



*a guide to*  
ONLINE  
EDUCATION

*tips & tricks for choosing an  
LMS that is right for you*



## *So you're looking for an LMS...*

**W**hile online learning and learning management systems are not new, perhaps they are new to you. As online education has grown and evolved since it was first introduced, so have many of the features, functions and use cases for adopting a learning management platform.

Throughout this guide, we will walk you through the features and functions you should look for within an LMS, what traditional pricing models exist, how to choose the right learning management platform for your business and plenty of other things to know.

This guide works best for decisions makers and evaluators alike, but is really for anyone who is shopping for a learning management system and really doesn't know what to expect. Of course, sales people will try to sell you on their product, but what is really important to keep in mind when shopping around?

Use this guide as a roadmap before making any decisions and hopefully you will come out the other side with a firmer grasp on what it looks

like to go through the process of purchasing your first (or second, or third) learning management system and ensure that this is the right decision for your organization.

While it's always possible to change vendors after choosing an LMS, everyone knows that getting an entire body of employees to learn a new software provides challenges of it's own. What if, you got it right the first time?

Let's begin at the very beginning of learning management and online education, with a little bit of vocabulary. Learning the language of this new software will ensure you are able to follow along with your sales rep without being misguided through the process with fancy language.

## *Let's begin!*



### *Blended Learning*

This type of learning uses a combination of e-learning methods and in-person teaching or discussions. Learners combine completing lessons online and in a classroom setting, hence blended.

### *Cloud-Based Hosting*

Software that is hosted on a server outside your organization. This type of software has become popular over the years because internal employees do not have to keep up with system maintenance, and enhancements to the software are automatically pushed out to everyone using the software.

### *Content Library*

A content library refers to learning materials that are purchased as a unit or individually and are not authored by someone in your organization. These courses can be helpful in areas such as compliance, or if your training and development team is strapped for resources.

### *eLearning*

Learning that takes place online!

### *Game-Based Learning*

Learning that is done through a game-like format.

### *Gamification*

The process of making learning like playing a game, oftentimes this style of learning is used to make content more engaging and can be seen with things such as a point system or levels.

### *ILT*

This acronym refers to instructor-led training, in other words, education that happens in a classroom with a teacher.

### *Learning Pathway*

A learning pathway is how a student is expected to complete learning. Typically pathways or roadmaps are designed for optimal learning and retention. These roadmaps outline how a student is expected to progress.

### *Open Source Software*

Open source software refers to software that has open-source code which is able to be edited for high customization. Oftentimes, these types of systems are free, however, they require developer abilities.

### *SCORM*

This acronym stands for shareable content object reference model and refers to a standard for authoring LMS content objects, which allows organizations to download their content and move to other systems, while maintaining functionality, if necessary.



# What is an LMS?

A learning management system (LMS) is a software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting and delivery of educational courses or training programs.

While this is the generic definition of the application - LMS's can be categorized in a few different ways, and it is important to understand the differences when looking to purchase an LMS that is right for your organization.

There are learning management systems that are strictly for user created content, which means that as an organization or institution, you are responsible to create content and courses that are relevant for your population of users. The LMS acts as the infrastructure to simply distribute content that has been created by yourself or your team.

Another type of LMS comes with provided content - a great example of a use case for this type of LMS is when you go outside your organization for training or even in-house, the training that takes place is particular to HR regulations or onboarding that is regulated by an industry and therefore the content that is provided is strictly regulated to ensure consistency across administration.

A hybrid of the two aforementioned systems, is a solution that both provides created content and courses, as well as allows for the opportunity for users to curate content that is application to their organization, industry, course, or population.

The two most popular LMS solutions are either a system that allows users to solely create their own content and host it within the system as a means to distribution or a system that comes with some sort of database of content that can be purchased with the added capabilities of

producing one's own content.

The recent uptick in use of LMS's over the past 20 years is due to the systems' unprecedented ability to allow organizations to develop coursework electronically, its far-reaching distribution capabilities, and the flexibility to manage its continued use overtime. Before the adoption and creation of LMS solutions, organizations and institutions, alike, required coursework to

be delivered during work hours, on Saturday's, on an employee's own time, or a student needed to take up valuable classroom space. Now, with LMS use on the rise, organizations are able to create highly specific content for each position, or provide additional resources to students - who are then able to access this information on their own schedule. While courses can still be taken within a designated time frame - it no longer takes up

valuable weekend time if the user would prefer to review the coursework during the week, or vice versa.

Additionally, the coursework provided or created within an LMS is able to be adapted as policies change, as positions change, as requirements are changed - this allows for a lot of control over managed coursework. Instead of updating textbooks, which can be costly, instead - swapping out resources to convey the most up-to-date procedures has become easier than ever before.

Traditionally, LMS solutions have been adopted by educational institutions since this is the most widely acceptable application for education. Learning management systems have paved the way for corporate entities and organizations to administer continuing education and development for their employees.

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”

# Must-Have Features & Functions

Everyone's needs vary greatly when it comes to choosing an LMS that is right for them - but there are a few features and functions that a business of any size would surely be remiss if their LMS did not have this sort of functionality.

## Rosters

The ability to prepare class rosters for enrolled students. Unenroll and enroll students through courses based on classes that have already been taken and are next in sequence.

## Registration Control

Logic in place to ensure the proper students are enrolling in a class that is either next in the sequence, or correct in terms of who should be taking what classes, and in what order.

## Document Management

A place to store class resources and make available the materials needed in order to successfully take the class with the proper materials.

## Multiple Device Access

Ensure students are able to access their course materials for continued learning in whatever setting they may find themselves in - when the time is right for them.

## Course Calendars

These calendars are used to lay-out upcoming courses and content to inform students of upcoming classes, enrollment dates, etc.

## Assessments & Testing

Testing features are important within an LMS not only to ensure proper instruction and learning, but to provide feedback as necessary to solidify learned concepts and instruction.

## Grading & Scoring

A way to rank students and determine whether or not they have properly mastered the learning material and can use the skills learned in the future, as necessary, depending on course content.

## Brand Integration

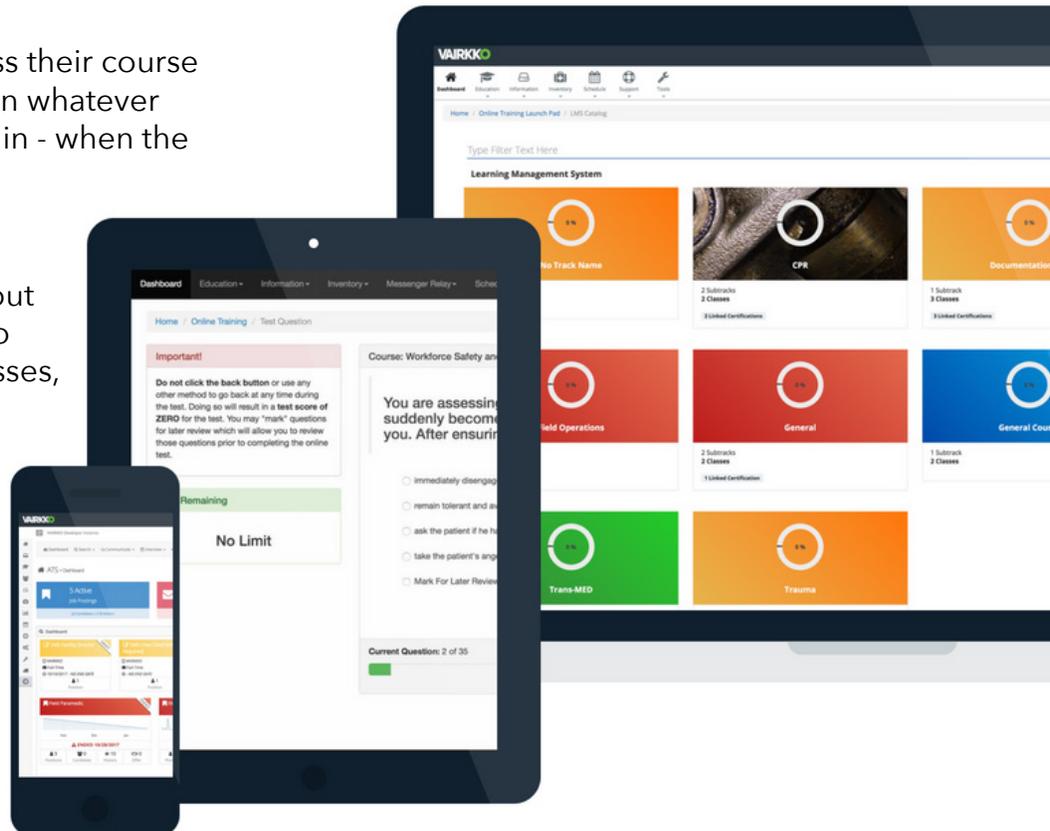
Look for an LMS vendor that provides white-labeling to ensure that students are not confused by who is putting on training and allow for customization to fit brand specifications.

## Customizable Reporting

Analyzing data from every vantage point is helpful in making actionable decisions.

## Personalized Learning Paths

Learning paths can be helpful to ensure all new employees go through the same training, or that whichever job role is learning the correct content.





## *& Skip These...*

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Sometimes, looking through the lists of features and functions, as well as listening to a sales rep, can be overwhelming. Even if you know about the features and functions that are important to have, what about the ones that may cost extra? Are they worth it? Let's take a look at the features that you can skip when shopping around for the right LMS vendor.

### *A Complicated Interface*

This should really go without saying but a complicated interface has a way of adding an unnecessary burden to users and administrators alike. Aside from additional frustration, a complicated interface discourages learning and continued use of the program. If during a product demonstration, you begin to notice that navigating through the system is cumbersome - abort. Worth mentioning, get a product demonstration, and if the vendor allows, access to the system to play around in and ensure it makes the most sense to you.

### *Rigid Design*

Using a learning management system is not only for developers, it is for anyone. Even if you aren't super tech-savvy yourself, the design should not inhibit you from using the system. A great example of something you should look for in your LMS is responsive design, this means that the website changes to fit the screen size so users can go from a computer, to a tablet, to a mobile device without losing functionality and without minimizing the legibility.

### *Bells & Whistles*

Let's face it, you want to get your money's worth from whichever vendor you ultimately select, but there is a such thing as too much. This goes hand in hand with a complicated interface, too many bells and whistles can lead to a lot of unnecessary headache. While we can't say what qualifies as too many bells and whistles for your organization - you'll know if the system has too much for you.

### *Lack of Security*

Data security is a big deal. Check with your vendor to ensure they take data encryption and security seriously, because the last thing any company needs is a breach of confidentiality. Ask the big questions about security, your employees will thank you (well, maybe not out loud), because if this is taken lightly, you'll be sure to hear lots of complaints.

### *Nickel & Dime*

The last thing you need to be on the look out for is vendors that are looking to make a pretty penny off your agreement. If you're paying for support, this may be a ploy to get more money from you. Watch out for traps like these that do not provide value equal to the cost of doing business.

## *Free*

While the benefits of a free LMS are apparent - that it is not costly, there are some important things to keep in mind. Typically these systems are not user friendly, and take quite a bit of development knowledge to import courses and upload content. If you are looking for a solution for a very small organization or small set of purposes - a free solution may be exactly what you are looking for.

## *Per Learner*

The per learner pricing model is typically the most widely used of paid platforms. With this model, organizations and institutions can typically expect that they will pay a fee per each additional user that will have access to the content. With this model, you can expect that there is an unlimited amount of content, courses, tests, and additional functionality that is included.

## *Per Use*

This pricing model varies between provider and as such tends to be a more flexible option for organization. For example, each provider has it's own definition of "use" such as an online course, access to a module, etc. Verify with the provider what the definition of "use" is in each case to avoid overpaying for the system. This option is best for organizations and use cases that do not need a wide-range of features and have a large audience.

## *Per Active Learner*

The difference between active learner and learner in pricing models is just as the name suggests. This pricing model charges by the number of users who are actively taking course content, as opposed to the number of "learners" that are eligible/enrolled to take a course. As an example, if you have 300 learners enrolled. This is a great option for those organizations who are unclear on how many will be accessing content and engaged with courses.

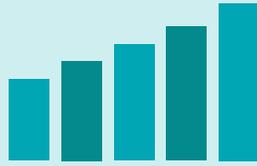
## *Limited Time Licensing*

A limited time licensing means that an organization pays annually for use of the LMS. This pricing model is most cost effective for those organizations that have very large audiences that will consume content as well as an abundant amount of online course libraries.

# PRICING

# MODELS





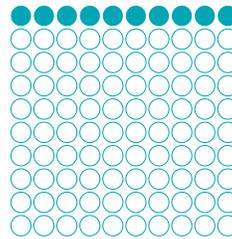
# Facts & Figures



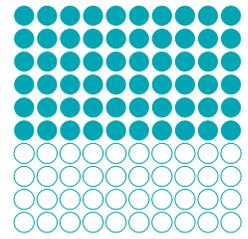
Learning material through eLearning typically takes

**40%-60%**

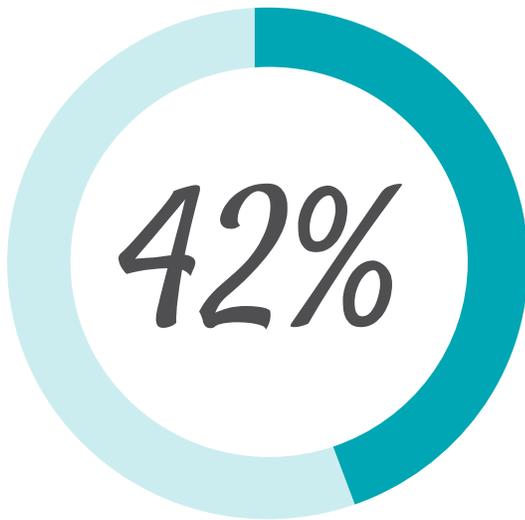
LESS EMPLOYEE TIME than through traditional classroom learning



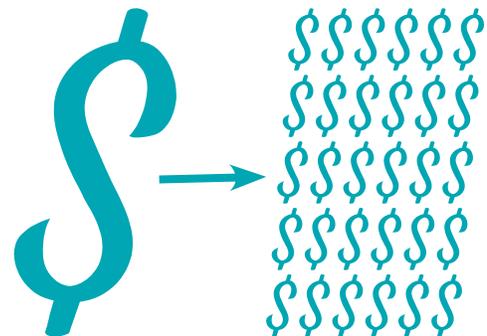
Classroom learning retention rates hover around 8% - 10%



eLearning increases retention rates to 25% - 60%



of companies in the US say that introducing eLearning has led to an increase in revenue



every \$1 invested in eLearning results in \$30 of productivity