

White Paper: Can SharePoint Really Function as an All-Inclusive LMS?



A Guide to Understanding the Pros and Cons of Using SharePoint as an LMS

There is no question that Learning Management Systems are not going anywhere. In fact, the industry has grown by leaps and bounds and is expected to take in revenues exceeding \$2.5 billion in 2014. Of course, there are many corporate benefits that an LMS can provide – from hosting a centralized learning environment to organized compliance procedures, collaboration, employee retention and cost savings to name a few.

Microsoft SharePoint offers a plethora of features that perform much like an LMS such as document sharing, calendaring, discussions, intranet-esque page design and of course, tight permissions for users.

So, it begs the question, can using SharePoint as an LMS offer a better, all-inclusive experience for training and development needs?

Train smarter, not harder with SharePoint

In the last year, organizations have steadily moved away from slashing corporate training budgets to increasing spending by 15 percent, a good indicator of improved economic conditions. The need for a skilled workforce is imperative and organizations are moving forward with a cautiously optimistic attitude. Budgets continue to be highly criticized and streamlining processes for efficiency is the status quo.

For this very reason, training managers are exploring already existing software operations to utilize them to their company's best advantage.

SharePoint is currently used by 80 percent of Fortune 500 companies and is the fastest growing product in Microsoft's history. SharePoint has evolved and expanded greatly over the past 13 years to become the most widely used document and file management, intranet, extranet and collaboration platform. Companies realize the benefits of SharePoint with improved performance, centralized administration, customization, increased collaboration, consolidated sites, security and integrity and employee empowerment.

With that said, why couldn't SharePoint be used as an LMS? A question that has been asked many times. The following white paper will explain in further detail how SharePoint out-of-the-box features can provide an effective LMS solution for certain training requirements. In addition, it will also explain how to get additional functionality with customization and provide guidance for situations when a separate LMS is required.

The Basics: SharePoint LMS Features Out-of-the-Box

Not everybody needs all the bells and whistles of an LMS, so if only basic functionality is needed than using SharePoint as an LMS using out-of-the-box features might be a perfectly acceptable solution. Here are a few examples of basic LMS features that SharePoint excels at:



1. **Collaborative Content Management.** SharePoint reigns supreme for content management. Having both content management and an LMS connected under one roof makes uploading training material that much easier. Version control and approval workflows also ensure a better managed compliance system.
2. **Training Project Management.** Team sites allow project management to flow seamlessly with task lists, reminders, calendar and social collaboration. Microsoft Project and Microsoft SharePoint can be synced for even more efficiency.
3. **Folder and Content Level Permissions.** Get as granular as needed by setting permissions that allow certain people access to only the correct content.
4. **Social Collaboration.** SharePoint's social features make collaboration a snap with the addition of blogs, communities, Wikis, RSS feeds, gamification and discussion boards.
5. **Single Sign-On and Active Directory Sync.** Never again will users have to remember another username and password. SharePoint automatically syncs with an organization's active directory and other systems.
6. **Training Requirements and Feedback.** Utilizing surveys helps identify what is good and not so good about training programs.

SharePoint Customization for more LMS Functionality

With all of the amazing features that SharePoint possesses, there are still areas of LMS functionality that are beyond what it is capable of. The bright side is that SharePoint is highly customizable. So with a little coding know-how, any organization can gain a few additional features for their LMS needs.

1. **Testing.** SharePoint offers basic capabilities to create a quiz using lists. However, for more detail, a program like InfoPath or SharePoint Designer can create custom tests.
2. **List View.** SharePoint allows a user to perform basic list view customization, like filtering, changing the sort order, and showing or hiding columns. To get a little more customized, SharePoint Designer can perform this same level of customization and in addition, change the layout of the list, apply conditional formatting to the list, connect the list view to other lists and much more.
3. **SQL Server Reporting Services.** Microsoft SQL Server 2014 Reporting Services integrates with SharePoint and is a server-based reporting platform that provides a full range of ready-to-use tools and services to help create, deploy and manage reports for your organization, as well as programming features that enable you to extend and customize reporting functionality.
4. **Custom Code.** Custom code can be used for course administration requirements.

Amplify SharePoint for Complete LMS Efficiency

SharePoint out-of-the-box features as well as additional customizations can provide a host of crucial LMS functionality. And, for some, this is all that is needed to fulfill training requirements. For others, training and development needs are a bit more complex. A separate LMS that is built on SharePoint can take training to the next level and fill in the functionality gaps for a complete LMS solution. Here are a few examples of additional functionality that a separate LMS can provide for a SharePoint-based training foundation:

- **SCORM/AICC/Tin Can Compliance. Instructor-led training management.** Enrollment requests, wait lists, multiple days training management.
- **Compliance training management.** CEU tracking, digital signature, recurring events.
- **Training tracking and reporting.** User and team transcripts, custom reports.
- **Customized learning.** Learning that is targeted by title, department or personal learning objectives.
- **Managing learning trajectories.** Course prerequisites, combined courses that consist of several learning activities.
- **SCORM tests.** Question-level reporting, embed multimedia in questions, various answer types.
- **Auto reminders and notifications.**
- **Managing webinars from within SharePoint.**

Conclusion

SharePoint is about giving you and the people you work with a better way to get things done together. This multifunctional tool can help keep an entire organization in sync, make processes and people more productive, deliver more engaging and effective customer experiences, assist in achieving legal and regulatory compliance and balance IT and business needs. All of these features make it a prime tool for use as an LMS.

In conclusion, Microsoft SharePoint features out-of-the-box are quite impressive but it is clear that even with additional customization, there is still more to be desired. However, by adding an LMS that is specifically built for SharePoint takes training to the next level. A fusion of SharePoint + LMS = the ultimate all-encompassing learning experience.