



## Top 10 tips for selecting a digital platform to deliver learning to your external audiences

## Introduction

When it comes to choosing a new Learning Management System (LMS) to deliver learning programmes to your external audiences - customers, partners, distributors, reseller, suppliers or students - there is a great deal of choice out there.

The considerations can be very different from choosing an LMS for your internal employees. To help you review your options and navigate the latest buzzwords and provider talk, here are ten top tips to help you select a new LMS for your external audiences.

### 1. Your external audiences

Your external audiences are much more likely to use a solution if they like it, so go for a solution with an attractive and visual user interface. Ensure it's easily accessible from any device and performs quickly.

Easy mobile access is increasingly important, so make sure you go for a system that has a fully mobile friendly user interface and also comes with Apps for on and offline use.

These features are important and not just for your millennial audiences!

Tip: Always remember, your external audiences are the important people here, so put them first.

### 2. Your brand

Your users may access your materials repeatedly and for relatively long periods. Your LMS and content are a powerful opportunity to promote your brand.

Your LMS should celebrate your brand. In addition to corporate images, fonts, colours etc, make sure your LMS can provide the information your external audiences need, in a tone and format that matches your brand.

Tip: A brand isn't just images and colours, make sure your provider understands your organisation and aims and reflects this in the LMS and the user experience.

## 3. Connected

Make sure your new LMS has a modern set of APIs that can (should you wish) integrate to your CRM or other external systems.

Tip: Some integrations will require technical support, so make sure your new supplier can do this for you.

## 4. External LMS v Internal LMS

If you already have an internal LMS, then it's possible you will not want your external audiences accessing the same LMS.

Why? Because administration, functionality, compliance or security requirements may all be significantly different and may lead you to conclude that you want a standalone solution for your external audiences.

Tip: Choose a supplier that is ISO 27001 certified and talk to them about potential concerns you have with external and internal audiences sharing the same LMS. If you are not satisfied that a single solution can satisfy both, consider a separate LMS implementation.

## 5. Functionality

New cloud-based providers tend to have more focused functionality sets, which are built to serve today's modern learner - including external audiences.

On the other side, older systems tend to be mature products with long feature lists that cover many traditional requirements - for historical reasons these tend to be mainly targeted towards internal audiences.

Tip: Invest time in deciding the functionality needed to provide the best possible learning experiences for your external audiences and don't be side-tracked by functionality that will only ever be relevant to internal staff.

## 6. Learning objectives v latest trends

Latest trends (in features and functionality) all have their place. Remember, mobile learning, microlearning, gamification, social learning, augmented reality and virtual reality may or may not be appropriate for your external audiences.

So document the learning objectives you need to achieve. Then look at the features and functionality that can help you meet the learning objectives.

Tip: Think about the way your learners will use your content and don't let the latest buzzwords rule you - they may not deliver the learning objectives you're looking for.

## 7. Existing content

If you already have an LMS to serve your external audiences, then it's likely you will have a library of content (eLearning, videos, PDFs etc). With new features being developed, it's essential that your old content is still supported.

Tip: Load some representative examples of your existing content onto your proposed new LMS and test what happens.

## 8. The future

As your business changes (market, competition, regulations, etc), so will the needs of your external audiences and you may want to support very different external audiences such as students, suppliers or distributors. You will therefore need a solution that will evolve with you.

Tip: Some suppliers aren't in control of the solution - get past the reseller and talk to the people who own the LMS. Are they investing and are they committed to the solution?

## 9. Service

Check out the service levels and providers' service level agreements. If your external audiences aren't able to access your learning content or programmes, it's going to impact your brand.

Tip: Speak to actual customers and discover how well they communicate and how do they respond when there's a problem.

## 10. Cost effective

Cost is an important factor in the delivery of any learning programme. External audiences may not access learning programmes as often as internal audiences.

Tip: Talk to the LMS supplier about pricing options for external audiences.

## Conclusion

Be careful not to simply repurpose your existing in-house solution and hope it will work. Get your priorities right. Understand your learners and how they will access and use your materials, then focus on their needs.

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