

What is a Learning Management System?

According to Wikipedia a learning management system (LMS) is:

“ a software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting and delivery of electronic educational technology (also called e-learning) courses or training programs. ”

In today's fast changing world, the learning management system (LMS) has become a critical tool for organizations that are trying to keep employees up-to-date on everything from the latest technologies and regulatory requirements, to industry certifications, best practices and job specific and leadership skills. Today's generation of LMS not only automates the learning process, but offers powerful reporting features and the flexibility to manage all types of third party and custom content, as well as peer-to-peer and on-the-job training.

There are many flavors of learning management systems available. Some are easy to use and implement; others are complicated and have long and detailed implementations. It behooves you to do research to determine which type of LMS will be best suited to your needs.

LMS use in the corporate arena has taken off in the last 20 years. Companies use learning management systems to deliver internal training to employees and/or to their customer base. Using the LMS allows them to streamline the training administration process with automatic tracking of training requirements, due dates, and re-training dates. Since course content is delivered electronically when needed, companies also see a reduction in training and travel costs, as well as increased training efficiency. And many LMS's offer an automatic process to keep online training information in synch with company employee data.

Common Components of an LMS

Below are some of the most common components included in an LMS.

ELEARNING PORTAL: Used as a starting page for learners. Typically the portal displays course assignments, training status, and any additional requirements that the learner may have. (Think certifications, CEUs, instructor-led training sessions.) May include additional features like a course catalog, course history, and a course calendar.

COURSE ENROLLMENT CONTROL: Usually supports multiple methods of course enrollment: self-registration, manager registration, automatic assignment based on job (or department, employment status, etc), or assignment based on a needs assessment.

DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT: This can include storage of source documents for instructors, or subject-matter experts, as well as storage of specific files associated with a learner – like a license/certificate, on-the-job training documentation, etc. Often includes the storage of auxiliary course materials that can be shared with learners.

MULTIPLE DEVICE ACCESS: Delivery of course content over web-based interfaces such as desktops, phones or tablets.

CLASSROOM SCHEDULING: Often supports scheduling of instructor-led training sessions. Automatic waitlisting and (optional) manager approval are added bonuses if trainees can self-enroll in a session.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: Interaction between and among students, such as instant messaging, email, and discussion forums.

ASSESSMENT AND TESTING: The LMS should support creation of, or upload of, varied knowledge retention exercises such as short quizzes and comprehensive exams. Shuffling of questions and use of question banks prolong life of content. Typically auto-corrected, with links back to the content.

REPORTING: Detailed customized reporting, with option to automate reports using a custom template.

CUSTOM DATA FIELDS: Ability to include company specific data fields in the training database, such as location, job title, or employee number.

10 Advantages of Using an LMS

1. Reduce tangible costs and expenses. Offering training online lets you reduce travel, training facility maintenance, and instructor costs.

2. Lower costs to produce, ship, update and store training materials. Because training is created and stored digitally, it's fast and easy to make updates as necessary.
3. Reduced time away from the job. Employees can schedule online training at their convenience.
4. Reduced record-keeping costs. An LMS has robust tracking and reporting capabilities, making your job easier. Automatic reminder and overdue notices are generated, and reporting is a click away.
5. Improved training efficiencies. Online training is not only easily accessible, it can also increase retention. Employees can access the training as needed, giving them an additional information resource.
6. Elimination of multiple systems. Using the LMS as a standard, centralized access point results in lower costs and better control over all aspects of the training.
7. Give employees more time to do their job. Offering 'anytime, anywhere' training means employees can learn about new products and services without leaving the field to attend classes or conferences.
8. Reduce redundant and unnecessary training cycles. No more 'one size fits all' training; offer custom training sequences based on employee's skills, job requirements, and experience.
9. Lower regulatory risks and liabilities due to non-compliance. An LMS is a critical tool in streamlining and effectively managing regulatory compliance. Easily generate 'audit' reports to minimize risk.
10. Establish strategic goals and track employees' progress. An LMS enables supervisors to benchmark performance, implement best practices and track course completion.