With nearly two decades experience providing organizations around the globe with the world's leading Learning Management System, we've learned a lot about what matters most in an LMS. And that's an LMS that:

- Goes beyond course management, and even overall learning management, and provides a full learning environment
- Has learners at the center
- Is easy to update with content and programs
- Holds a proven track record of learning innovation
- Expands its portfolio with innovative partnerships
- Is dedicated to your ongoing success

Whether you're evaluating an LMS for the first time, or re-evaluating your current approach, this guide's for you.

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Beyond Course Management, and Into a True Learning Environment

The definition of LMS has expanded, going well beyond course management. Yes, course management – the creation and delivery of dynamic courses, course registrations, enterprise content management, the ability to record and analyze learner progress – remains a pillar of an LMS, but today's best LMS provide a more holistic approach, offering solutions that cover a broad spectrum of learning requirements.

This new, integrated learning environment combines traditional learning management with collaboration and social interaction capabilities, enabling learners to:

• Use a personalized, intuitive platform that increases engagement
• Take part in blended learning programs
• Collaborate on team projects that tie learning to job activities
• Access materials on-the-go with mobile and off-line learning capabilities

You need to keep in mind: today’s learners crave relevant, on-the-job training delivered at the right time. Your organization must:

• Support your learners’ demands for an up-to-date look and feel, mobile access, and real-time interaction
• Provide a platform that facilitates charting the optimal learning path – résumé-building, networking, earning badges and certificates - for achieving their career goals

You need to keep in mind that, in order to deliver an excellent learning experience - one that will help you onboard employees more rapidly, improve employee performance, groom future leaders, and engage and retain employees - today’s organizations and their learners must be data-driven. An LMS must be able to draw on an organization’s data – from the LMS itself, as well as from other sources, to provide comprehensive, easy to understand and actionable dashboards for learners and training managers that provide proof points of outcomes for a range of purposes, including certifications.

“The Advisory Board Company has long centered its leadership development practice on face-to-face workshops. We traveled around the country having very intensive experiential interactions with groups of people, after which there was very little engagement. We had long sought a way to sustain a relationship with large numbers of learners, to understand what they’re doing outside of the workshop, and to enable them to interact with each other when not together in the classroom. We looked across the learning solutions landscape, and chose Blackboard because its richness of functionality best matched our needs.”

Paul Merrylees, Director
The Advisory Board Company

And underlying any LMS must be a reliable technological platform that offers multiple delivery options, including delivery to the mobile devices that today's learners have so widely adopted. For organizations and the staff that supports their LMS, deployment choice - SaaS or Private Cloud - is needed to satisfy requirements for control, management costs, and time to acquire new enhancements and innovations.

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Learners at the Center

At the end of the day, the purpose of your LMS is to make learning more desirable, accessible, and meaningful for all learners, and to improve outcomes for them. This is the shared purpose that your LMS provider should hold along with learning and development leaders, instructional designers and corporate trainers.

This all sounds very noble, but what, exactly, does it mean?

It means that your LMS should be designed with today’s learners in mind, learners who are:

• Always on
• Mobile

And increasingly discerning consumers of education, looking for a good experience, good value, and a path to workforce entry or career progression.

Today’s learners expect:

• Real-time connection to their content and to each other
• Apps that are easy to navigate
• Engagement in their learning experience: no more reading from slides or clickthrough training
• Online interaction with subject matter experts
• Access from anywhere, on any device, to learning materials,
• An investment in learning that pays off, not just in terms of personal growth, but in terms of professional opportunities.

Of course, learners at the center also means making sure that learning and development leaders, instructional designers and corporate trainers, who provide and support the learning environment, have an LMS that meets their needs, too.

If an LMS solution does not seem to be putting learners at the center, you have to wonder who, exactly, they believe that learning is for.

“With Blackboard we’re able to combine all of these different elements - video, games, and assessments - and not lose the instructor in the classroom.”

Kimberly Gutierrez, System Administrator, AIM Specialty Health

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**Accessible to the Extended Enterprise**

An LMS should provide an innovative online learning solution that gives you the power to easily establish consistent learning experiences across time zones and geographic locations, and in multiple languages, so you’ll be able to connect in a natural, comfortable way with employees, customers, and partners around the world.

An LMS vendor should demonstrate their commitment to an open architecture that can integrate easily with other learning management systems, talent management and association management systems so you can deploy a comprehensive training strategy, including instructor-led training, eLearning, and extended learning.

**Accessibility For Users With Impairments**

An LMS should ideally measure and evaluate accessibility levels using two sets of standards: Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act issued from the United States federal government and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0) issued by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). A third party should conduct audits of the LMS provider’s software releases to ensure the accessibility of the products.

Have you thought about accessibility? Is your content mobile friendly, in the right language or 508c compliant format for those with impairments?

Technology offers many breakthroughs:

- Closed-captioning for those with hearing impairment
- Screen reader support, enabling text-to-speech output for those with vision-related disabilities
- Improved keyboard navigation and accelerator keys for those with limited mobility
- Recordings for those with cognitive disabilities

When you look for an LMS provider who shares your commitment to accessibility, keep in mind that “commitment” means more than satisfying a set of checklist requirements, like those set out in VPAT. Yes, specific product features are important, but so is engaging those with disabilities in the product discussion.

Look for an LMS provider that works closely with members of the community who are disabled, and the educators who support them, in the design of their LMS. A true LMS solution will incorporate the wisdom and experience of those who encounter accessibility issues in “real life.” Such an LMS is the one most likely to offer the level of accessibility that your institution is committed to providing.

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A Proven Track Record of Innovation in Learning

Over the last several decades, things have changed very rapidly in the world of technology, and these changes have had a profound impact on how learning is delivered and how learners expect to learn.

An LMS provider must be able to demonstrate that they are nimble, and can respond rapidly to the new opportunities that technology opens up, such as:

- Virtual and blended classrooms
- Digital and interactive content
- Collaboration
- Mobile access
- Use of new devices
- Real-time engagement
- A focus on competency-based and individualized learning
- The ability to demonstrate ROI and professional outcomes

“All companies want modernized platforms which are easier to use, offer mobile learning, and tightly integrate with talent and collaboration systems. Our research shows that many LMS systems developed for the educational market are now reaching into the corporate space, a play which Blackboard started more than five years ago.”


All the innovation in the world won’t matter if the LMS is unable to point to a proven track record. Whether you’re small business, large enterprise, membership association, government agency or military branch; whether you’re purely local or have a global presence, the LMS vendor you want to work with is one that has worked (and succeeded) with organizations like yours. As organizations look to reduce costs and extend training more widely by introducing online learning programs, you need to ask whether an LMS can support and scale with you as you grow. How well do they support a globally dispersed workforce, with access to varying connection quality? And today many organizations use a wide variety of content and methods to get training initiatives to stick. How well can your LMS support them?

When it comes to learning, the business world and the government can take a page from higher education. So your LMS vendor should have in its ranks those with a background in academia and in academic technology. Increasingly, those investing in an LMS recognize that a learning solution that was designed for learners, with guidance from educators, will best meet their needs.

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Innovation Through Partnerships

An LMS vendor’s philosophy should be open to expanding its portfolio by partnering with a broad range of technology providers that will integrate their offerings with the core LMS.

This is not always the case, and some LMS providers are uninterested in capabilities that are “not invented here.” But the learning technology landscape changes so rapidly, with new content, tools and applications being continually brought out that apply technology to learning in fresh and innovative ways. Your LMS vendor should offer a rich ecosystem of partners offering products that can easily integrate with their core portfolio.

8 Ways to Boost Employee Productivity and Lower Spending per Learner in Your Learning Environment

1. Easily create instructor-led courses that use a variety of content
2. Facilitate the transfer of knowledge from internal top performers or subject-matter experts to other employees
3. Allow employees to use mobile devices to access content
4. Tap social learning tools to engage employees and keep them coming back to gain deeper knowledge
5. Offer flexibility with self-paced asynchronous courses or all-at-once instruction via synchronous sessions
6. Standardize training across a global organization and reduce associated travel expenses.
7. Promote and enable mentoring that fosters leadership development
8. Get more from your training investment by repurposing content for a variety of employee audiences and courses

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Dedicated to Your Ongoing Success

Success may start with designing and implementing a system that will help achieve your strategic goals, but it doesn’t end there. Techniques and practices for solution adoption are essential. So is providing vibrant forums in which LMS customers can exchange ideas for ongoing success.

The right LMS can make a real difference to your organization, enabling you to provide a learning environment that can help you:

- Invest in career growth
- Develop a workforce with the skill sets you require
- Improve engagement
- Cost-effectively expand your reach

To begin with, your LMS provider should offer services, staffed by those who understand both the learning environment and learning technology - professionals who can work with you to articulate your organization’s strategic goals, sales goals or professional development goals and translate how their solution that will help you achieve those goals.

Once the solution has been defined, and implementation is underway, your organization must determine how your LMS will be launched. Since widespread adoption is essential if you hope to use your LMS to help achieve strategic goals (and achieve a return on your investment), you should look for an LMS vendor who can provide expert services focused on solution rollout and adoption, and, where it makes sense (e.g., a new online training program), expansion.

Make sure your LMS provider offers a full range of services to help you realize the strategy for a learning environment that meets your needs.

While learners are at the center of your LMS, they will only be using that LMS for the duration of their employment. Your staff will be working with it for years to come. With collaboration on the increase throughout society, your LMS vendor should offer a range of vibrant forums in which instructional designers, trainers and administrators can find peer communities, and meet to exchange ideas, share best practices, discuss their challenges, etc.

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Looking to Move Beyond Yesterday’s LMS and Move Into a True Learning Environment?

Look for a vendor that is more than an LMS—look for a seamless, integrated learning environment that includes mobile apps, online conferencing and virtual classrooms. Look for a comprehensive solution that includes a core LMS, and can integrate with many other third-party LMS products to help you build the learning environment that’s right for your employees.

Interested in learning more? Our solutions experts can schedule a 30 min conversation to help determine if your current learning and development programs are meeting the needs of your learners, please register here, and we’ll be in touch.

If you think your organization is ready to delve into organizational learning, we’re here to help you discover how to provide a flexible, innovative online learning environment. Find out how driving knowledge throughout your workforce can also drive down costs and improve your bottom line.

Blackboard is the world’s leading education technology company, reimagining education by challenging conventional thinking and advancing new learning models. We rapidly deploy relevant and meaningful technologies and services to meet the needs of the modern day learner and the institutions that serve them, driving success and growth for both. In partnership with higher education, K-12, corporate organizations, and government agencies around the world, we help every learner achieve their full potential.

Learn how the Advisory Board is working with Blackboard to build an exceptional learning environment. Watch the video now »