Challenges and Best Practices When Setting Up an LMS for a Global Enterprise

Susan Jacobs
with Varun Bihani and John Leh

Adobe Captivate Prime
Learning Management System

THE eLEARNING GUILD

Copyright

Contact Information

Adobe Systems Incorporated
345 Park Avenue
San Jose, CA 95110
captivateprimesales@adobe.com
The eLearning Guild
120 Stony Point Road, Suite 125
Santa Rosa, CA 95401
info@eLearningGuild.com

Authors

Susan Jacobs with Varun Bihani and John Leh
Note: *The contributors to this paper do not necessarily endorse Adobe's products or the products of any other company.*

Reviewer

Nipun Sharma, Adobe Systems

INTRODUCTION

Setting up a new learning management system for a global enterprise used to be a complicated process. Properly configuring the LMS and migrating the data from one system to another required considerable time and expertise. Although the process today is far more streamlined, those tasked with deploying a new learning management system want to sidestep common obstacles in order to successfully manage the project.

This paper will illuminate some of the challenges typically associated with setting up an LMS for a global enterprise. It will address how to gain buy-in from a variety of stakeholders, provide suggestions on how to promote a new learning solution internally, and discuss the role IT should play in setting up a new LMS. It will also highlight some best practices for controlling costs, sourcing content, creating functional reports, and establishing multi-tenant learning.

Gaining buy-in from stakeholders

When making a business case for a new learning solution, it is absolutely essential to gain buy-in from important stakeholders. L&D leaders must employ different strategies to appeal to different groups of stakeholders.

Upper management/C-suite

As the fiscal overseers who authorize and approve corporate expenditures, this group must be convinced that a new learning management system will provide inherent value as a business tool. Getting buy-in from senior executives is exclusively tied to business case. What costs will be saved? How will revenue be increased? How will business processes be improved? The L&D professional must be able to answer those questions with great specificity in order to build a business case that will sway upper management. Remember that there are only so many initiatives that can be achieved in any budget year. A new LMS is competing against many other projects, each trying to prove their fiscal worth.

To improve the odds of C-suite buy-in:

- Do your homework. Be thoroughly prepared before approaching this group.
- Research what motivated senior executives to approve similar expenditures in the past.
- Provide a detailed explanation of what a new system might be capable of and how the company could successfully leverage it.
- Show specific examples of the benefits the organization could realize, and offer case studies that demonstrate results realized at other companies.

The L&D team

The learning and development team is the group tasked with implementing a new system and efficiently maintaining its operation. Its responsibilities include training staff on how to use the system, continually updating and refreshing content, and troubleshooting general problems.

Key considerations when deploying an LMS for a global enterprise

It is not uncommon for global organizations to have several learning and development groups overseeing governance processes, rules, and standards. Having multiple L&D groups usually results in the need for localized content, business unit domains, separate HR integrations, and many other issues that must be identified up front and actively mitigated. Collaboration is vital because deploying a global LMS is actually akin to deploying multiple independent systems that must work together flawlessly.

When setting up an LMS for a global enterprise, it is important for the system(s) to be able to display documents in multiple languages. Different countries may follow different rules and regulations in regard to content, privacy, and taxation, and the LMS must accommodate these differences. It must also permit all end users to upload content in any form, from any device, and be able to convert that content into a compatible format.

Here are some other general considerations to bear in mind when deploying a learning management system:

- The LMS must offer a user-friendly experience for employees and administrators. The navigation must be intuitive, and the dashboard should be self-explanatory.
- The LMS must effectively support learning and track progress for individuals, as well as for specific departments, regions, or teams.
- The LMS must be responsive because users will access it on a wide variety of devices with different screen sizes.
- The LMS must be able to seamlessly integrate with other vendors' software.
- Gamification and social elements, such as chat plugins, content sharing, discussion forums, and a rating system, can increase overall user engagement and, for this reason, are often featured in modern learning management systems.

The L&D team is the natural driver for a new LMS. If L&D is content with the status quo, upper management will happily avoid the hassle and expense of selecting a new solution. If L&D finds the existing system inadequate or antiquated, however, this group possesses a powerful and influential voice.

To gain buy-in from the L&D team:

- Discuss problems L&D is encountering with the current system. What does the system lack? How is it failing to deliver? What are the major pain points?
- Research solutions that will rectify these problems and help L&D meet organizational goals.
- Partner with this group. Get them involved and solicit their input. Come up with ideas of how to best present this initiative to decision makers.
- Competing L&D teams that are either regional or business unit–focused may have different viewpoints or priorities. It is important to resolve disputes and arrive at a consensus before approaching upper management with an expenditure request. Present a united front.

Rank-and-file employees

Employees in all divisions and at all levels in the company rely on the corporate learning management system for a plethora of services, including onboarding, training, and reports. Although buy-in from learners may be immaterial in the early stages, it becomes more crucial after a decision is made to commit to a new LMS. Rank-and-file employees who find a new system confusing or alienating may vocally profess their dissatisfaction, thus discouraging others from voluntarily using it.

As the primary users of an LMS, rank-and-file employees' buy-in is important to gain. Here are some tips to help get this group on board:

- Clearly communicate why the organization decided to switch to a new LMS, and emphasize how the initiative is important to the corporate vision.
- Demonstrate how the new system can personally benefit individuals by providing career paths, course recommendations, and/or social connections.
- Describe compelling features, such as the fact that employees can access the LMS anytime, from any device.
- Identify credible people within the organization to serve as influencers who will actively encourage others to embrace the new system.

How to evangelize a new learning solution

With all LMS deployments, communicating change, value, and process to learners is a key factor in success. L&D leaders can take some cues from the marketing department's playbook. Use newsletters, flyers, and internal communication systems to herald the arrival of the new system and develop a marketing campaign around it. Learning leaders can also introduce contests or games designed to pique curiosity and encourage learners to explore the LMS.

Assure that the LMS is fully operational before formally unveiling it. Check to make sure that the content and data from the previous system has migrated properly so that the records are accurate when learners log in to the new LMS for the first time. Remember that you only have one chance to get the launch right. Nail it by conducting a thorough assessment and test run, correcting all errors before officially rolling out the system.

When it is time to launch, surprise learners who log in with a short video from the CEO or senior leadership, welcoming them to the new LMS. In addition, create simple tutorials to guide learners and help them navigate the new system. This will ease initial resistance and accelerate the learning curve.

Here are some other tips for evangelizing a new learning system:

- Educate learners about the many benefits of the new LMS. Stress how it will enable them to access training at their convenience: at any time, on any device, from anywhere.
- Emphasize how it can be an essential tool to propel their individual careers, while also contributing to organizational goals.
- Point out how the system will track their learning progress over time and prepare them for future opportunities within the company.
- Stress how fun and engaging it is. Gamify learning by adding levels, badges, and rewards, and encourage employees to use the system's social features to interact with one another.

What role does IT play in setting up a new LMS?

When deploying an enterprise learning management system, the information technology department usually plays a vital role. Working in partnership with L&D, the IT team is often responsible for the actual setup and technical administration of the system. Either alone or in conjunction with representatives from human resources, IT specialists often configure the system to the specific needs of the business, setting up user profiles and ensuring consistent implementation across all modules. Additionally, IT is usually responsible for taking care of data site management, carrying out periodic upgrades, and keeping an eye on network security.

For global deployments, the IT department plays an even more significant role. The IT team maintains not only the existing technical ecosystem of learners, but also the organizational knowledge of international rules, privacy standards, and regulations on data. Experts point out that it is critical to have IT involved in planning integrations such as single sign-on, HR data, CRM, and other global systems to ensure a seamless flow of data to drive the LMS.

Tips to control costs

For most organizations, the purchase of a new learning management system represents a significant financial investment. Here are some best practices to help contain costs:

- Be conscious of cost from the very beginning. It is easy to be dazzled by a pricey system that offers enticing bells and whistles that the organization may never actually take advantage of.
- Consult with representatives from all groups that might potentially use the LMS in order to clarify their goals and needs. Then develop a comprehensive list of "must-have" features. Use this as a foundation for selecting a system that will satisfy a majority of the stakeholders.
- When budgeting, plan for more than just the cost of the system. One industry veteran recommends that at least 30 percent of the platform budget should be allocated to design, configuration, and rollout. Remember to account for the main rollout, as well as regional deployments.
- Consider any additional services and resources that may be required after the initial expenditure.
- Work closely with your vendor, who may have the authority to offer discounts or throw in extra services.
- It may be financially prudent to seek the guidance of a professional consultant, whose sage advice will often save you money in the long term.

Recommendations for effective multi-tenant learning

Multi-tenant learning has grown in popularity. It is a method to democratically break down silos and have diverse learning groups, which might be geographically dispersed, work in collaboration to determine things like branding, content design, review and refresh standards, technology ecosystems, and rules and processes for communication.

In order for multi-tenant learning to be truly effective, strong organizational learning governance is required. One expert likens this governance to government. "Each group is represented and ideally works together for the common good by sharing resources and thought leadership," he notes, adding that multi-tenant learning is almost always ineffective when driven by one group. "In such situations, the ignored groups demonstrate immense creativity to finding and funding their own solutions, leading to the decentralized problem organizations are trying to solve."

Here are some other tips for establishing effective multi-tenant learning:

- Make your LMS fully customizable for every tenant.
- Tenant managers must be able to add their own users and assign appropriate licenses and departments to the users.
- Allow data sharing among the tenants.
- Offer content integration to allow access to external content.
- Enable the reporting feature for tenants to track the performance of multiple departments from one place.

Sourcing content

A learning management system is only as good as its content. Most companies today rely on a blend of internal and external content. Internal content addresses needs and processes specific to the business, while external content is more generalized. Organizations typically develop their own internal content but often turn to third parties to augment their company-specific offerings.

Use human-verified localizations to provide local entities the ability to upload and manage their own localized content, in addition to centralized corporate content. Many LMS solutions will automatically detect or invite learners to select their language preference, and then translate the interface and in some cases the content dynamically.

In a growing industry trend, firms are encouraging employees to upload self-created content to the company LMS. This non-professional content can be produced and disseminated in a variety of formats, including blogs, videos, or short podcasts. In most cases, L&D does not vet, validate, or endorse the shared content. Some organizations utilize an internal rating system that will push the most useful or popular content to the top.

Aggregating services present another popular option for sourcing external content. Such services can segment content according to the interests and needs of individual learners, creating a highly personalized experience designed to encourage return visits to the LMS.

Best practices for creating functional reports

Learning management systems collect and store a vast amount of data. This can provide senior executives with a veritable gold mine of valuable workplace insights. In order to make sense of it, however, they must be able to generate functional reports.

The most common LMS reports focus on training progress, course completion rates, compliance, and certification, but organizations today also use reports to track performance and provide windows into learner deficiencies.

Most learning management systems make it a cinch for managers to generate and share actionable reports. Here are some best practices when creating reports:

- Understand what each manager or administrator actually needs and wants to see in terms of reporting. It is easy to become inundated with irrelevant data.
- Executives generally prefer to receive roll-up reports, with the ability to drill down and filter as they see fit.
- Many LMS solutions offer the opportunity to schedule reports for specific dates and will instantly deliver them via email or text.
- Reports can be made more visually pleasing by intentionally placing, aligning, and ordering elements in specific ways to attract attention or highlight specifics.
- To make long reports more consumable, offer easy navigation, enable sorting, and insert supporting links.

CONCLUSION

Setting up a new learning management system for a global enterprise used to be a long, laborious process. Today, upgrading or replacing an LMS is a far more manageable and pleasant experience. While there are certainly challenges, a new LMS offers the opportunity to start afresh with a tantalizing array of possibilities that can help drive real business results.

Adobe's LMS Solution: Captivate Prime

While hundreds of different learning management systems exist today, many global enterprises rely on Captivate Prime, Adobe Systems' state-of-the-art LMS solution. Learn more about what Adobe Captivate Prime can do for your business.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

SUSAN JACOBS

Susan Jacobs is a senior editor with The eLearning Guild. She has a deep-rooted interest in and passion for education and technology. Prior to this position, she was a senior content producer at Bright Business Media, a leader in the meeting and events industry. Susan is a graduate of Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism.

VARUN BIHANI

Varun Bihani is the founder of Examination Online. Passionate about education, Varun's goal is to help create and deliver amazing eLearning experiences. His entrepreneurial journey has led him from New York to Boston. Varun has closed over 200 contracts for subject matter experts to scale, redesign, and customize eLearning solutions. His clients run across industries including education, fashion, healthcare, eCommerce, publishing, and more.

JOHN LEH

John Leh is CEO and lead analyst at Talented Learning. Named by eLearning Industry as one of the top 20 global "eLearning Movers and Shakers" of 2017, John is a fiercely independent LMS selection consultant and blogger who helps organizations develop and implement technology strategies, primarily for the extended enterprise. John has more than 20 years of industry experience, having served as a trusted LMS selection and sales adviser to more than 150 learning organizations, with a total technology spend of more than $65 million.