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How to Choose a Learning Platform

Freedom to Learn

With hundreds of learning platforms to choose from, entering the market for a new system can be a daunting experience.

And getting it wrong is painful – not only is it an expensive mistake to make, but it is also a drain on time and resources as your team tries to fix problems you hadn't anticipated and work around the platform, rather than the platform adapting to your needs.

With over a third of organizations actively looking to replace their learning platform, and 45% of these wanting to do so within the next year¹, it is clear that the standard learning

platform selection process is letting many of us down. But with just 9% of organizations being completely satisfied with their LMS, are too many of us making do with systems that don't fully work for us? Is it time to shake up the status quo and find a better way to choose the right learning platform? If you're tired of grappling with a platform that is too expensive, not flexible enough and too time consuming to implement and manage, rest assured that it doesn't have to be like this.

Did you know that just 9% of organizations are completely satisfied with their LMS?

Learning Management Tech 2018,
Brandon Hall Group

¹ Learning Management Tech 2018,
Brandon Hall Group



Content

1.	Getting Started	1
2.	Who Wants What	3
3.	How Much Flexibility do we Need?	7
4.	Will this Platform Grow with our Needs?	9
5.	What if We Change our Minds?	11
6.	What are the Main Drivers: Time, Quality or Cost?	13
7.	So, What Next?	5

1.

Getting Started

Getting started

Before you get stuck into your usual feature-by-feature comparison, think about what your learning platform is really for:

- What business requirements does it need to support?
- What do you want to get out of your learning program?
- What does your current learning strategy look like, and what might it look like in the future?
- Do you want to reduce employee attrition rates?
- Do you want to help resellers improve their sales figures?
- Do you need to improve compliance rates?
- Do you want to support better customer service skills?



Whatever your goal, ensure you keep this front of mind throughout your learning platform selection process. Just because platform X has twice the number of features as platform Y, that doesn't mean it is the right platform for you, or just because platform A is half the price of platform B, that doesn't mean it will offer better value for money in the long run.

Essentially, make sure you have your goals clear in your mind before you even start comparing solutions. This will help you stay on track and avoid getting distracted by all the shiny new features and enticing discounts on offer from vendors keen to attract your attention.



2.

Who Wants What?

Who wants what?



Many organizations make the mistake of immediately entering into a feature-by-feature showdown of the learning platforms on the market. However, this is the wrong way to go about selecting a platform that will support your organization's needs over time. **For instance:**

Will your people actually use all of the functionality?

Can your IT infrastructure support it?

Will it integrate with your other systems?

Establishing who wants what does involve some legwork upfront, but the benefit of starting with this understanding of your needs is that you can ensure you're making the right choice not just for the L&D team, but for your stakeholders, your learners and the

organization as a whole. And often, this won't just be one conversation - you should involve your learners and stakeholders throughout the selection process to ensure that you're making an informed decision.



The key groups to consider in your decision-making process are:



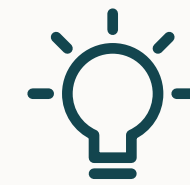
1. End users

If your learners don't like your platform or don't derive value from it, they won't use it. Include them in the selection process from the very start to ensure you know what they like about your current system and what they don't. This can spell the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful learning platform.



2. IT/IS department

Your IT team will care about factors such as robustness, security, interoperability and technical specifications. Don't just drop a system on them that won't work as part of your wider IT infrastructure - their input can be invaluable if you ask them before making any big, expensive decisions.



3. Learning designers

This applies to your in-house learning designers and any outside vendors you work with. Often they have a wealth of experience with various learning platforms, so ensure you're choosing a system that will give them the freedom to innovate and work with the learning content they create, not against it.



4. Managers

Managers will need to track progress, monitor completion rates and control access, so make sure you understand exactly what they need from your new system to help support their everyday workflow.



5. Administrators

Think about the people who will actually be managing the learning platform on a day-to-day basis. Their satisfaction and ability to drive the system efficiently is key to the success of the platform.





6. Sales team

The sales team may want specific features such as leaderboards, and may want access for extended enterprise audiences² outside your immediate organization.



7. Leadership team

Leaders may request a more resource-based approach and the ability to support informal, peer-to-peer learning alongside formal activities.



8. Compliance team

They are likely to want role-based assignment of content, granular reporting and robust certification of completion of mandatory training.



9. Marketing

Marketing will want to know how they can customize the look and feel of the learning platform, and can help out with any internal marketing campaigns to a successful deployment and sustained engagement.



Totara top tip:

Instead of creating a feature wishlist, think about the use cases you want to support with your learning platform. Opting for enterprise open source software gives you the freedom to innovate above and beyond the current features and product roadmap, meaning you can come up with more created, tailored solutions which can be shaped around your requirements.

²Extended enterprise guide - Winning through collaborative advantage.

3.

**How Much Flexibility
do we Need?**

How much flexibility do we need?

With hundreds of learning platforms on the market vying for attention with lengthy feature lists and all the bells and whistles you'll hear about at any industry conference, it's easy to overlook the flexibility of the software you are considering. When one solution has twice as many features as another, it's easy to assume that this is the obvious choice. However, what happens if your circumstances change drastically overnight, and suddenly none of these features are fit for purpose? Can the learning platform you're choosing cope with any potential changes your organization may undergo, whatever they may be?

When it comes to retaining the freedom to innovate, there are several factors to consider:

Branding

Does your platform need to suit your organization's look and feel, or is a vanilla, unbranded product acceptable?

User experience

Do you need to customize by role, remember preferences or offer personalized learning based on previous interactions with your platform?

Integration with other systems

How will your learning platform fit into your wider blended program? Does it need to sync up with your HR system, your CRM, your social learning platform or anything else?

Device compatibility

Which devices will your learners be using (think about personal devices used outside of work too), and how many of these will your learning platform need to support?

Cost

What is your overall budget, and how will you ensure that you are only paying for features you will actually use?



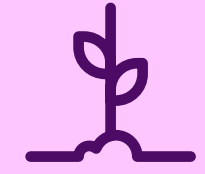
4.

**Will this Platform
Grow with our Needs?**

Will this platform grow with our needs?

When you're entering into the procurement process for a new learning platform, it pays to consider not just your current situation, but also what might happen in the future. Would the platforms under consideration be able to double in scale if you were to acquire another business? What about if you undergo a rebrand – could you easily apply your new branding to your learning platform?

Before you make your selection think about a few key points:



1. Can we easily scale user levels as we need to?

If you go on a recruitment drive, open a new office, acquire a new company or open your learning up to a new group, your learning platform needs to be able to handle this. Will scalability come at a cost, or do you have the freedom to upscale (and downscale) as you need to?

2. Can we extend outside our organization?

The use case for your learning platform may change, or grow, over time. If you decide to open up your platform to partners, suppliers, resellers, end customers or the general public, will your chosen platform be able to support this? Can you divide your learners into audiences? What about security concerns?

3. How will adding new features and functionality work?

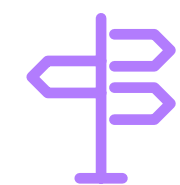
While a learning platform may appear to tick all of the boxes on the day you sign your contract, don't forget that things can – and do – change quickly in today's business environment. If you need a new feature in the future, can you add this yourself, or are you at the mercy of your vendor, who will have their own priorities on their roadmap? This is where flexible, configurable, enterprise open software comes into its own – you have the freedom to create a solution that suits your needs, rather than working around the features that are currently available.



5.

**What If We
Change our Minds?**

What if we change our minds?



A tailor-made
solution when
you need it

While it's virtually impossible to predict the impact of external factors, such as future mergers, acquisitions or even the wider economy, on your business, you can certainly put measures in place to protect ourselves from these changes - even if they come from within the business.

Businesses change direction all the time, whether that's changing product focus, switching priorities, reallocating budgets or restructuring teams. As relatively common business decisions, it's crucial that the learning platform you choose supports changes such as these,

The trouble with traditional, proprietary learning management systems is that you are often locked into long-term contracts with very little (if any) say about the direction of the product. If your business restructures

and you need to reflect this in your learning platform, you need the freedom and control to do this immediately.

Likewise, if you need new functionality to support training for an entire new product line, what do you do if your current learning platform doesn't do what you need it to? Do you wait for months, or possibly even years, for your vendor to add what you need to the roadmap, or do you choose a platform that enables you to work with your learning technology partner to create a tailor-made solution when you need it?



6.

**What are the Main Drivers:
Time, Quality or Cost?**

What are the main drivers: **time, quality or cost?**



Every organization has a unique combination of drivers for choosing the learning platform they do, whether that's time, quality, cost or a mixture of the three. Regardless of the reasons behind your choice, be clear about where you're starting from and how your learning platform will help you get to where you need to be.

Understanding the primary drivers behind your decision also equips you for honest conversations with vendors. If your current learning platform is too expensive, or doesn't let you deliver learning quickly enough, or doesn't offer the right user experience, ensure you make these reasons for wanting to change clear to your prospective vendors.

Aside from the drivers within your organization, it's just as important

to consider the external factors. The rate of change in your industry may be beyond your control, but the rate of change and innovation within your industry needn't be if you take an open source approach where you can influence the roadmap and build the solution around your needs.



7.

So, What Next?



So, what next?

In a business climate driven by rapid technological change, the demands on your organization to adapt and remain competitive will only increase. Maintaining the skills and performance of your employees and stakeholder community is critical to your business strategy. Investing in systems that can adapt with you, both quickly and cost effectively, keeps you in control, and not at the mercy of any one vendor.

The next time you enter into the learning platform procurement process, prioritize flexibility, adaptability and scalability. The organizations who place these requirements at the heart of their procurement decisions will find that their learning strategies are far better supported well into the future - and who can afford to make another costly mistake?





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