Top 10 Mistakes when choosing an LMS... and how to avoid them.
It’s happened to all of us. You made a purchase that just wasn’t a good fit for what you need. So, naturally, you take it back to the store and get a refund.

When it comes to buying an LMS, it’s just not that easy. An LMS is a big ticket item and there is a lot of time, money and energy involved.

- **On average, companies spend anywhere from six to 12 months in their search for an LMS** (1). And then implementation can take another six to 18 months, depending if the LMS is on premise or cloud-based.

- **In addition, not only do you have to consider the listed cost of an LMS, but also hidden costs.** Despite doing research, people were still likely to lowball their expected costs, by an average of 59%.

- **And lastly, it takes a great amount of energy to put together an LMS selection team.** Write an RFP, conduct research and demos, organize implementation and much more.

If you make a mistake in the LMS you choose to purchase, the long and stressful process begins all over. And, as a result, your training and business goals are put on pause until you are able to find another one.

But, the good part is that you don’t have to choose the wrong LMS.

In this eBook, we’ve compiled the top ten biggest mistakes companies do during the selection process. And, helpful tips for avoiding a costly mistake.

When armed with useful information and helpful insight about buying an LMS, you’ll walk away feeling confident that you chose the right LMS and are on a path to reaching your business goals and objectives quickly and efficiently.

IGNORING YOUR CORPORATE IT AND SECURITY STRATEGY

Many companies in their quest for the perfect LMS go straight to the shiny object that many LMS providers dangle in front of them…features.

But, there won’t be any features or anything else if the LMS doesn’t fit into the big picture of your company. And, most importantly, your corporate IT and security strategy.

For example, a company that purchases a cloud only LMS might be disappointed to discover that because of tight compliance requirements this simply isn’t an option. Or, the opposite could happen and you could buy an on-premise solution only to find out your company doesn’t have the staff nor the means to maintain it.

During the selection process, if you really want to be successful, start backwards.

You can’t put the cart before the horse, right? The same goes for your LMS. It’s crucial to look at the tools you already have to begin with and your IT strategy is going to play a big part in the effectiveness of your learning management system. This could potentially save your business time and money in the long run.

Let’s say for instance that your business is heavily invested in Microsoft products – using SharePoint for document management, Outlook for email, Teams for collaboration etc.

Let’s take this Microsoft example even further. Let’s say you also need an on-premise solution because it makes sense for you in that it protects your sensitive data and you already have the in-house resources.

An LMS solution that can piggyback onto an already established business ecosystem provides even more advantages like in integration where you would inherit all existing authentication protocols, processes and know-how – saving lots of time and money.

Before choosing an LMS, be sure to know right from the beginning what your IT and Security strategy is.
Another area that can cause missteps in the LMS selection process is using an RFP that is poorly written or using a generic RFP template found off the internet.

Usually when you’re to the point of using an RFP, you’ve already done your research and narrowed down your options to the top 3-5 vendors. So, now’s not the time to drop the ball.

When an RFP isn’t capturing the right information it defeats the purpose and can put you 10 steps behind in finding the right LMS for your business or even risk choosing the wrong LMS.

A better option is to develop your own RFP with specific use cases and requirements while only using available templates as a reference.

It’s ok to use common sections that are standard for most RFPs such as a table of contents, company info, feature list, budget, timeline and references.

But, the following must also be included to get the most out of your RFP:

- **RFP Committee** – Your LMS does not just affect the learning department, there are many people involved and as a result they should be included in the selection process. Because of the complexity of choosing an enterprise-wide learning solution, it’s best to choose a selection committee carefully. This should include but not limited to L&D, Procurement, Learners, Line Supervisors, Business Unit Leaders, Sales & Marketing and IT.

- **Use Cases** – One of the most common things companies do is write up a long list of features they want instead of scenarios of actual ways they will be using the LMS. A good way to avoid going down the wrong path is to utilize your LMS committee by listening to the suggestions on how they see the LMS working for them.

- **Learner Projections** - It’s not just important to include use cases and features that you’d like the LMS to have but also explain in detail who will be using the LMS. This will be very helpful for the vendor so they have a better understanding of your current and future needs.

- **Technical Information** - The technology part of an LMS is just as important as the learning portion. This portion of the RFP should never be placed as an afterthought at the bottom, but front and center so vendors know if their system is even suitable for your particular situation.

- **Vendor Product Info** - The last section that is often overlooked when writing an RFP is including additional information about the future of the LMS, not just what it is today. For instance, find out about the current release date and how often their release frequency. How many individual clients they have and any planned upgrades and new releases scheduled in the next six months.
Piggybacking on the first two items on our list, it can’t be stressed enough that your IT department absolutely must be included in the selection process. This is a common mistake made by companies.

When you don’t involve this key person you could be faced with implementation problems and integration issues among other things. Or, even face major delays.

So, before you dismiss including the IT department, think twice.

Nobody wants to spend thousands of dollars on software only to discover major problems that no amount of help desk assistance can figure out why the LMS isn’t doing what it’s supposed to do.

If you’re trying to get healthy, you would talk to a doctor first. And, before purchasing a house, you’d get an inspection before committing, right? The same goes for an LMS. If you’re purchasing major software, you really need to talk to IT about it first.

They know much more about your IT strategy and can ask questions during the process that only they would think to ask. Their expertise will be essential in recommending what software will fit most seamlessly with the other programs your company already uses as well as suggest more secure options, and help you make the installation process as smooth as possible.

During the RFP process, vendors need to know about internal network, hardware and software, before they can intelligently make a recommendation. This is where your IT person can provide information on current browser version, operating system, future upgrade plans, infrastructure and other IT information.

All those features like scalability, integration, customization and reporting that you want in an LMS...they all will impact the IT department.

For instance, if the LMS isn’t built to scale, guess who is tasked with trying to troubleshoot? The IT department. And, when you have complex reporting needs that the LMS can’t accommodate? The IT department.

If you haven’t realized by now, it’s important to consider including the IT department in the selection process. When you do this, they’ll be more helpful overall because they will have been a part of selection from the start versus trying to clean up something after the fact.
Let’s talk about money, shall we?

Unrealistic budgeting for an LMS has caused many issues in the selection process and beyond.

How many have assumed that the LMS purchase price is the only cost involved?

If yes, please read further so as not to be blindsided by extra costs you didn’t plan for.

Most of the time there are additional fees associated with any LMS you choose. There are hard costs of the LMS but then there are hidden costs that often get overlooked such as,

- Time
- Hardware and software required
- Implementation and set up fees
- System administration
- Upgrade fees
- Customization
- Maintenance fees
- Support
- Creation of online training content
- Tool replacements

In addition to considering the main players, and even the hidden players, of LMS cost, there are also functionality issues with an LMS that will hit your pocketbook.

If an LMS doesn’t integrate with other systems…it’s going to cost you. If an LMS doesn’t scale…it’s going to cost you. If an LMS doesn’t provide thorough reporting…it’s going to cost you. If an LMS isn’t secure…it’s going to cost you. If an LMS isn’t intuitive and easy to use…it’s going to cost you.

And lastly, companies confuse price with value.

For instance, a company might think they don’t need anything fancy so they purchase a cheap LMS only to find out its clunky and slow as well as lacks features they really need to have.

Lesson learned – if something has a low price but isn’t used or turns into a money pit, it has low value. Go for a system that has a higher price that you feel the majority of features will be used. This will create savings in the long run.
Normally when we buy something we get it immediately during the time of purchase. With a big ticket item, like an LMS, this is not the case and should be considered during the selection process.

One of the biggest mistakes companies make is to underestimate how long it will take to find an LMS and implement it.

As a result, it’s common to run into a variety of problems. For example, the contract on your previous LMS is expiring and you don’t have the new one up and running yet. Or, you run into problems with customization and it causes unexpected delays.

When buying an LMS, it’s important to know your timelines and hard dates.

If you don’t, you face delays in your training programs, potential loss in productivity and financial setbacks.

There are lots of moving parts during the selection process and it’s your job to know what they are.

When you have a solid grasp on your timeline, you can easily plan your purchasing process around that.

Here are some helpful questions to keep in mind.

• What is your budget cycle?
• When do you lose access to your old LMS?
• How many other systems must be integrated with the LMS?
• How much data needs to be migrated?

As with most things of this nature, plan for the unexpected and be sure to leave some buffer room in your timeline.

In addition, a provider that promises a fast turnaround isn’t necessarily a good thing. It’s very important to make sure that all your needs are accounted for thoroughly. And, if things are being rushed than there is a good chance that things will be missed or mistakes made.
If there’s one thing we know, it’s that nothing works in isolation. Unfortunately, many companies forget this when they purchase an LMS.

And, as a result they face a string of unnecessary challenges.

In reality, learning is a part of your entire business ecosystem. In fact, more often than not, various components of the learning infrastructure are being handled by other systems. Failing to connect means you probably won’t be able to make the most out of the LMS, and/or fail to utilize its full potential and even miss out on critical data.

An LMS that doesn’t seamlessly integrate with other systems your business uses means you will most likely have to put the burden on your IT department to try and makeshift a solution. This results in an increase in time, money and resources...and you still might not have the problem fixed.

To avoid this, you must think of your software as an ecosystem. Everything in that ecosystem must work together and fit in such a way that no one program eclipses the others.

Be sure to think about all the current programs and software you prefer, as well as industry standards. Some questions to consider,

· **Where will your content be hosted?** Will you be uploading content to be hosted directly by the LMS or integrating and embedding content from external resources like Google Docs and YouTube?

· **What user data will be needed (e.g., department, company, job title) and how will the LMS obtain it?** Should new course registration data be sent to your company’s HR, CRM, sales and marketing systems? What about course progress, completion data and certifications? Should financial data integrate with internal accounting systems?

Don’t assume the LMS will be able to integrate with just any program. If for some reason it doesn’t, be sure to ask if there are any plans for the future and how soon that might happen.

Of course, during the selection process, be sure to pay special attention to these features that will help with integration flexibility – single sign on, active directory integration, API integrations and customization abilities.

When you put the required time and effort into the LMS selection process your business will reap the benefits. Integration flexibility in an LMS will provide improved productivity, increased data accessibility, more efficient workflows, greater profitability and more accurate decision making.
During the LMS selection process there seems to be an infinite amount of features that all providers deem as ‘must-haves.’ And, this only encourages the idea from a buyer’s perspective that more is better.

But, when it comes to an efficient and productive LMS, this is not the case.

So, what happens when you have too many features in an LMS?

- You’ll pay more for features that you may or may not even use
- You might not even know how to use all the features available
- The LMS will be bloated with features that only add clutter and make the system difficult to use
- Excess feature sets can also cause complications with implementation
- You might have features that don’t even match with your training goals

The most important thing you can do early in the LMS buying process is to first figure out what you need so you don’t buy something you don’t need.

The best way to go about this is to have a firm grasp on what your business goals are and then focus on the subset of LMS functionality that will be essential for your business.

With the help of your selection committee, create a high-level features/requirement list that maps back to the use case scenarios you have already created during the RFP process.

Be sure to ask yourself questions such as “what tasks am I going to perform with the LMS?” Or, “how will I demonstrate I met my goals?”

The features you and your committee come up with should be at the top of your ‘must haves.’

Then, any other additional features will be listed in the ‘nice to have’ or ‘not necessary’ category. The more you can focus and narrow down feature options, the more efficient and effective your LMS will be. Your learners won’t be overwhelmed with choice overload and neither will you. And, of course, it’s a bonus to not pay for things you won’t use now or in the future.
Some companies go through the LMS selection process with the mindset that reporting is just reporting...it’s all the same.

But that couldn’t be farther from the truth. Reporting features are not all created equal.

In fact, problems with reporting in an LMS is one of the most common reasons to switch learning providers.

At the end of the day, it’s your job to find out whether learning programs are working and how they have affected your business. And, the only way to do this is with great reporting features.

If your team can’t easily and regularly report on the data you need, then you’re limiting your ability to see a true picture of how learning has impacted business requirements and objectives.

Common challenges with LMS reporting include,

- Not fast or easy to use.
- Difficulty accessing information due to permission restrictions.
- Creating a report that is too complicated and requires too many steps to prepare regularly.
- There isn’t an option to customize the report to fit specific needs.

Nothing is more infuriating than to face a major roadblock as you’re faced with reporting deadlines.

This means your IT department will get pulled away from other projects to deal with your incompetent LMS – quickly surpassing allocated staff hours and lowering productivity.

Or, what about how reporting relates to compliance? If you’re can’t show data during an audit in a timely manner you could be faced with financial loss due to fines, shutdowns and lawsuits.

If you don’t want to face some of these potential issues, follow our guidelines for LMS reporting. To ensure reporting is up to par with your LMS, be sure to look for these features:

- Detailed data
- Customized and permissions based reporting
- Automation
- Integration Business intelligence dashboards with the ability to drill down from within the same report. You can never go wrong with choosing an LMS that provides great reporting. And, it should be at the top of you ‘must have’ list because you’ll be able to get critical information quickly, seamlessly and stress-free.
Ok, let’s be real, we all might be guilty of living in the moment sometimes and not planning for the future. But, when it comes to purchasing an LMS, you’ll want to take a different approach or face having to buy a new LMS in a couple years.

Making an LMS purchase is a lot of work and a big time investment, one that you should not need to repeat regularly. You want something that is going to have lasting power.

When you don’t prepare for growth you could be faced with an LMS that crashes when you overload it with more employees than it can handle. Or, even stopping your learning initiatives dead in its tracks.

And, don’t forget about the impact to your wallet. Yes, it’s going to cost you.

Just think about what your IT department will be tasked with when your LMS can’t scale easily. They might temporarily patch the LMS to alleviate some of the issues but with that comes added complexity. Never a good thing.

The more data stored or simultaneous people using the LMS, the more strain is put on the software’s architecture. Limitations that didn’t seem important in the beginning become a huge barrier to productivity.

With that said, scalability is easier and less resource-intensive when considered from the beginning.

How can you better prepare?

By knowing your business inside and out.

Consider the growth of your company. How large were you this time of year, or two years ago? How large will you ideally be this time next year? Do you need an LMS built for corporate or educational needs? Does your business have simple or complex needs?

It’s always a challenge to predict what your future business needs may be but it is possible to at least make an educated guess. During the selection process, it’s important to consider what projects are coming down the pike.

What are your 3-5 year, and beyond, business goals? And, how will that impact training?

Ultimately, scalability isn’t a ‘bonus feature.’ It’s the quality that determines the lifetime value of the software and will save time and money in the long run.
AN LMS THAT IS NOT INTUITIVE TO USE

The last LMS selection mistake in our Top 10 list has to do with how difficult the LMS is to use.

Ease of use seems like it would be an obvious requirement, but you’d be surprised at how many companies buy a costly piece of software and then have problems getting their employees, or even administrators, to use it.

And, this usually is a result of the system being too complex and difficult to use first for the administrators and then for the learners.

It’s much like a domino effect...if your learners aren’t learning then your business goals aren’t going to be achieved.

There are some features that will help with this including,

- **An interface that is built to be intuitive.** Meaning, all users will naturally know what to do.
- **Customer support.** There will always be questions no matter how easy an LMS is. Does the vendor provide ongoing support?
- **Customization.** Tailoring the LMS to suit your needs is a good idea to help with the ability of your users to have a good experience.
- **Automation.** Automation is essential in an LMS because it alleviates the need for manual processes and does it for you, so you don’t have to.
- **Search functionality.** No administrator or learner should have any trouble finding a course or anything else within the LMS. That is why search is so important and an often overlooked feature one.

Let’s face it, your learners don’t have time as it is for training let alone having to struggle to use the LMS. Likewise for administrators who need an easy system so they can quickly upload training modules and do their job.

We talked about use cases in previous sections of this eBook. During the demo or trial period, try to walk through exactly how you would use the system. Did you find it easy or difficult and frustrating?

Make sure all your potential users from learner to administrator and business line manager can play with the system.

And, if you haven’t realized by now throughout this eBook, don’t forget including your IT committee member. Because it’s not just your learners and administrators who will use the LMS, but the IT department will also be tending to your brand new purchase with implementation, ongoing support and upgrades.

It’s important to have an LMS that checks all the boxes, including ease of use. At the end of the day, your business will only benefit in profits and productivity when your LMS is doing what it should and your users are happy and engaged.
Selecting an LMS is not easy and can be a stressful process. However, there are ways to set yourself up for success so you won’t choose the wrong training system for your business.

Preparation is key.

And, using the tips in this eBook, you’ll be armed with useful information to help guide you to the perfect LMS.

Let's recap the list,

- IGNORING YOUR CORPORATE IT AND SECURITY STRATEGY
- LMS SELECTION WITH THE HELP OF A POORLY WRITTEN RFP
- EXCLUDING THE IT DEPARTMENT FROM THE LMS SELECTION PROCESS
- UNREALISTIC LMS BUDGETS
- UNDERESTIMATING TIMING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF LMS SELECTION
- NOT CONSIDERING INTEGRATIONS
- UNMATCHED FEATURES AND TRAINING REQUIREMENTS
- OVERLOOKING ANALYTICS AND REPORTING FEATURES
- CHOOSEING AN LMS THAT WON’T EVOLVE WITH YOUR COMPANY
- AN LMS THAT IS NOT INTUITIVE TO USE

We hope this eBook was useful to you in your journey to finding an LMS.

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