



Why Using a Learning Management System Alone May Miss the Learning Curve

Five Guidelines for Improving Your Corporate Learning Outcomes

A Blackboard White Paper



Executive Summary

Corporate Learning Management Systems (LMS) are very good at what they were designed to do: manage and administer learning activities such as registrations, certifications, tracking and learner progress. These strengths have brought them attention, acceptance and clients around the world.

However, by definition an LMS is intended to manage, *not to train and develop*. That is because the underlying architecture required for managing and administrating corporate training is very different from the framework needed to instruct and learn. As stated by Elliott Masie in the March 2008 *Masie Trends Report - 12 Wishes for Our LMS and LCMS Systems*, "Most Learning Management Systems are focused on the organization's perspectives on learning and training. They know how to track attendance, participation and certification. These are important, but not sufficient. We need to have our Learning Systems focus on the LEARNER." As robust and capable as they are, Learning Management Systems need to be supplemented with true *learning content delivery systems*.

This often comes as a surprise to businesses that have installed an LMS when they find it falls short of expectations. Effective pedagogy, knowledge acquisition, skill development and overall user acceptance are often lacking. In fact, according to Bersin Associates' *Enterprise Learning and Talent Management 2008—Predictions for the Coming Year*, after nearly a decade of e-learning and online content delivery, most companies do not feel they have a "sound and complete blended learning strategy" for corporate training.

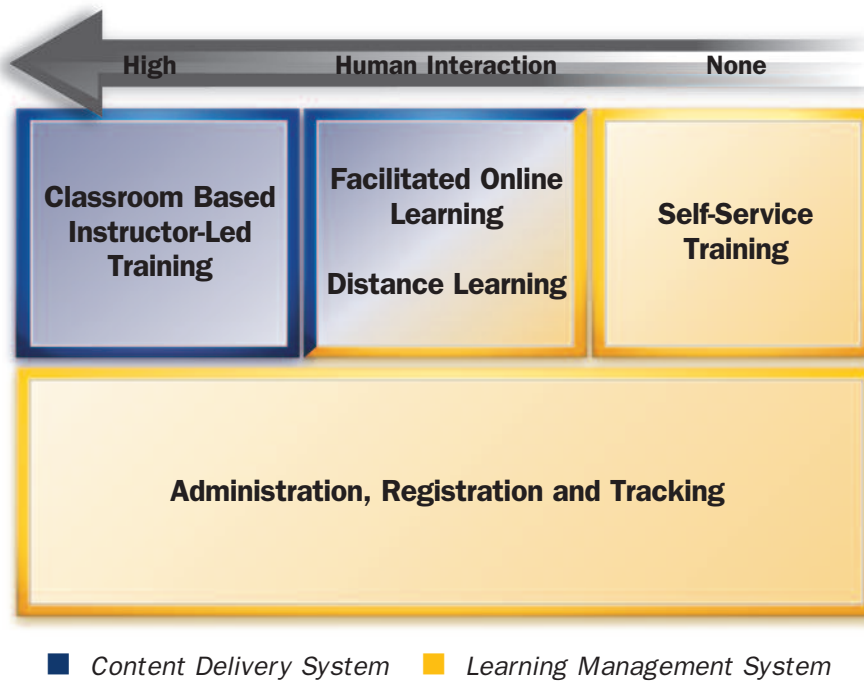
The same study found that businesses are realizing that Learning Management Systems are not "very compelling or interesting" for employees. And a recent study by TrainingIndustry, Inc. of 53 training leaders whose organizations had implemented an LMS found that "an LMS has the strongest impact on being compliance ready...and the weakest impact on employee productivity." The study went on to list one of the key challenge areas for respondents in getting the most from their LMS was "Slow, Old-School Technology". They went on to further describe LMS technology as "not suitable for blended learning or other innovative learning solutions" and that you must "dig to get things".

This is a critical issue, since for the end user the most important aspect of learning is the quality of the content. Many organizations still plug off-the-shelf content into an LMS that was designed to function as the center of a data management network, not as an learning content delivery system. They are using the wrong tool for the job.

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Most Effective Systems Pair Learning Management With Content Delivery



Organizations are finding that when an LMS is paired with a true teaching and learning (or content delivery) system, adoption rates are better and students learn more. The diagram above illustrates how these two systems together provide a holistic online learning solution.

Administrative Perspective:

The bottom half of the diagram represents the administrative user's involvement in the learning process. In this area, the LMS platform provides strong foundational capabilities for administration, registration, and tracking.

Learner and Instructor Perspective:

The top half of the diagram represents the end user's (student and instructor) involvement in the learning process and illustrates the various training methods from lowest level of human interaction on the right (Self-Service Training) to highest level of human interaction on the left (Classroom Based Instructor-led Training).

Self-Service Training

With Self-Service Training, there is no interaction between the student and instructor or between the student and their peers. Typically the content is pre-packaged and used for compliance, IT, or desktop training. This training is well supported by the LMS platform.

As the training methodology involves increasing levels of human interaction, the Content Delivery System provides the necessary supporting capabilities.

Classroom Based Instructor-Led Training

At the other extreme of Self-Service Training is the traditional Classroom Based Instructor-Led Training where instructors and students have full interaction in a physical classroom. In this environment, instructors have the opportunity to provide engaging, dynamic material from a variety of sources and be responsive to their students. It is this approach which is the most effective and results in the highest retention rates.

Content Delivery Systems support this learning method by enabling a continuous learning environment. In this environment, the same technology is used to supplement the class before, during, after and beyond the learning event itself. Instructors can deliver pre-course materials such as the course objectives, agenda, pre-reading, and pre-work online prior to class. Relevant articles, videos and assessments can be delivered anytime throughout the duration of the class. This allows classroom time to be spent on instruction and interaction rather than course administration.

Content Delivery Systems enable the class to continue to interact long after the event itself is over. Through Content Management Systems' collaborative capabilities such as discussion boards and email groups, students can continue to share relevant ideas and material and develop a strong community outside of the classroom.

Facilitated Online Learning/Distance Learning

Because Classroom Based Training does require resource investment in terms of travel costs and time commitments, distance learning is sometimes used as a less expensive alternative. This type of synchronous learning simply takes an existing instructional method (presentations, seminars and workgroups) and makes it more available by removing location barriers. It can be said that this improves learning and development by making the material more widely available.

Research shows that learning technology spend is heavily weighted toward lower value self-paced e-Learning events. While these are great for compliance and mandatory training, they do not provide the high impact training that is taking place on the other side of the human interaction spectrum.

And it is on this side of the spectrum, Classroom Based Instructor-Led Training, where the largest opportunity exists. By introducing technology into traditional face-to-face programs, organizations can change the very nature of these event-driven programs by creating continuous learning opportunities.

“Death By PowerPoint” And Other Teaching Methods

Businesses are still working to find their way when it comes to the most impactful approach to learning. They continue to spend 80 percent of their training budgets on traditional lectures, mind-numbing, “death by PowerPoint” presentations and rote “force feeding” of processes and statistics. This produces familiar results: learners’ eyes glaze over while they count the seconds until the training session ends or they learn just enough to demonstrate proficiency.

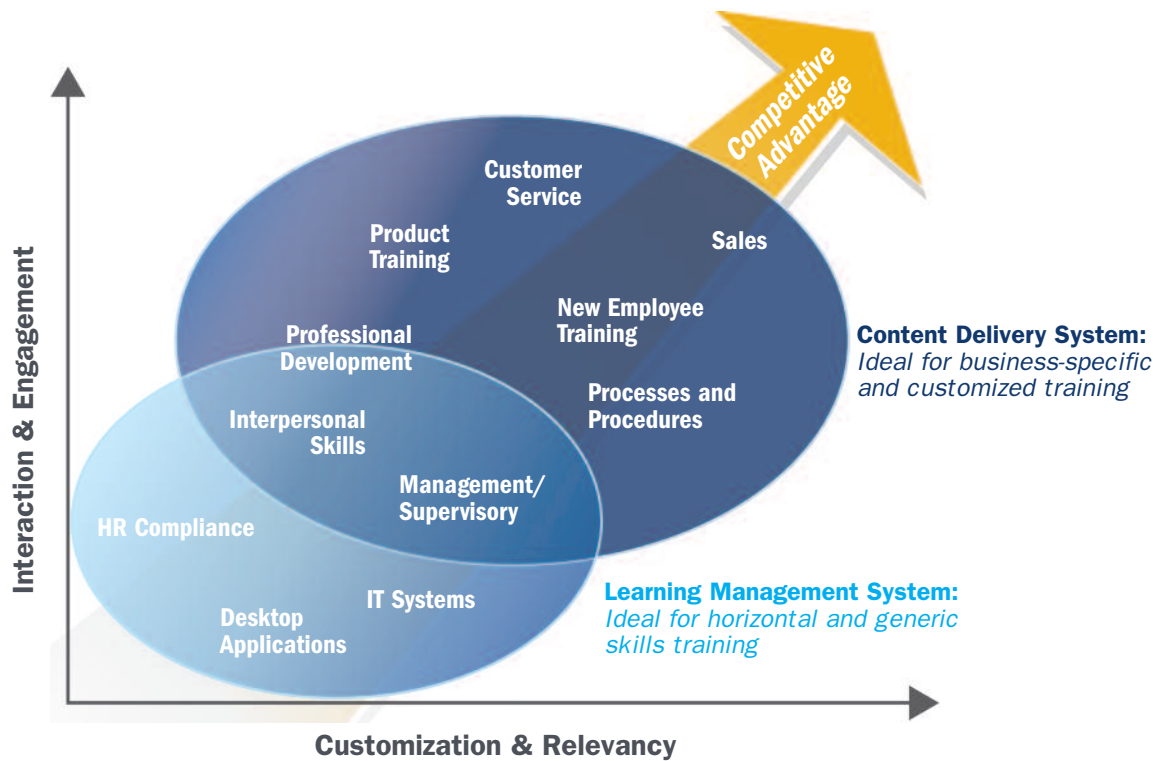
This scenario continues to play out because companies have supplemented their pedagogical expertise with off-the-shelf content. This material is convenient, but frequently of limited teaching value since it usually lacks capabilities for interactivity, updating or customizing. (What’s more, companies usually have quite a lot invested in this material, so they continue to re-use it in order to get their money’s worth.)

Such content may be suitable for standardized, regulated topics like HIPAA (the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), Sarbanes-Oxley, sexual harassment or ethics training. Even soft skills such as leadership or negotiation may lend themselves to off-the-shelf material. However, in-depth, advanced training requires more customized, proprietary content that adequately addresses complex topics and sophisticated instructional scenarios. What’s more, because the off-the-shelf material is static, it can’t keep pace with advances in industry practices and technological developments.

An LMS is certainly capable of delivering content, but it cannot easily and rapidly deploy, update, and maintain content or link to outside supplemental sources such as graphics, video, and subject matter experts. These are the elements that extend the life span of content and create more engaging, interactive and effective training. Most importantly, it is proprietary training that truly delivers a competitive advantage to the organization.

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Proprietary Training is the Key to Competitive Advantage



Context Makes the Difference

The best way to illustrate the difference between learning programs offered through a hybrid LMS/learning content delivery system and an LMS alone is to imagine a dynamic, engaging instructor whose presentation is supplemented using broadband connections to interactive research sites, illustrations using audio and video and who encourages students to participate and interact through class discussions, electronic bulletin boards, online discussion groups and cooperative group projects. Contrast that with the same content delivered by a boring instructor who relies on printed hand-outs, static PowerPoint slides and provides no opportunities for group participation or interactions.

It's easy to see how the same conclusion can be drawn when comparing off-the-shelf content (generally presented "in one direction," to students without interaction except for answering test questions) and custom-designed, environment-rich content that makes use of audio, video, graphics, Web resources and outside links. The problem is that although an LMS provides the tools for creating this kind of customized material, it tends to be cumbersome and difficult to use, leading to low adoption rates.

This content-rich, customized learning environment does not mean eliminating company trainers or expert facilitators. In fact, it enhances their ability to train and educate. According to Josh Bersin, Principal, CEO, and Founder of Bersin &

Associates, in his article *What Works in Blended Learning*, “The key... seems to be selecting the right combination of media that will drive the highest business impact for the lowest possible cost. Programs with the highest impact blend complex media with one or more of the simpler tools. A Web-based course for introduction followed by a... hands-on interactive class is an obvious mix.”

There is also research to support the assertion that a blended mix of content is most effective. Brian K. McFarlin of the Laboratory of Integrated Physiology, Department of Health and Human Performance, and Texas Obesity Research Center, University of Houston, found that “hybrid courses provide additional exposure to course content that is not possible in a traditional classroom environment.” His study showed final grades in an undergraduate exercise physiology course were 9.9% (one letter grade) higher when the course was presented in a hybrid format.

Five Guidelines For Improving Corporate Learning

So how can companies which have made substantial investments in Learning Management Systems and off-the-shelf content improve corporate learning? There is no need to eliminate the existing training structure, but enhancements made possible by the addition of a learning content delivery system can make dramatic differences in learning outcomes.

Here are five important principles to help guide the creation of a truly effective training program:

1 ***Instructors should have a system that allows them to organize and deliver content in a pedagogically sound way that puts learners’ requirements ahead of the limitations of the technology.***

Instructors need to have the flexibility to blend their own expertise with outside sources of authoritative information. Web links, graphics, PowerPoint, audio and video can be blended with in-person or distance-learning classes, learner participation and interactivity through group discussions, projects, bulletin boards and other elements that engage students. These elements encourage learners to become invested in the instruction and give them meaningful illustrations of how it is relevant to their individual areas of responsibility.

2 ***Instructors should remain a critical element of the teaching process, but be able to leverage technology to improve their efficiency.***

Rather than eliminating them from the instructional equation, content delivery systems should elevate instructors’ standing by enhancing the currency of their expertise. This is accomplished, in part, by allowing them to import supporting and complementary material from outside sources, which actually improves learning, according to *Hybrid Education: The*

A content-rich, customized learning environment enhances the ability of instructors to train and develop.

Future of Instructional Models on WorldWideLearn.com. The article states that combining electronic and online components with in-person instruction produces better test scores and subject mastery. Students are “more likely to participate in group discussions and collaborate... because there is not only ample opportunity to prepare a response, but also because they are not physically speaking in front of a group.”

The combination of greater participation and technology also helps students create a networked community of learners even if they are in different physical locations. The technology should also improve time management among full-time employees who are trying to balance their full-time job responsibilities with their status as part-time students.

3 *Instructors can keep content current.*

As fast as topics and content evolve, instructors need to be able to easily edit and update existing material. They should also be able to create new courses from the ground up when required. This can only occur if the content delivery system is intuitive and requires a minimum of time, effort and expense to build new training modules. As mentioned previously, this should include being able to easily incorporate content from outside subject-matter experts, existing documents, off-the-shelf content, audio, video, Web links and learner generated material.

4 *Content Delivery Systems are a continuous learning environment.*

As noted above, evolving subject matter can be supported from a wide variety of sources. Being able to draw on all of these to create intuitive presentations that mesh seamlessly with learners’ areas of interest and responsibilities means they will be more engaged and achieve greater subject mastery. The organization, in turn, will be able to develop a staff with “just in time” expertise. Investments in discrete learning “events” and content that quickly become outdated will be eliminated, leaving only content that is perfectly matched to the needs of the learners and the organization. Such a system can also provide learners with access to on-demand support from experts, stored content or even a network of informed colleagues.

5 *Mutual engagement and accountability for instructors and learners.*

The online component of content delivery systems makes assigned tasks, class participation, quizzes, reviews and test results all available for instructor, peer and supervisory review. Gone are the days of learning “just enough to get by” since the “public” nature of the environment creates a positive pressure for personal responsibility and accountability to truly learn the material.

Instructors also engage in more extensive interaction with students (through discussion groups, bulletin boards, Q&A and other postings) than in a traditional classroom setting or with off-the-shelf content. This provides them with more opportunities to determine which

techniques and assignments are most effective and which students or content areas need further attention. Organizations can also analyze the effectiveness of particular courses, instructors and which students show subject mastery and potential for promotion.

Blackboard Offers a True Learning Content Delivery System

Blackboard knows what works in the training and development of students of all types, whether in a corporate setting, traditional classroom, military or government workers or healthcare professionals. That's because of our extensive experience facilitating successful outcomes for all these types of organizations. Millions of users log into our learning systems every day.

This experience means that Blackboard has the expertise to develop architecture and features built on sound pedagogical methods and that provide solutions specifically designed for learners and instructors. However, the learning platform blends seamlessly with Learning Management Systems so data and outcomes meet the requirements of those responsible for compliance and administrative concerns.

The Blackboard Learning System:

- Drives learner engagement through personalized experiences and active learning tools,
- Enhances instructor expertise by easily linking to supporting research and resources,
- Creates powerful learning content using a variety of Web-based tools, links to outside resources and intuitive steps to incorporate existing material from off-the-shelf titles as well as proprietary training documents,
- Facilitates the creation of "learner networks" through participant interaction, small-group work and peer knowledge sharing,
- Enhances learners' critical thinking skills using interactive tools, and
- Evaluates progress using a rich set of evaluation and assessment capabilities.

Combining the strengths of both an LMS and the Blackboard solution enables corporations to create a comprehensive learning system that exceeds expectations by serving the best interests of both learners and the organization.



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