



**How To Implement A  
Cost-Effective  
Learning Management System  
(LMS) To Induct & Train  
Your Staff Online**



**HRwisdom**

## How To Implement A Cost-Effective Learning Management System (LMS) Start Induct & Train Your Staff Online

HRwisdom has been busy exploring online LMS (Learning Management Systems) as part of our internal training processes (we help businesses involve their staff in online marketing).

We have been keen to avoid the very common concerns when it comes to online learning implementation:

*"I didn't realise what was involved"*

*"It took much longer to implement"*

*"It doesn't do what I thought it would do"*

*"We underestimated the post implementation support capability"*

*"We didn't factor in change management"*

*"Getting help from our vendor post implementation is not easy"*

This guide simply highlights the key points around what to look out for to help you identify, implement and support the LMS in your organisation.

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We have broken up the following discussion around the three phases of a typical LMS implementation.

## **Phase 1: Pre-Implementation**

There are so many LMS vendors and brands in the marketplace today - many of which are not well known in the Australian market.

There are open source options and there are very expensive options and everything in between. Some are face to face only, some are elearning only, whilst many do everything and more (talent, HR etc)

Most of the more well know LMS systems will "do the job" for you, however have you ever stopped to consider: "Am I going to have to adapt my strategic learning strategies and business processes around the potential LMS, or can the LMS be flexible enough to work with our way of thinking and working?". There is no simple answer to this question. To get what you want may exceed your budget constraints. It may also be that adapting some of your existing processes to fit the LMS functionality may not have a significant impact (something you can live with). Just something to consider...

New LMS vendors appear on the scene all the time.

It is important to understand the difference between a dedicated LMS vendor versus a vendor who specialises in another form of database solution, who then adds on an LMS function (e.g. HR, Payroll systems).

We are not suggesting you discount multipurpose vendors, however it is worth serious consideration, as you could end up with a very complex environment to manage. In addition, if one area of a fully integrated system goes offline (for whatever reason), what impact may that have on your learning and development strategy?

Keep in mind, these days it is relatively simple and inexpensive to have your HR/Payroll system working seamlessly alongside an LMS (centralised data and reporting repository etc).

Many LMS platforms are somewhat rigid in that whilst you can turn functions on or off and in most cases manipulate the reporting data, most LMS system cannot be customised.

Most LMS systems are 'configurable' which means you can tweak functions to an extent to meet your needs, however many are not 'customisable'.

Customisable LMS systems are often more expensive by nature but can be the right fit if your current business processes and requirements are complex. For many, 'configurable' is perfectly fine and as you may need to adapt slightly to meet the LMS framework to achieve your business outcome or goal. The vast majority of LMS platforms around the world are configurable.

Hosted or locally installed?

This is a common question and is not a difficult one to answer. For some organisations, locally installed is the only option. The reason may be around requiring 'absolute' security of its employee data or perhaps the content is very sensitive and not for public access or consumption. Hosted solutions on the other hand (which by the way represent more than 80% of the LMS market today) offer little to no IT support (which is often attractive to many HR/L&D managers) and are accessible to learners both internally and externally. In most cases, hosted solutions will prove more cost effective as most hosted LMS platforms will be to a large extent 'out of the box' or 'turn-key' – albeit with some configurable components.

Choosing the right LMS can make or break an organisation's learning strategy. Consider the question 'What would be the result if you were to build a million dollar home on a weak foundation?' Your million dollar investment, whether it be next month or next year, would ultimately be wasted.

But cost is not the only issue here.

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If you implement a substandard LMS (whether it be based on functions or stability issues) your employees will not have a good user experience. Even if you then invest 6 months or more replacing that LMS with a better one, there will always be trepidation from your employees when it comes to using an LMS for their day to day learning within your organisation.

The world of elearning is evolving quickly. When you are planning to implement an LMS into your organisation, are you considering the next 2-3 years, or 5 years? It comes as no surprise that given the massive uptake of smart phone and tablet usage in Australia, that mobile learning (or **mLearning** as some refer to it) is only going to gain momentum. Does your LMS provide possible mLearning capability? Even if this function is coming in a future release... In addition to mLearning, blended learning solutions are become more popular. Can your LMS support a training package comprising multiple components such as online content, in the field workshops, classroom events, webinar, forums and more...? Social media components are now being integrated into organisational learning strategies.

So armed with all these considerations - what's next? Well, if you are starting out on your LMS journey just allow sufficient time to prepare, plan and scope your requirements. It is very important to involve your key stakeholders (e.g. L&D/HR managers from your different departments, business units etc) and ensure you understand what it is they expect and require from a potential LMS. Naturally you most likely will never tick every box (unless you have an unlimited budget), however you can at least identify the salient points from the long list you may receive.

Most people will need to prepare a 'business case' prior to procuring an LMS, so armed with your stakeholder feedback, your next steps will be around identifying your overall business objectives by having an LMS in the first place.

You will also need to discuss issues such as: IT (e.g. is your standard operating environment (SOE) capable right now of sustaining the LMS (and potential content)? Do we have a support structure in place to help employees and managers use the system? Answers to these questions can be somewhat involved - however are never to be underestimated. It would also be worthwhile working out your return on investment (ROI) and compare current practices and benefits against the potential of implementing an effective LMS.

Some considerations for when considering your next LMS might be features such as:

- Overall cost

- Time taken to implement
- Uptake by your learners
- Post-Implementation Support - both from LMS vendor and your internal team)
- Scalability (e.g. mLearning and multiple device support).

## Procurement

Often following the 2 - 3 month preparation of your business case and planning comes the request for quote (or tender) document.

Naturally this document will outline hundreds of requirements you have identified.

Some LMS vendors will tick every box (whether that is correct or not based on their understanding of the criteria) and some can't or will not.

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When putting out a tender or Request For Quote, consider three things:

1. Be clear about what is mandatory and what may be desirable. Finding an LMS which ticks ALL boxes will cost you – do you REALLY need all that?
2. When stating a requirement – be as clear as possible. Using a term which makes sense to you may not make sense to the vendor. Anything IT is usually engulfed by a world of acronyms and unfortunately some of them bear different meanings to different people. In essence a vendor may tick a box in all honesty thinking they can deliver that objective only to find out

during implementation they are arguing with you as there was a misunderstanding.

3. Ask the vendor to state if a feature is configurable or customisable where appropriate. Noting that generically speaking, customising something will generally equate to an additional cost to the solution. Configuring can often be included in the setup cost. Again, ask yourself; can you live without that feature?

## **Phase 2: Implementation**

After you have invested all the time preparing your business and writing your request for quote (RFQ), let's assume you have now selected a suitable vendor to install and configure your LMS.

The installation typically ranges from 48 hours to 3 months (sometimes longer).

There are a number of things you may be working on whilst the LMS is being implemented. You may be building your organisational structure (which will help LMS systems distribute content as well as you reporting on its usage etc), you may be concentrating on consolidating all your learning content and supporting materials ready to import into the LMS.

Aside from the tasks above (all of which you will need to complete), you will hopefully have considered internal support and change management.

If this is your very first LMS (or first online LMS), it is most likely your staff will have no idea what to do or how this works and more importantly, what benefit it provides to them. It would be wise to ensure you have adequately communicated to your staff (and managers) what is coming, when it will be ready, what it does and most importantly what their roles will be within that system.

Working with your LMS vendor, you may prepare some tutorials and create some process maps to help them understand how it works and in addition what to do when this LMS is introduced to them.

Your vendor typically will provide support to the "administrators" of the LMS and not to your staff (unless specifically arranged as part of the procurement process). This means you will be suddenly dealing with a range of level 1 technical support issues ranging from "Forgotten passwords" up to "Where can I find ABC?" The larger your organisation, the more day to day technical support you will need to provide (or plan to cater for).

If you are either a large geographically diverse organisation or have chosen to implement a complex LMS platform it may be a wise strategy to implement your new LMS in stages. Introduce components of the solution to your staff over a period of time so you do not inundate them with too much information too soon...

### **Phase 3: Post-Implementation**

One of the most important, yet most understated factors when discussing Learning Management Systems is the relationship between you and your vendor.

Your aim is to avoid the usual complaint of: "We paid good money for this LMS and trying to get support out of the supplier is like drawing blood from a stone."

If this is your first LMS, you must have regular communication and on-demand support from your vendor.

Today's fully featured LMS systems can have over 10,000 functions built into the system. There is little chance of you absorbing all that in a couple of days.

As you use components of your LMS, you will need to learn how to use it. As you use more components/functions your reporting matrix expands, your day to day management of the LMS expands and in essence it can get complex. Having the right support structure around you will put your mind at ease.

Cultural change/shift and technical support is crucial post implementation. You need to assume the majority of your staff (learners) will not know what to do on day 1.

Also ensure your IT department remain a close partner in all this, as should they upgrade your standard operating environment (SOE) in any way, it may have an impact on the LMS performance and functionality.

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