

7 Questions

for Finding the Right Partner in the
New World of Enterprise Learning
and Development



Selecting the right learning management system (LMS) can deliver meaningful talent development, give your organization greater ability to pivot to a new business or product strategy, or result in revenue-producing digital transformation. But when looking for the best LMS partner, it's easy to get distracted by the sizzle of all the bells and whistles of today's solutions.

We've put together this straightforward list of questions to get at what's really important to look for in an LMS and what features to compare if you want to go beyond mere competency training and skills certification.

Here's our guide to help you move beyond the basics to achieve enterprise e-learning that will educate, engage, and empower your employees.



1

What type of deployment and types of LMS do you want?

The choices boil down to **enterprise, industry specific, or open source. Let's examine what to look for in each option.**



ENTERPRISE LMS (COMMERCIAL)

An LMS that's going to serve an organization's broad and unique needs should be designed for (and, ideally, with input from) learners and trainers without limitations on content. Because most organizations have in-house experts with a deep network of intelligence that often gets siloed or trapped within small teams, it's imperative to be able to tap these subject-matter experts.

The remaining question for enterprise deployment is to go with Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) or an installed (on-site) solution: cloud-based or on-premises servers. The most common complaint of SaaS solutions is the risk to data security and privacy. But Gartner research suggests that 95 percent of cloud security issues are the customer's fault. On-premises has its advantages, but it brings the downside of hardware, support costs, and downtime for updates.

1

What type of deployment and types of LMS do you want? (Cont.)

INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC LMS

Here, the main consideration is how many of your users need industry-specific content and training, or how critical it is for your organization to develop industry-specific content and training. If this is a main consideration for your organization, deploying an industry-specific LMS could make sense. It will better help you keep track of certifications and industry-specific compliance issues, or simply better have analytics downstream around talent analytics and performance management.

OPEN SOURCE

Although open-source (or free) technology may offer a positive licensing consideration, its drawbacks are often too weighty for organizations that are unwilling to hire or assign a dedicated team for technology support (which open-source technology lacks). Customizations, for example, are assumed to be necessary by any large company using an open-source LMS. Those hidden costs, in addition to hosting fees, often turn companies away from this option.



2

What key features do you need?

The key here is to select an LMS that is going to be engaging to end users and deliver the right content you want them to consume. A chief complaint from buyers of LMS solutions is that users aren't engaging with the technology and content, so the systems are failing most ROI tests.





What key features do you need? (Cont.)

HERE IS OUR LIST OF IMPORTANT FEATURES THAT CREATE AN LMS EXPERIENCE THAT END USERS WILL ADOPT:

- **Gamification** brings a psychological element that appeals to the digitally connected or competitive person in your organization. Learning becomes fun.
- **Responsive design** is a must, given the sheer amount of time that people spend on their devices today. A solution only accessible on a desktop is doomed to fail because that's simply not where people are consuming most of their information.
- **Mobile and off-site learning** provide the flexibility that people have come to expect in a connected, digital world. The traditional classroom experience evokes a dull, dated experience.
- **Application compatibility** is a must, given the sheer amount of dependence that organizations now have on technology. Keeping your learning in a siloed container means you'll have data that's unable to connect with other systems in your enterprise.
- **Third-party integration** will allow you to leverage data from your learning system to your talent development and performance management systems — or to countless other programs that can benefit from seamless integration with your LMS.
- **Compliance certification** is often the most important feature — ensuring compliance training is completed by the numbers and within key timelines.
- **A content development application** makes it easier to convert any existing content — audio, video, slide presentations, and more — into e-learning courses that align with your needs.
- **Off-the-shelf content** is essential for organizations that want velocity in their training program, or that don't have the time or resources to generate custom content to achieve the results they need.
- **Customized vendor-provided content** might be what you need to deliver in your LMS, but be sure the partner is able to incorporate that type of content into the their LMS.

3

What support services do you need?

The need for support is going to be as unique as your organization. Ultimately, though, people simply want their issues resolved, and they want them resolved quickly — whether that means a real person on the other end of the line or the right answer provided in a timely fashion.

SUPPORT NEEDS BOIL DOWN TO THESE FOUR ISSUES:

- **Design:** You want to set up your LMS in a way that appeals to your people (staff and end users) and to your leadership who need to deliver training, skills, and knowledge shared with people and teams. Getting there requires a provider that can help you design it to your unique needs.
- **Implementation and training:** Deployment within any organization's ecosystem takes a specific set of skills — if you want to get employee and trainer buy-in with your LMS.
- **Division of ownership:** Who has ownership on your side, and what support will they need? Those are critical questions to answer. Chances are that your organization can't — or doesn't want to — do it all when it comes to running a learning and development initiative. The right mix of support and ownership is key to successful LMS adoption and measurable outcomes.
- **Ongoing support:** Support shouldn't end once you're up and running. New challenges will arise in your company, and fresh business initiatives will require new skills, knowledge, and abilities if they're going to be successful. Support to adapt and handle any issue that crops up will mean the difference between a one-and-done approach and a lasting, impactful LMS.

4

Is the LMS scalable?

As we mentioned earlier, business needs change over time. So should your LMS. The best LMS will scale with your business.

HERE'S WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- **Adaptability:** Look for learning, business, and strategic expertise in your partner, to be sure they can keep pace with your changing business needs. The best LMS is one that changes people and business — neither of which are static in their knowledge and in their need and potential to adapt to changing business pressures.
- **Scalability:** Organizations are obsessed with growth. But with growth comes the need for new talent or skills and abilities, so you're able to deliver on new products, services, or lines of business. Look for an LMS that can effectively deliver on your growing strategic learning needs in ways that will parallel those of your workforce's expectations for personal and professional growth.



5

How usable and efficient is the administrative side of the system?

Sure, you want end users to have a great experience and embrace a new technology like an LMS. But business leaders depend on learning and development as a tool to drive business outcomes and customer success and, in the best cases, go beyond learning to foster an appreciation of lifelong learning.

THAT MEANS YOU'LL NEED TO EVALUATE SUCH ADMINISTRATIVE TOOLS AS:

- **Administrative accessibility:** To extract real business value, an LMS should have accessibility that meets the needs of a dedicated admin, human resources, learning and development, and other management positions. Leadership will need access that is secure, customized to their needs, and aligned with their strategic needs.
- **Analytics:** Probably every leader in the digital age has been asked to produce proof points or data to support decision-making or demonstrate ROI. That means your LMS should have easily understood data or dashboards to track all the necessary aspects of a learning program and outcomes. What's key here is the ability to efficiently access learning data to view all user and usage data, delivered in meaningful metrics to any HR, L&D, or business leader who needs access. The point of powerful analytics is, of course, to understand the status of your organization, like a progress report.

6

What is involved in implementation?

One of the biggest pain points in adopting any new technology is the implementation process.

Know the vendor's implementation process intimately, and look for one that is collaborative and that gives your organization enough control, while making sure your team isn't overwhelmed by the job.



How much time will it take?



How many people will it take to get up and running?



How much of the burden falls on our organization or team?



How simple is the learner's process?

For learning to stick, people need to easily consume the information and walk away with the ability to apply the new-found knowledge.

LOOK FOR:

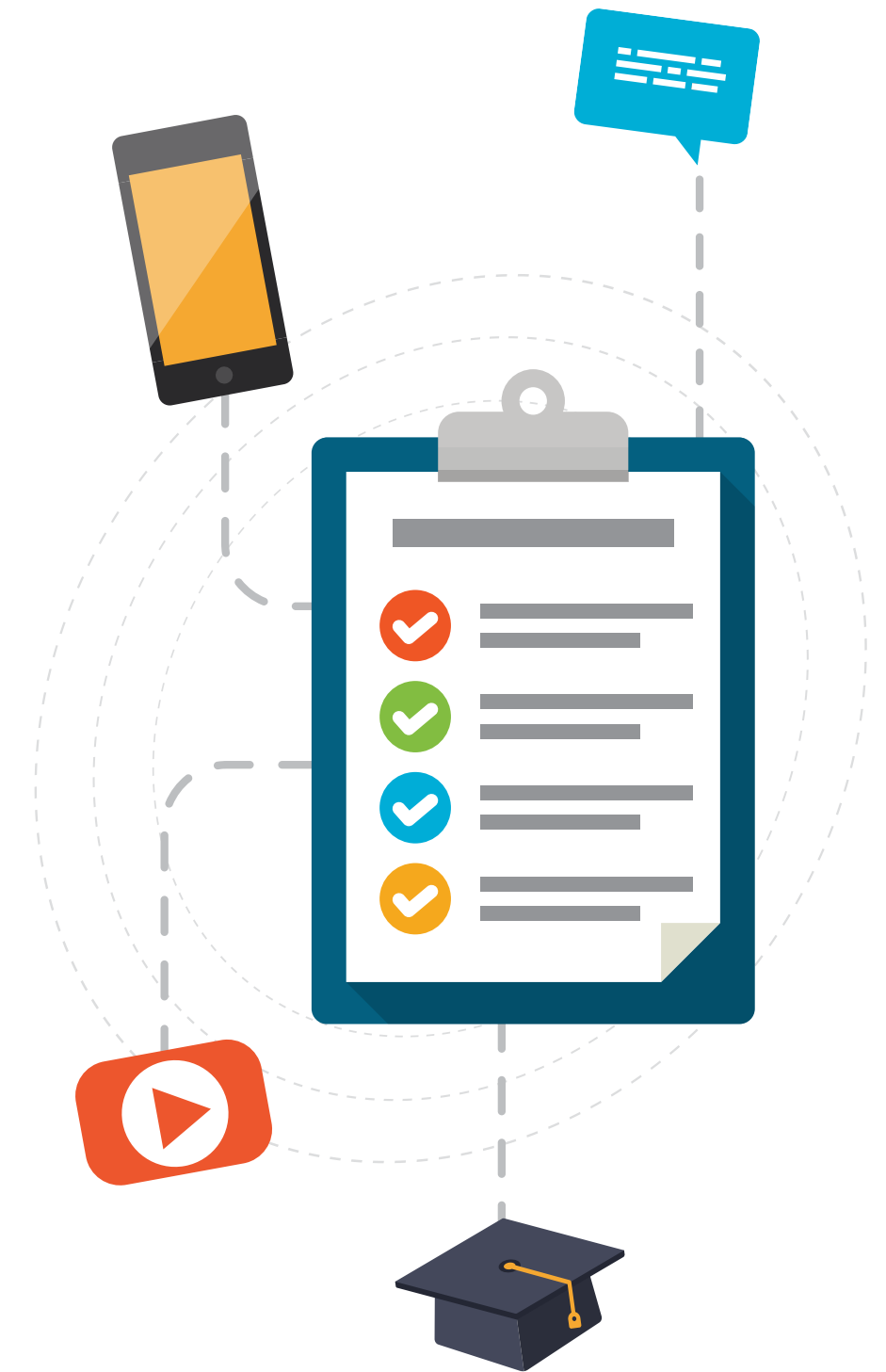
- **Flexibility:** The LMS should be able to easily direct learners to different courses, whether to match each learner's knowledge or needs, or to find content that will resonate with them.
- **Variety:** People learn better with different types of content, so you'll need an LMS capable of text content, audio, video, or interactive content to match every person's preference if you want successful outcomes and a system that supports long-term learning.
- **Delivery:** There are different types of learning that work with every person. Some people are audio learners. Others are visual, verbal, or kinesthetic learners. Your learning program needs to be designed to allow for each individual's approach to learning.



Summing It All Up

Clearly, there are many factors to evaluate when considering an LMS provider. This checklist will help you organize your thinking around factors that can seriously affect the outcomes of an LMS solution – for better or worse.

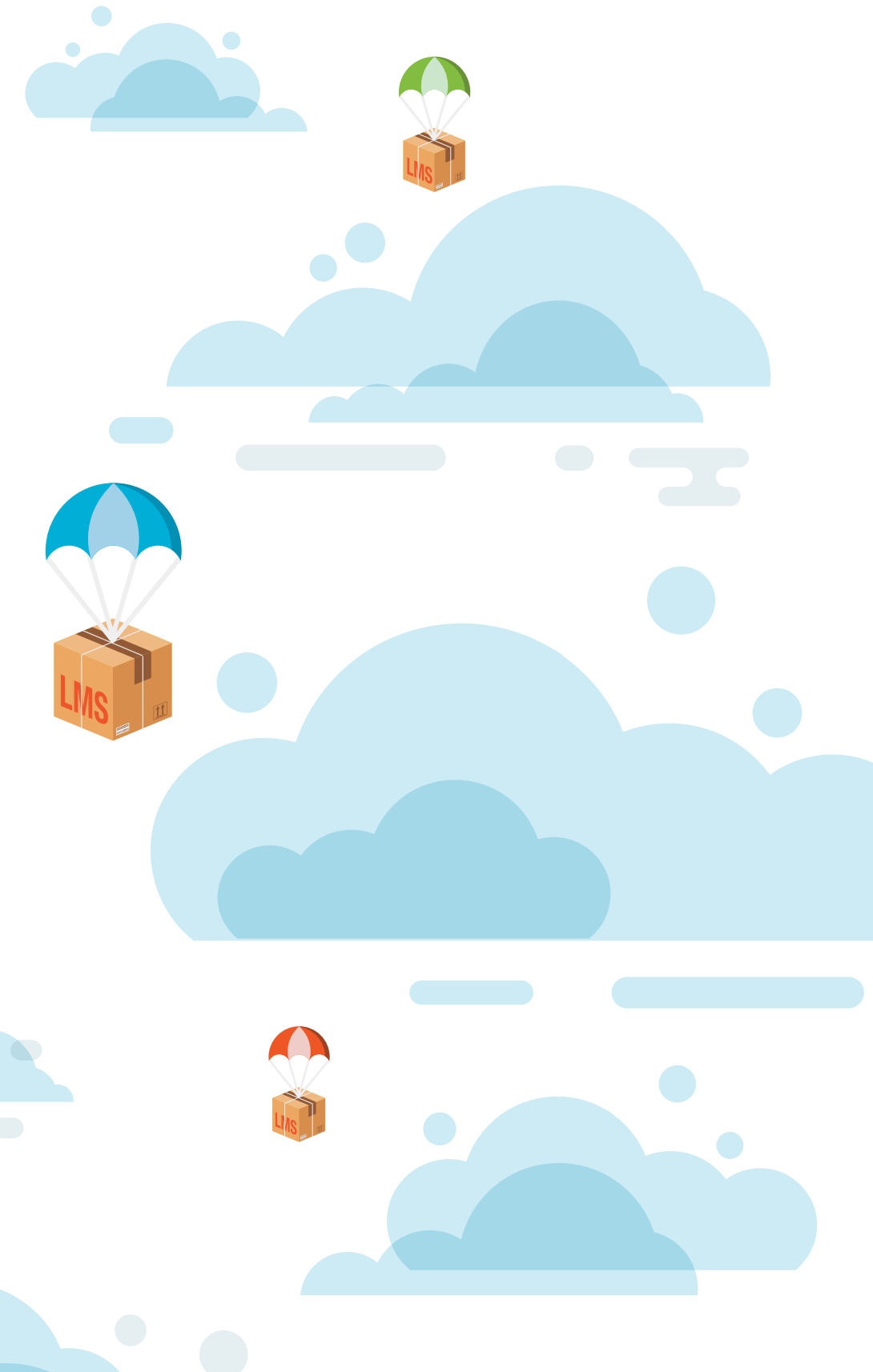
Shiny objects can distract when evaluating an LMS provider; true enterprise learning and development requires a genuine connection and trust. Discerning HR and learning and development leaders know effective LMS delivery requires flexibility that matches the needs of individual employees, business leaders, and organizations that want to grow and succeed. Take your time and find a partner that can be a trusted advisor.



About Brainier

Brainier is a software technology company specializing in Enterprise e-Learning Solutions, and global provider of cloud-based Learning Management Systems, online LMS platforms. Based in Minneapolis, Brainier has been helping clients discover a better approach to learning and development since 1995. Award-winning SaaS offerings include the Brainier LMS (formerly Elan) and Chameleon Cloud (adaptive e-learning framework).

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