run their own reports.

In other instances, it might be important for a business to get very detailed, granular information in their reports.

ShareKnowledge has a Question-Level Report that would be very useful in this scenario. It allows users to see how well learners did on a test but also assess the test itself.

If everybody got the same question wrong there is a high chance there is something wrong with the question and you can reword it next time. If the results show a mixed bag, learning professionals, instructional designers and course creators can decide whether it's something that can be addressed with more training or change the wording so the question is understood more clearly, or implement both.

Choosing an LMS is difficult as it is. Selecting the right feature sets for learning management systems is important but you also need to make sure that reporting is up to par as well. Being aware of your specific needs and pairing that with an LMS that can solve the problem will pave the way to a stress-free reporting process. And, the best part of effective reporting features in an LMS is the positive impact it will have on the success of your business.

Reporting for Learning Administrators

One of the prime responsibilities of an LMS administrator is to communicate how learning programs have positively affected your business. And you simply cannot do this without great reporting tools.

Reporting is the gateway to information that will tell you what is working, what is not and what needs to be changed.

But, of course, there are reporting roadblocks that must be considered when choosing an LMS:

- **Not fast.** When a report is needed ASAP, does it take multiple steps to get what you need? A long, tedious process is never conducive for reports needed right away.
- **Not easy to use.** Will you need to bother the IT department regularly just to pull a report?
- **Lack of customization.** Reporting is only as good as the data it can provide. Does the LMS lack the ability to be customized to fit your needs?

Compliance is another reason that reporting features in an LMS are important.

Every year there are more and more regulations created. And as an LMS administrator, this falls on your shoulders. Prove compliance with thorough reports, or face fines.

Reporting is not just to see who took a class and who didn't. Good reporting can be the difference between success and failure of your business.

And, because of this, it should be one of the top features to consider when choosing an LMS.

So, what reporting features should I look for in an LMS?

Each business has unique reporting needs, but there are some common features that are a 'must have' for everybody:

- **Customization.** No matter what information you need, your LMS should always have the option to customize. Whether you need general information or very specific, there should be no problems accessing this data.
- **Permissions.** An LMS with flexible permissions allow various departments to create their own reports which alleviates the administrator work load so he/she can focus on other important tasks.
- **Automation.** Reports are notorious for being time consuming. But, an LMS that has utilizes automation streamlines the process and reduces the stress of creating the same report over and over.
- **Simplicity.** Pulling a report should be as simple as a few clicks.
- **Dashboard.** Access to information has been a common problem with LMS reporting. With a centralized dashboard, the LMS administrator can quickly see an overview of all learning programs.

During the LMS selection process, keep these features top of mind while exploring additional requirements.

The Selection Process

During the LMS selection process, it's important to know what specific information you'll need from reports.

Reporting for Learning Administrators

It's a good idea to consult with your LMS selection committee to brainstorm a list of reports that your business may need now or in the future.

Here are a few questions you might ask yourself:

- **How are learners progressing?** A course status report will provide this information.
- **Has John Doe completed a safety test?** A course history report is needed.
- **Is there a bottleneck in a course?** A course module report will give this information.
- **Is Jane Doe currently certified?** Certification report needed.
- **What are the attendance levels of Instructor Led Training (ILT)?** An ILT report can provide a detailed explanation.

When choosing an LMS, think about who needs the reporting data, and when. You should be able to get your data with a couple of clicks of a button and, you should be able to let the LMS do the hard work so you don't have to.

LMS reports and analytics are one of the most beneficial features of Learning Management Systems.

- **Proves ROI**
- **Shows the impact of learning on your business.**
- **Proves compliance.**
- **Allows you to make accelerated decisions based on real-time information.**

If there is one way to make your job easier, it's with great reporting features. And, in just a few clicks you have all the data in one place that demonstrates the wonderful job you've been doing - whether that be staying in compliance or making sure everybody has completed required courses.

Reporting features should be at the top of any administrator's list when choosing an LMS.

Scalability

The ability to scale is an important feature of a Learning Management System. If an LMS isn't able to grow with your business, there could be dire consequences.

One obvious issue is the inability to add more learners to the system in a fast, efficient way.

This is a huge and stressful roadblock.

Your employees are the foundation and success of your business. If they aren't learning and evolving, neither is your business.

Naturally, when a business grows this equates to more customers, more data and more resources.

It's a costly nuisance to discover that an LMS that worked sufficiently with a limited amount of users – crashes under the pressure of 10,000+ learners all over the world.

If your organization is unprepared to handle these increases, you lose efficiency and business agility – key factors to stay competitive in your industry.

Financially speaking, scalability is also critical.

A system that does not scale could wind up costing your business a lot of money. Payroll could be exceeded if the IT department are tasked to fix the issue or, if not solved, you could be faced with buying another LMS all together.

An LMS should fit the needs of your organization now as well as tomorrow.

What makes an LMS scalable and adaptable?

When selecting an LMS, it's important to look for features that promote growth and adaptability such as,

- **Users.** An LMS should be able to tolerate a large number of users accessing the system at the same time, from all over the world, without delays.
- **Data.** The ability to handle a large amount of data is imperative to scalability.
- **Administrative.** As the system grows, it's important that different branches of an organization can access the LMS in order to get the information they need.
- **Integrations.** An LMS will never operate independently, especially as a business grows, so having integration capabilities is crucial so it can link with systems such as a CRM or HRIS.
- **Automation.** With growth comes more work and processes. Automation features help streamline and removes the stress of managing a long list of tasks.

The Selection Process

Choosing a system that can change and adapt to the growing needs of your learning initiatives will be a key component in your organization's growth.

A scalable LMS will continue to accommodate your business as you grow, saving time, effort, and resources it would take to find and implement an entirely new LMS.

When it comes to scalability, it's important to know exactly what your business needs are.

- **Does you need an LMS that is built for corporate or an educational environment?**

Most LMS systems will have their core niche in the market – corporate, educational or human resources

. An LMS designed for corporate use can handle a user range of 80,000+ while other systems can manage not more than 5-10,000 users effectively. If the system is human resource focused, there is an even greater chance that the learning aspect is very small and limited in scope.

- **Does your business have simple or complex needs?**

Some companies will always have very simple learning needs. But, if there is any chance down the road this might change, it's imperative to factor in scalability into an LMS. This allows for more complex workflows and the capacity to handle more data that comes along with multiple organizational units and very complex needs.

Every business knows that to stay competitive, it's important to be agile. The faster a company can make changes, whether in learning or other business processes, the more competitive they'll be.

Scalability in an LMS plays a vital role in the future success of your business and contributes to competitiveness, efficiency, reputation and quality. And, it should be one of the top considerations when evaluating a learning system.

LMS Scalability Insights for Learning Managers

The end goal of running a business is to grow and be successful. And, with growth, comes more workers to train and resources used. If an LMS can't keep up and the ability to scale becomes a problem...meeting your business goals will be stopped dead in its tracks.

Scalability is important for all businesses, but especially for smaller companies because a) you have to be extra careful to optimize your ROI and b) small businesses have the biggest growth potential.

But, regardless of your company size, if you're unprepared to scale accordingly, you lose efficiency, customer service outreach and product quality.

There are three basic elements to consider when it comes to scale of an LMS:

1. The number of users of the system, and the number of objects and services encompassed.
2. The distance over which the system is scattered.
3. The number of organizations that exert control over pieces of the system.

It's common when starting a new project to start small and scale later, but that concept is not so easy with a Learning Management System. Training programs are not exactly cheap to build, the results are not self-evident and without correct structure and management, it's easy to fail.

So what improves scalability of an LMS?

Scalability for software solutions usually come down to these things:

1. **Administrative.** As organizations grow, the need for training grows. Businesses must decentralize decision-making, as it becomes impossible to operate without significant delegation. Do the right people have access to the LMS, or just administrators? This is a huge sticking point when choosing an LMS.
2. **Workflows/Automation.** As your training needs grow, it's important to streamline processes for better efficiency.
3. **Authentication.** As more users flood the LMS, it's crucial to have an easy way to authenticate who is accessing the system.
4. **Integration.** An LMS will never operate independently, especially as a business grows, so having integration capabilities is crucial so it can link with systems such as a CRM or HRIS.
5. **Built for business vs. education.** It's important to look for an LMS that was built specifically for corporate use, which entails large amounts of data and users.

During the LMS selection process, keep these features top of mind while exploring additional requirements.

The Selection Process

Are you manually enrolling learners into courses? Messaging individual learners one-by-one? Regularly needing to repeat the same steps to create a report? Or, printing and mailing certificates?

If you said yes to any of these questions, you're not using an LMS that can scale.

LMS Scalability Insights for Learning Managers

Not every LMS is equal in terms of scalability. So, when choosing an LMS, it's important to keep a few things in mind.

- **Is it stable and reliable?** Or will it crash when you expand to servicing the training needs of thousands of people across the globe?
- **How well does it handle data?** Can it accommodate large amounts of information effectively? If the answer is no, scaling will be difficult.
- **Does performance lag when the platform is subject to heavy user load?** If this is the case, user experience will suffer, which will ultimately lead to disengagement and poor training outcomes.
- **Is it designed to use efficient workflows to accommodate heavy traffic?**
- **Is the LMS sufficiently automated?** Or does it require manual activities that must be repeated again and again?
- **Is there robust client support?** Growth often comes with challenges, so it's imperative to have a support system in place to help you navigate any growing pains.

Choosing the right LMS for your company is not an easy or a quick decision. Scalability plays an enormous role in the success or failure of an LMS. When it can grow and evolve with your business, you reap the benefits of cost efficiencies, better processes and more informed work staff. If you choose an LMS that is not able to scale, you face an incompetent LMS that you'll need to replace in a couple of years. In order to avoid this costly mistake, it's important to choose features in an LMS that foster scalability.

THANK YOU!

We hope this ebook was useful to you in your search for an LMS.

If you'd like additional information about how ShareKnowledge can help with your training needs, please visit our website and fill out the contact form. Someone from our team will be in contact shortly.

