# Selecting Your Next LMS

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Brandon Hall GROUP

Brandon Hall Group Research

Introduction

Learning is a vital element of organizational success. An effective learning strategy can attract and retain key talent, ensure the workforce has the skills necessary to meet business objectives and prepares the organization's future leadership. In today's technology-rich environment, organizations need the right tools to execute their learning strategies. Offering classroom training alone just doesn't cut it in a world of multi-modal learners. To address this challenge, organizations must adopt a new approach to learning and development, while leveraging learning technology solutions. When 73% of companies are either trimming their learning and development budget or keeping it flat, the need to demonstrate learning's return on investment is critical. With the right solutions in place, a company can dramatically improve its ability to attract multi-generational learners and deliver high-impact education and training to a broad audience.

Though a majority of organizations already have at least one LMS in place, many are still preparing to go through the selection process. In addition, around 37% of companies seek to replace their current learning management system, according to our research. Technology replacement may be expensive from a time and financial perspective but the benefits often far outweigh the costs: an improved user experience for learners and administrators, more mobile capabilities, better integration with other systems and enhanced reporting and analytics.

Does Your Organization Use an LMS?

18% No System

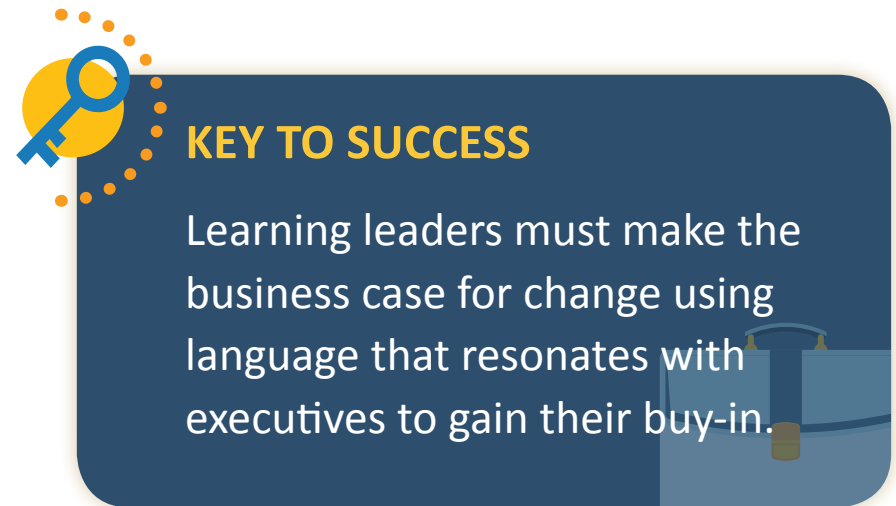**21%** Multiple System

60% One System
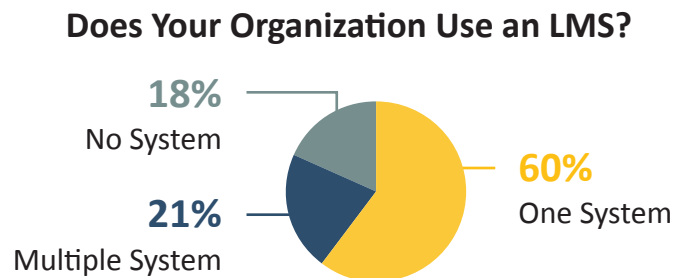
Source: Brandon Hall Group Learning Management Technology Study
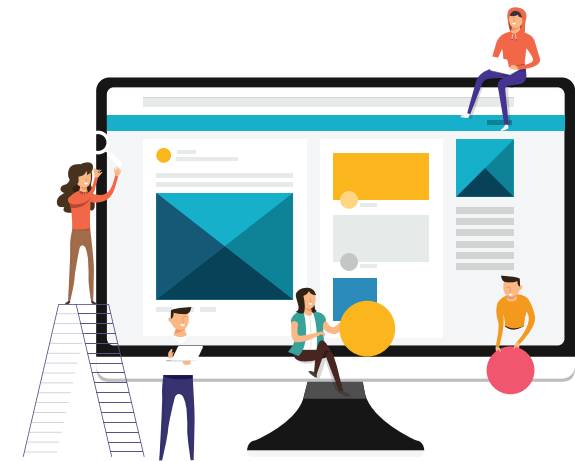
It's interesting to note that when we asked companies to rate their satisfaction with their current LMS, the system's ability to meet current learning needs received the highest score and the lowest rating was for the system's ability to meet future needs. This illustrates how companies often make technology decisions by looking at what they need to fix immediately without an eye toward future. Smart companies prefer systems that grow and evolve along with their business.

This report establishes an 11-step framework for selecting a learning technology solution for organizations shopping for their first one or replacing an existing solution.
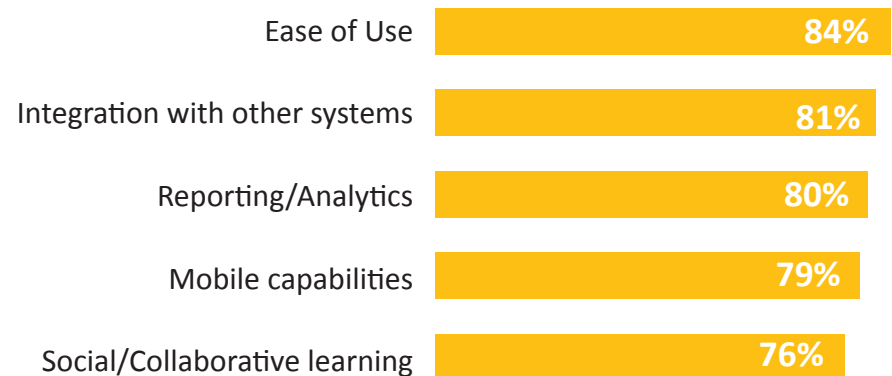
KEY TO SUCCESS

Learning leaders must make the business case for change using language that resonates with executives to gain their buy-in.

1 Build the Business Case

Starting with a solid business case for new learning technology makes a strong statement that the learning function is intended to drive business results. When shopping for an LMS for the first time, identify ways technology can make learning faster and easier to develop, deliver and measure. If switching from an existing platform, identify areas the current solution is lacking.

Top 5 Reasons for Switching an LMS
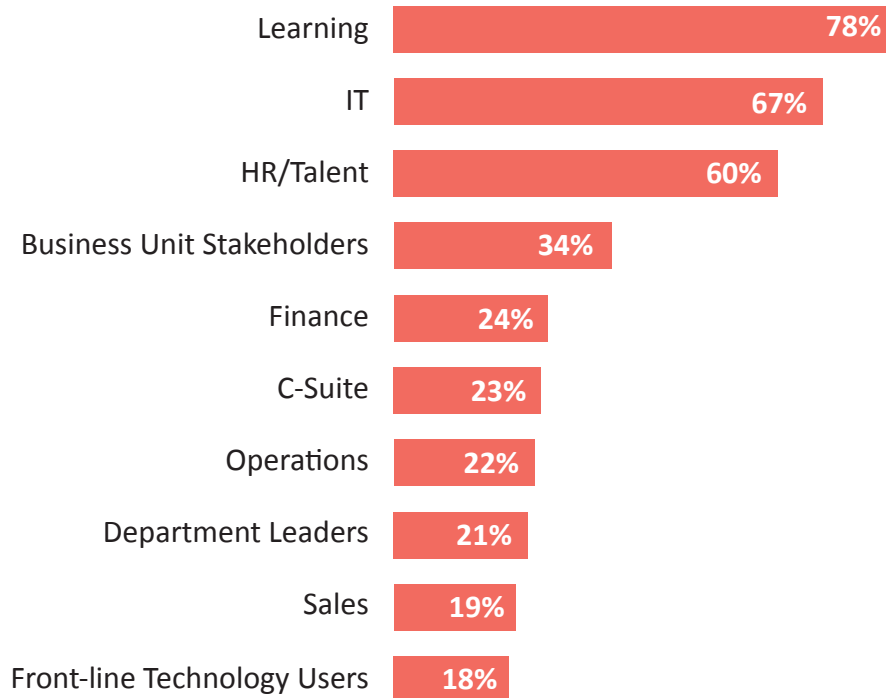
Ease of Use	84%
Integration with other systems	81%
Reporting/Analytics	80%
Mobile capabilities	79%
Social/Collaborative learning	76%

Source: 2018 Learning Management Technology Survey

2 # Define Business Stakeholders

It is important to understand the depth and breadth with which an LMS impacts the entire organization. It is not just the learning team that must reckon with a new system. Getting input on the pros and cons of the current system from all parts of the organization helps build a well-informed business case for change that will also gain buy-in and support for the project.

Selection Team Representatives

Category	Percentage
Learning	78%
IT	67%
HR/Talent	60%
Business Unit Stakeholders	34%
Finance	24%
C-Suite	23%
Operations	22%
Department Leaders	21%
Sales	19%
Front-line Technology Users	18%

Source: Brandon Hall Group Learning Management Technology Study

KEY TO SUCCESS

Don't just identify stakeholders. Get at least some of them actively involved. Engage key stakeholders to form a governance team to guide the organization through selection and implementation.

3 # Identify Requirements

It is important to be specific about what your learning technology must include to move the business forward. Start by creating a list of realistic must-have functionalities. For companies seeking to replace an existing system, there will be factors you identified that led to the decision to make a change; either things that the current solution does poorly or doesn't do at all. It is upon this foundation you can begin to add the things your organization will need in the future.

KEY TO SUCCESS

- **Focus on the future.** Most organizations seek what they need now, only to find the system can't meet future needs. Learning requirements constantly change. Anticipate the changes and address them in your requirements.

- **Keep the requirements list relatively short.** Long lists get too complicated and can erroneously eliminate appropriate providers.

- **Prioritize.** Pinpoint the business need behind each requirement and assign it a priority level.

4 Create Use Cases

The best way to find a solution that fits your needs now and in the years ahead is to create use cases. Develop roles and scenarios detailing how users will interact with the system to accomplish tasks. Luckily, wanting to switch solutions provides you with the foundation for some powerful use cases. Examine how your current solution falls short and see how prospective vendors handle similar situations.

KEY TO SUCCESS

Avoid generalities. Create several specific use cases to highlight how your organization will use the software rather than looking at how it works in general.

KEY TO SUCCESS

Get input from key decision-makers and stakeholders on the scenarios you choose for demos so their needs are met and they feel included in the planning process.

Set Up Scripted Demos 5

Use cases will also help you create scripted demos for providers. Rather than have the vendors run you through a generic demo of the product to highlight its bells and whistles, have them take you through specific scenarios showing how the platform handles the use cases. Generic demos can make the providers seem similar and make your decision more difficult. Scripted demos will highlight the providers that can better meet your needs.

6 Use References

Don't be afraid to ask for and follow up on references. Though vendors will only provide you with their happiest clients, you can still glean useful information from them. It's helpful to see how companies of similar size and industry use the system. By asking the right questions, you can also uncover some challenges from even the most ardent fans of the solution.

KEY TO SUCCESS

Be assertive in your reference checks. Ask the questions you really want to ask. If references are uncomfortable, they can decline to answer. But don't be conservative in your approach. This is a rare opportunity to gain insights you will not get from the vendor.
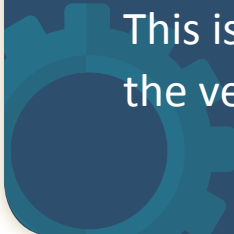
7 Identify Support Levels

Manage Change **8**

There is wide variety in the levels of support provided by vendors. A "rip and replace" scenario is a difficult undertaking, so it's important to select a vendor offering implementation support based on your needs. Best practices include not just in-person support, but online communities, adoption kits, communities of practice etc. to help you get up and running quickly.

A solid change-management strategy provides a path to the future, whether it is moving from a paper-based process or switching from a legacy system. In most cases, change management begins at the leadership level and requires strong communication to the employees expected to use the system. A communication strategy should be developed to articulate the need for the technology investment with key stakeholders and overall business leaders.

KEY TO SUCCESS

Ask "What if?": Don't be satisfied with a list of support services from the provider. Ask what level of support they provide in critical scenarios. Ask them to provide context and details about their support.

KEY TO SUCCESS

Communicate early and often. Your communication plan should start as soon as the purchase decision is made. Repetition and redundancy are good. Inclusion is good. Waiting until after the purchase or shortly before rollout to discuss the new technology is bad and can result in chaos and confusion.
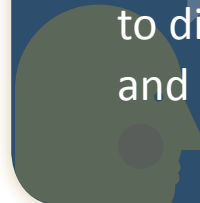
9 Focus on Integration

During requirements gathering, an overview of the systems that must integrate with the LMS should have been identified. It is now time to prioritize those integrations and test them separately rather than plug everything in at once. Getting critical integrations up and running allows a company to roll the system out to users before all the integrations are final if they choose.

KEY TO SUCCESS

Be inclusive. Integrations with the LMS affects the entire organization directly or indirectly. Involve key stakeholders.

KEY TO SUCCESS

Ensure stakeholders and providers understand the content and data standards. Test the migration often. Do not wait until everything is complete to see if it works.

Prepare for Migration 10

For companies switching to new solutions, moving data and content from one system to another can be complex, especially if the current system was in place for a long time. Content and data have specific taxonomies to keep them organized and need to be mapped from the old system to the new system to keep everything intact. This is also a good time to assess active use and eliminate unneeded data and content.

11   Train, Train, Train

The last piece is training. Establish a training schedule for the different types of users. From the due diligence phase on, you must understand the types of training the vendor provides so you can plan accordingly. Take into account the types of users and levels of training they will require; admins, learners, subject matter experts and stakeholders each have different needs.

KEY TO SUCCESS

Treat LMS training as you would any other training initiative:

- Determine outcomes for each user group.
- Deliver blended learning.
- Reinforce knowledge.
- Enable training at the point of need.

About Brandon Hall Group

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With more than 10,000 clients globally and almost 25 years of delivering world-class research and advisory services, Brandon Hall Group is focused on developing research that drives performance in emerging and large organizations, and provides strategic insights for executives and practitioners responsible for growth and business results.

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