

Why 'Best LMS-Lists are absurd

If you are looking for a new LMS you will surely have come across one of the many 'Best LMS'-Surveys and lists which are widely available on the websites of magazines and vendors. These are supposed to introduce you to the systems which will support you best. Do you find them particularly helpful? We don't – and we will tell you why:

Questioning the test scenario

How many LMS were evaluated in total to find the 'Top-10-Systems'? 20? Or 30? And in what way were these systems tested? One way would be to implement all systems running in a real life scenario configuring them all to a comparable setting, and training a team of administrators to operate the various LMSs. Have you ever implemented an LMS system or any other complex software such as this? This would involve a large amount of money, man power and time, not talking about the hardware involved. Please ask yourself how likely a publishing house could actually carry out such a mammoth task.

What is the alternative? The researcher will not actually collect data himself but resort to product information provided by vendors. Realistically a sales demo will be the most the publisher will have seen from some of the 'best LMSs'. This impression will be enhanced with statistics or user numbers. So, which data can be verified? and can this be seriously compared?

What actually is an LMS?

Many definitions are out there; even more systems supplying a wide range of different functionalities. Fact is that the term 'LMS' is widely used for a range of software products which do not advertise the same features. But what exactly is the difference between a qualification management and a talent management suite? Do you know? And do the LMS-vendors terms coincide with your interpretation? Saying Learning Management Software (or System) is like saying fruit – but specifically hoping for an apple. What will you get?

Broad Functionalities

Does the Best LMS always come with a talent management suite or an authoring tool? Is a learning platform the same like an elearning platform? And do the functions of an integrated authoring tool actually match your demands? Having a tool to produce screen casts is great – unfortunately hopeless if you would like to work with –virtual classrooms or animations. Fortunately technology today allows for designing interfaces to integrate exactly the right tools at any given time later. This particularly applies to contents connecting to learners’ platforms. To have one ‘holistic’ system from only one vendor to cover everything at once is outdated as a demand, as nowadays you can connect the tools suiting you best seamlessly.

Best LMS for what type of training institution?

Is the best LMS one-which is used in college, one used by an academy completely or one serving the specialized training centre of a multinational corporation? As you can imagine the demands of those institutions vary widely. Not to speak of the differences between the training demands of a bank or a manufacturer in the automotive industry.

Best LMS for which size of corporation?

There are LMSs which come with a broad variety of functionalities to administrate a multinational enterprises’ HR-training. If you are a midsize institution which is, for example, specializing in CAD-courses addressing mainly local enterprises this type of ‘best LMS’ might not be right exactly right for you – even if it is leading one of the many ‘Best LMS’-lists.

Best price LMS?

Are LMS comparable across the whole price range? Apart from the fact that vendors usually do not provide their pricelist at in these surveys, an LMS which is marked as the ‘Best’ on the list might not be the one you can afford either in terms of licences or in terms of development cost you have to cough up. Apart from all this prices of software are hardly comparable. When choosing a ‘free’ open source product it might take you a long time to set it all up. The costs of an open source LMS can

exceed the cost of a commercial vendor's product by far. Also the time and manpower which you have to invest until an open source LMS is productive can be significantly higher than expected or planned. Do you actually have sufficient IT knowhow to set it up and running? Many open source LMS are perfectly suitable for college and university use. But bear in mind that the demands of enterprises irrespective of the size are completely different.

Best LMS for a certain sector of industry?

Certain sectors have to obey different circumstances. Compliance trainings or other mandatory training programmes such as ones concerning food hygiene or toxic waste disposal might have to obey different governmental or insurance regulations (burden of proof). Not all LMS can map these processes onto the required conditions. Unfortunately 'best LMS'-lists usually do not differentiate between industries.

Best LMS by most number of learners?

Is the best LMS the one where the platform has been accessed by most learners? Certainly in an open university surrounding this might be an indication. Less so, when it comes to training requests of a corporation specializing e.g. in oil drilling schemes or management training programmes. Seeing learners' numbers as a sufficient criterion you may call YouTube the best LMS you can have. But will that really do the job? Other lists feature surveys which supposedly are based on customer satisfaction. If the underlying population, which is the customers actually taking part of the survey, are representative across the Learning Management Landscape is doubtful. If learners of one big company vote for their system and whilst others do not even take part, this certainly cannot be a scientific proof of quality.

Is the best LMS web based or a Client-Server Solution?

The pros and cons of these are widely discussed. 'Web based' is nowadays often seen as the state of the art. But if you can actually profit from this depends widely on the circumstances and demands of your training institution. Just because the system is web based does not necessarily imply that is better suitable for your particular project.

So – what are Best-LMS lists good for?

At best they serve as a first indicator what systems are available on the market. Not surprising: they are incomplete. Worse: the LMS-products listed there can often not seriously be compared with each other. But the worst thing is that these lists do ~~hardly~~ not even consider the demands of the consumer.

Furthermore the LMSs listed are often those, which the publishing magazine actively approached to take part in the survey. Often this comes with a ‘proportionate share of printing costs’ to the publisher. Could this influence the ranking on the list? Or are commercial LMS compared with SaaS-Systems, LMSs for college with those for globally operating enterprises?

What is the best LMS for you?

Unfortunately you will have to find this out yourself. One system which is perfectly suitable for one training purpose might prove to be a complete failure in another requirement.

The process involves a significant amount of time and effort from your side. The focus of your research is about the demands of your corporation. That is your type of enterprise, the functionalities which are mandatory or seen as a nice-to-have, IT-guidelines, the organization of your training portfolio and many more. The best LMS you can possibly get is not on a list – the best LMS you can get is the one to serve your needs best, and allows for future adjustment to the future development of your enterprise.

A vendor doing straight business will not be interested in just selling you a product which is not suitable for the consumer. Unsatisfied consumers spread the word and can damage the vendor’s reputation. Furthermore the vendor invests time and manpower to implement the system. Not only from a financial point of view but this situation will be viewed as an unsuccessful project.

On our website www.softdecc.com you will find different white papers which hopefully provide really helpful hints how to check out what type of Learning Management Software you really need.