

Finding Your Way to the Right LMS for Your Learners

Most online courses need to live on a platform or **learning management system**, commonly referred to as an LMS. There are literally hundreds to choose from. This is good ... and bad. *Good* because there are a lot of options to choose from with great features that will serve your learners well. *Bad* because it can be bewildering to find just the right one.



Here are a few good questions and some tips to get you started on the hunt for the best LMS for your course.

1. **Who are your learners?** *This is always the first place to start.*
 - ✓ What are their learning needs?
 - ✓ What are their skill levels with digital tools?
 - ✓ Will they use computers, iPads, mobile phones or all the above?
 - ✓ Do they have adequate bandwidth for learning online?

2. **What features do you really need?**
 - ✓ *A pleasing user experience.* It needs to be easy to use for learners and for you too.
 - ✓ *Tracking and reporting.* See who is accessing your course and how they are progressing.
 - ✓ *Assessment and testing tools.* Learners gain certifications or badges; you can assess learning transfer.
 - ✓ *Collaborative features.* Video chat, web conferencing, and message boards for networking and facilitator interaction.
 - ✓ *Responsive design for multiple devices.* Learners can access your course on any device.
 - ✓ *Content creation options.* A variety of interactions and experiences available to help get through complicated material.
 - ✓ *Customizable branding.* Gives your course your brand identity.
 - ✓ *SCORM or xAPI compliance.* Ability to upload interactive content and access more sophisticated reporting and tracking features.
 - ✓ *E-commerce integration.* Ability to charge a fee for your course.

3. **Open source or proprietary, cloud-deployed software?**
 - ✓ *Open source options* like [Moodle](#) and [Joomla](#) are free. You will either need a good administrator or a Moodle vendor to make the best use of this software on your own server. It has hundreds of millions of users and hundreds of plug-ins that allow you to customise your learning experience.
 - ✓ *Proprietary or cloud-deployed software* is software that you download and access on any device. It's hosted by the vendor, and there are hundreds of options. A good way to sort through them is to go to [Capterra](#) or the [eLearning Industry](#) LMS

selection sites. There you can tick the features you're most interested in, and they'll give you a shortened list to look through.

- ✓ *Budget.* Free options still require an administrator or vendor. Cloud-based options range from \$500-10,000 per year. Some have monthly or annual fees; some are based on the numbers of learners you have using the system. Most also have reduced fees for not-for-profits; ask directly about those.

Take it Out for a Spin

Once you've landed on an option you think fits your needs, try it out. Most have a free trial or limited function, so you can get a feel for how it works. Choose one that allows you to use the full range of features during the trial. If that's not available, reach out and ask if you can be allowed to trial the pro version ... it never hurts to ask.

As you are trying it out, reach out for assistance to see how responsive their support services are. You want to make sure you can count on help when you need it later.

And then, enjoy. As with any software, it will take some getting used to, but the effort is well worth it. A good learning platform puts your best foot forward whether you're doing in-house training or developing a course for sale.