Things to Consider When
SELECTING A LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

SHAREKnowledge®

It's as simple as this: if a Learning Management System (LMS) is easy to use, people will use it. If it's not easy to use, they won't.

When selecting an LMS, it is important to keep "ease of use" as key criteria. We can get caught up in the fancy bells and whistles shown in demos of various LMS systems. They may emphasize 'gamification,' 'xAPI,' 'social learning' and all the other buzz words of the day.

Who wouldn't be impressed, right?

But, if using an LMS is too complicated, no one will use it. Learners will get frustrated and the goals of your business objectives will fall short – or fail.

While the Learning Department (if there is one) usually "owns" the LMS, there are also stakeholders involved. Your IT department usually has a lot of involvement, as do your front-line managers who are assigning and approving training for their teams. Most importantly, your employees, all whom you want to be true "Learners," need to feel at ease with the system so that they will use it.

The average employee is expected to learn many software systems at work (e.g. CRM, Microsoft Office). This can be overwhelming.

Technology changes fast, and employees must master the tools of their workday in a short period while remaining a productive member of the company. If the LMS, where they are supposed to learn those tools, is unfamiliar or involves a huge learning curve to use, employees simply won't use it. What will they do? Go to Google.

So what improves the Ease of Use of an LMS?

Ease of Use for software solutions usually come down to these things:

1. **Intuitive User Interface**. When a learner or administrator uses the system, it must be easy and they must naturally know exactly what to do without explanation.

2. **Customer Support**. Open and friendly lines of communication with your vendor's support team is a must because there will always be questions.

3. **Customization**. Tailoring the system to your business's specific needs will reduce unwanted clutter and/or features that won't be used.

4. **Automation.** The system should make it easier for you, not more complicated, by handling some activities automatically.

5. **Search Functionality**. It's important to be able to find what you're looking for with a system that provides speedy and seamless navigability.

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

The Selection Process

Most companies stay with their LMS from 3-7 years. People say that the main reason they switch is that "the technology won't work or meet their needs." The real reason, though, is usually that at the time of implementation, the LMS wasn't set up to be easy to use with how that particular company does business. What are their processes? What are the workflows? Also, as the business changes, does anyone bother revisiting the LMS to make sure its processes and workflows match the new business direction?

The frustration people experience with the technology actually circles back to this idea of Ease of Use and how it fairs over the lifetime of using the system. Can the system continue to grow with the company? Can the LMS be flexible and be customized? Is the cost of owning the system and access to updates with increased functionality appropriate for the business value?

Not all systems are created alike and not every system is right for every company. For example, if your company is not running SharePoint, then our solution, ShareKnowledge, is not a good choice. If your business is running SharePoint, then your employees are already familiar with how it works, so it might be the solution you were looking for.

Selecting the right LMS for your company is not an easy or a quick decision. There are many variables to consider. Ease of Use impacts the effectiveness of not only the system, but your Learning and Talent Development programs as a whole. Be sure it's one of your primary considerations in your selection process.

ShareKnowledge is a good choice for those who want to leverage their SharePoint investment. Maybe they're using SharePoint already and just want to expand training functionality. Or, they need a system that is compliance-driven. If you would like more information about how ShareKnowledge can solve your training needs, please call us at 425-996-4201

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.

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.

If your company needs an on premise LMS solution and has SharePoint then our solution, ShareKnowledge, may be a good option. ShareKnowledge inherits all existing authentication protocols from SharePoint and can seamlessly 'talk' to all of your other business systems – providing a much more secure and cohesive solution. For more information, please fill out the form and a team member will contact your shortly.

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.

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.

ShareKnowledge is a SharePoint-based Learning Management System that is integrated into all aspects of your business. Fully adaptable and scalable, ShareKnowledge boasts a list of impressive features that continue to grow. You get to choose and deploy enhanced functionality web components for your specific needs. To learn more, please fill out the form.

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:

- **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.

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.

ShareKnowledge is a great choice for those who have SharePoint and want to leverage their investment. There is incredible value provided from an integration, operational ease of use and cost solution stand point. If you would like more information about how ShareKnowledge can solve your learning and development needs, please fill call us.

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.

ShareKnowledge is built on the proven and flexible environment of SharePoint. Therefore, you can choose, control and deploy whatever suits your specific needs. It is completely scalable and adaptable with a list of versatile features that continues to grow. If you would like more information about how ShareKnowledge can solve your training needs, please call or email us and we'll be in touch soon.

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.

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.

If you're currently using SharePoint and want an LMS with robust reporting features, ShareKnowledge might be a good option for your business. To learn more about our unique advantage point to corporate training, please contact us and we'll be in contact soon.

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.

ShareKnowledge is designed specifically for the needs of corporations. In fact, we built our solution on SharePoint because of its unmatched scalability, extensibility and customization options. To learn more about how we can solve your learning needs, please call or email us.

Good Luck!

We hope that you have found this resource helpful. Selecting an LMS can be daunting...but it doesn't have to be. To speak to a consultant today, please contact us to see if ShareKnowledge is right for your business.

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