How to Speed Date Top LMS Vendors

By Joy Church Millard

Learn the latest tips and trends from today's top analysts to secure the best LMS for your organization

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Introduction

Are you just beginning your LMS search and want to make it as efficient and effective as possible? Or are you in LMS limbo—a search that has dragged on wasting precious L&D time and money? This LMS Insights can help!

Following are current tips and trends from learning industry thought leaders that will get you on the right path to your best LMS.

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How to Speed Date LMS Vendors

Analysts estimate that there will be more than 1,000 LMS vendors by 2017. No wonder it's hard to figure out where to start your LMS search!

If you'd like a fast and effective "speed dating" method for narrowing your LMS field, following these tips from "LMS Success" and "The LMS Selection Checklist" author Katrina Baker:

1 **Frame your LMS search with your current and future needs—**This ensures that you don't quickly outgrow your learning system. Specify:

- What your leadership's goals are

- What's your organization's projected growth

- Will all of your employees access the LMS

- What percentage of your courses will be delivered online, etc.

2 **Identify your top learning priorities—**It's key to focus on the top three or four. Don't get trapped into being a jack of all trades, but a master of none.

3 **Do your due diligence—**Don't settle for a passive LMS search:

- Talk to the vendors' references

- Walk through their standard user experience

- Explore whether customizations will be needed

- Find out building and delivery times, and so on

4 **Assemble an RFP—**First and foremost, keep your list reasonable, focusing on top needs that will produce the most L&D value. Also make sure to include stakeholders and rank each desired feature.

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What You Should Know Before Buying an LMS

Craig Weiss, the "most influential person in e-Learning", has a different take on Katrina's suggestion for creating an RFP. He says to skip them altogether—refining your "Request for Information" (RFI) down to one page. "This will help you avoid getting a 'vanilla' response."

He suggests you:

- First get your "tech facts" together

- Request a demo of these key needs—involving actual or dummy courses and users

- Then do a sandbox trial

If everything's kosher, then do your RFI. You shouldn't need 20 pages by then because you've already learned a lot of answers to your questions and seen the platform performing in your own use case.

> *Check out Craig's streamlined LMS RFP template*

As for key things he says you should know before buying an LMS:

(1) **What's the roadmap**—Look at least three years down the road when you're buying an LMS. You want these future features in your LMS now, even if you don't yet need them. You don't want to have to go back and retrofit your system. It's a costly process and not guaranteed to work well.

(2) **How's the support**—According to Weiss, the #1 reason people leave an LMS is vendor support. So find out about their support response times, where their support offices are located and if you can speak with existing customers about their support experiences.

(3) **How about updates**—Are they continually updating their product? And make sure these "updates" aren't just bug fixes. You want a system that will grow with you.

(4) **Does it have the must haves**—No matter what your key needs are, Weiss urges that any new LMS you consider must have:

- An intuitive learner UI

- Mobile

- Streamlined admin reporting and analytics

- Video content support

"People's attention spans are too short today. They learn via video. Short videos. Two to five minutes max."

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2016's Learning Trends: Search, Personalization & Smart Learning

With a purpose of "changing the world of workplace learning and technology", Elliot Masie has some great insights on 2016's learning trends.

Search—Are you using it to its full potential?

According to Elliot, your learners' search history is the biggest data point you have. It shows what they're most curious about and reveals learning gaps. It's also an opportunity to speed learner productivity. If you take the time to teach people how to search correctly, they can be much more effective.

> *Side Note: A few modern LMSs, like ExpertusONE, have profile-driven search which delivers personalized, meaningful results, while lowering user frustration and search times. It's worth looking into.*

Personalization—The #1 opportunity for learning!

If you want to understand how learners want to learn today, Elliot says you need to look outside the office. For example, TV.

Gone are the days where only one show was broadcast at one day/time (think Ed Sullivan). Instead, modern audiences pick: when they want to watch a show, which show they want to view, how they want to access it (phone, tablet, TV), who they want to watch it with and for how long. It's a completely personalized viewing experience.

Yet, often, when they come into the office, they're told they have to go to this room, at this time and watch this type of learning for X hours. No wonder they tune out. If you want to amp your training's effectiveness, Elliot suggests that you:

- Make learning shorter, smaller and more focused (personalized). "Try to set it up so learners can make good, personalized learning choices."

- Move away from directing how learners learn by giving them more options. "You should care that learners learn, not how they learn."

Video—62% of all learning consumption.

If you don't embrace video learning now, your learners will use YouTube or other Internet resources to find their own videos to learn from.

Also, did you know that the size of one video file can be up to 50 times larger than a typical e-Learning file? Now's the time to make sure that your LMS can adapt or if your future LMS is capable to handle the extra bandwidth.

Elliot additionally believes that learners will start to create more of their own video content. So your LMS should be able to not only support their uploads, but track, monitor and control them too.

Machine Learning—aka smart or prescriptive learning.

Elliot estimates that we'll need to reskill our workforce every 5 to 10 years. So we need to get smarter in how we continually train them. His solution is prescriptive learning.

Instead of using the LMS as a training dispenser and tracker (which is all many legacy platforms are designed to do), we should use them to learn about our users—and then use this data to shape and improve their learning experience.

Summary

If there was one key takeaway for me from these three analysts, it's that people are not only tired of their old LMSs, but they're finally ready to make the move to a new, modern learning platform.

If you're one of them, the tips and trends covered here should help you get started on an expedient, successful LMS search.

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Joy has more than 20 years of experience covering key and trending issues within the software and technology industries.

If you'd like to learn how ExpertusONE solves the problems of legacy LMSs, please contact Joy directly at joyc@expertus.com or request a demo at www.expertus.com/demo.

About ExpertusONE
As a trusted learning technology partner, Expertus has built ExpertusONE— the most powerful and intuitive LMS for training any learning audience. The enterprise-class system engages and empowers learners and admins, enhances learning effectiveness and enables distributed learning at scale.

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