D2L

Your Association's Guide to Buying an LMS

Learning management systems (LMSs) are transforming how associations deliver continuing education and professional development opportunities to their members. However, with increased demand comes higher expectations from everyone. Members expect learning content to be relevant and easy to access. Learning and education teams want to be able to create and curate the best training content possible and track the effectiveness of their programs to measure ROI. Executives need to see how learning can solve their biggest challenges—whether unlocking new revenue channels, enabling more effective skill development, or boosting member attraction and retention.

To do that, your association needs the right LMS technology and learning partner.

Selecting the Right LMS

FEATURES AND CAPABILITIES

Content Creation and Curation

LMS platforms vary in the extent to which they offer tools that allow content creation and curation. Some may offer content uploads only in DOC, XLS, PPT, PDF, TXT and RTF formats. Others may support elements such as links, videos and entire course packages.

When assessing an LMS, consider the following questions:

- Can you upload all your existing assets, including videos and examinations?

- Can learners connect to web content hosted elsewhere, if needed?

- Does the LMS platform support the latest international standards for online learning, including SCORM, AICC, IMS and Tin Can/xAPI?

- Does it offer a native content builder to develop engaging and dynamic course content from scratch?

- Can content managers organize the curriculum, learning materials and evaluations into an effective and meaningful learning pathway?

- Can learners easily find and access learning materials from different learning pathways and coursework specializations?

Larger associations might need an LMS with more robust content creation capabilities that involve video, audio, interactive and gamification opportunities, and broader online learning content libraries. Are there services offered in house to assist with learning strategy and content development?

User Experience

Understanding the varying ways in which different users—including facilitators, course designers, administrators and members—engage and interact within your selected LMS platform is essential.

Factors to consider when gauging the relevancy of the user experience include:

- branded elements and logos

- decluttered navigational controls

- accessibility of instructional materials

- multi-platform functionality

- responsiveness across browsers and devices

- personalization of the learning environment and content

Accessibility

Accessibility is important for all users. In the U.S. alone, one in four people lives with some type of disability. The right LMS should help make it easier for your association to create courses that are not only engaging but accessible too.

Questions to consider include:

- Can members easily customize their preferences to suit their needs?
- Are you able to present material through different mediums?
- Can members interact with content and give responses in various ways?
- Is the platform compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level AAA standards?
- Are there features or tools included in the platform that help you make your content more accessible?

Accessibility-related features aren't necessary only for users who may have a long-term disability. Making learning experiences more accessible can make them more flexible for everyone. A person working in a noisy room may benefit from closed captions and transcripts for videos. Someone recovering from an eye infection might benefit greatly from content that has the right contrast ratio of text to background colors and descriptive tags for images.

At the end of the day, it's about making sure that all members have a variety of ways to consume content, show their knowledge and skills, and engage and collaborate.

Personalization

There are two parts to personalization. The first is user-driven personalization features, which may include:

- customizable dashboards with day- and night-vision options
- adjustable color palettes for menus and sidebars
- personalized feeds, notifications and nudges
- multi-language interaction and support capabilities
- options to set pronoun preferences and use avatars

The second part is automated personalization, which is supported by capabilities such as:

- defined learning groups
- pre-set learning paths
- automated release conditions
- self-registration
- integrated e-commerce

Skill Building

Education is key to helping members master new skills and upgrade existing ones. Look for an LMS that enables you to:

- administer awards, badges and certifications
- facilitate social learning opportunities with peers • give people opportunities to practice and apply skills through video
- help members reinforce concepts with in-course knowledge checks
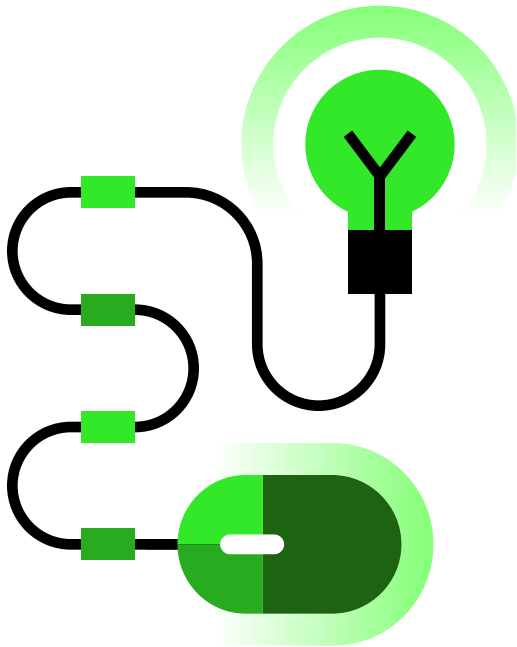
Data Analytics

Learning data and analytics can be a powerful resource in helping you understand:

- Which members are the most engaged? Which are the least engaged?
- Who is likely to renew? Who is at risk?
- Overall, what does the member engagement journey look like for your association?
- Which courses are the most popular? Which ones are the most effective? Which ones generate the most revenue?
- In what areas could users benefit from more advanced resources?

To answer these questions, you need solutions that provide detailed information about adoption, engagement and performance. Look for an LMS that supports:

- a robust report-building engine
- a library of standardized report templates
- scheduling and data visualization capabilities
- integrations across your technology ecosystem (AMS, CRM, etc.)

Administration and Security

You want your LMS to ease administrative burdens—not add to them. When it comes to setting up content, this could look like drag-and-drop editors rather than HTML/CSS coding. For user management, that could mean automated user creation and enrollments, self-registration and catalog features, and bulk editing and control functions.

Concerning the security, LMS vendors with cloud-based platforms are generally responsible for keeping the system working the way it should and protected against outside breaches and threats.

- Do you offer constant uptime?

- What's your disaster recovery plan?

- What safety features (secure data transmission, endpoint and threat protection, single sign-on (SSO) capabilities, vulnerability management, etc.) are built into your platform?

- What security policies does your association have in place?

- Will maintenance windows make the LMS unavailable for use?

Integrations

Your LMS needs to be able to integrate with the other tools that are part of your association's tech stack. For example, some LMSs provide easy integration with CRM software, so learners can easily search for courses based on their areas of interest. Some will integrate with e-commerce capabilities to provide seamless registration for learners and easy accounting for association staff.

Always remember that your LMS needs to address the needs of two different audiences: learners (members) and instructors. Each group's preferences and requirements must balance one another. Otherwise, you may end up with a platform that's too complex for administrators to manage or too difficult for learners to use.

Services and Support

Learning Strategy

Whether you're building from the ground up or migrating from one LMS to another, look for a partner who can offer support with:

- strategic planning
- change management
- communications and marketing
- learning program design
- learner experience mapping

Implementation and Training

When it comes to implementation, you want a plan that's customized to reflect your needs and a partner that will be there to help you do some of the heavy lifting—including course migrations, AMS configuration and setting up SSO.

Training should help your member training and education teams get up to speed fast through on-demand content, individualized plans and personalized support for specific skills needs for your deployment.

Content Development and Design

Creating awesome learning experiences is about more than simply having great material. It needs to be well structured and designed with member engagement, retention and success in mind.

When you're evaluating LMS vendors and the services they provide, ask these questions:

- Do they have in-house instructional designers who are experts in their product, or do they contract work out to independent third parties?

- Can their teams build distinct types of learning experiences—asynchronous, synchronous or a blend of both?

- Can you tailor the scope of work, whether you need one-time assistance with a project or ongoing support to keep content fresh and engaging?

- Will the content be accessible for all learners?

- Will the templates be easy for your internal course creators to reuse and adapt?

- Can they create custom branded elements, including widgets and badges?

Support and Consulting

To help your association get the most out of its learning platform and programs, you may also benefit from working with a vendor that can provide:

- ongoing help with day-to-day administration

- technical guidance with updates and projects

- knowledge in creating customized analytics reports and data visualizations

- comprehensive end-user support

Questions to Ask When Evaluating an LMS Vendor

When you're researching vendors, you want to evaluate them considering the following:

- financial health and stability

- history and longevity

- customer retention/churn

- executive stability and capability

- thought leadership

- innovation, R&D and product road map

- expertise with implementation, course conversion and support

- commitment to long-term partnership

There are several questions you can use to help assess those criteria.

ABOUT THE VENDOR:

- How long has your company been providing an LMS?

- What additional services does your company provide?

- Is it likely that your company will be regularly releasing new features in the future? How will your company be delivering them to your members? Will your LMS platform experience any downtime during these upgrades?

- What makes your LMS stand out from your competitors?

ABOUT THE PLATFORM

- How can your LMS help reduce administrative burdens by building better product knowledge?

- How can I create a continuous user experience with a cohesive look and feel so members don't feel like they're hopping between LMS and other technologies I have in place?

- Will my members be able to access courses anytime, anywhere and on any device—even if they're offline?

- Can members purchase training and courses from inside the LMS?

- How do I control who has access to content and permissions?

- Does your LMS offer eCommerce functionality?

- Will the platform be scalable? Are there additional charges involved?

- Can your platform integrate with other systems so I can run additional reports?

ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

- Does your company provide guidance on how to improve my programs to make them more effective?

- Will the LMS be able to cater to diverse learning preferences and needs?

- How can I measure the impact of my programs? What types of metrics and reporting features will be available?

Conclusion

Online learning platforms are fundamentally changing how people of all ages learn. Content needs to be relevant, engaging and accessible anywhere and at any time. Courses need to be easy to set up and customize to reflect your members' individual needs and preferences. And programs need to be effective, increasing engagement, retention and skills development for members and associations alike.

When evaluating a learning partner, you want to ensure that they can deliver the level of support your association may need to deploy its LMS and increase membership adoption and engagement with its learning experiences. The right partner will offer more than just technology. They'll be there to help you succeed and introduce you to a community of other associations committed to making learning their competitive advantage. For these reasons and many more, finding the right LMS partner for your association has never been more important.

We're excited to support you in your search.

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ABOUT D2L

D2L is a global learning innovation company, reshaping the future of education and work. We're leading the way into a new era of personalised learning, driven by the belief that everyone deserves access to high-quality education, regardless of their age, ability or location. Our signature technology products—D2L Brightspace and D2L Wave—enhance the learning experience for millions of learners at every stage of life, from the earliest days of school to the working world.

Learn more at D2L.com.

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