

HOW TO BUY A LEARNING PLATFORM LIKE A CONSULTANT



5 tips to make sure you're meeting your organization's needs when you purchase an LMS solution. This guide provides insight into the right questions and considerations the selection team should consider when exploring various LMS solutions

Sometimes, we need a fresh perspective to assess, interpret, and analyze our situations and help us move forward. This wisdom applies to our personal and professional lives, alike. In the latter case, businesses frequently turn to consultants to provide the fresh perspective they need to understand problems and tackle them in a new way.

The consulting market is massive and it continues to expand. In 2016 alone, the US consulting market grew 7.1% to \$58.7 billion and is projected to continue growing in 2017¹. Consultants are brought in to help organizations of all sizes execute all sorts of organizational change – including enterprise software implementations.

And, it is also clear that L&D teams could stand to benefit from the insight consultants provide. As a recent BHG report revealed, 50% of L&D professionals are unsatisfied with their learning platforms. Furthermore, 25% of companies reporting a neutral, somewhat ineffective, or very ineffective process indicated they had no formal technology selection team or formal process to select a vendor². In other words, they weren't thinking like a consultant.

DO YOU ACTUALLY NEED A CONSULTANT?

Before you start trying to buy an LMS like a consultant, it is worth asking whether or not an actual consultant could be better suited to your particular situation.

Consider the following questions:

- **Are you suffering from 'boardroom myopia'?** This term refers to the shortsightedness that results from decision making without an external perspective. In these cases, fresh eyes or an external view can help
- **Are you short on organizational capacity?** If you don't think you have the peoplepower, time, and resources to execute software evaluation and a large-scale execution, you might need support
- **Do you need specialized skills?** For many large organizations, a specialized toolkit of skills, knowledge, and experience can drive a smooth selection and implementation process

If you answered “yes” to the above questions, you might want to consider hiring a consultant. If you said “no”, then you might be able to achieve your desired outcome without the help of an external consultant. To help you become the consultant, we've put together five tips on making sure you're meeting your organization's needs when you purchase learning platform:

1. ACCOUNT FOR PEOPLE, PROCESS, AND TECHNOLOGY

Just as with any new enterprise software initiative designed to help fix a broken process or solve a systemic problem, the software is never a magic bullet. Instead, people – the users – need to be onboard with adopting and using the system. Also, they need to understand and follow well-defined processes that support both the technology and their capacity to use the technology.

¹“The US Consulting Market in 2017”, Source Global Research, Consulting Market Programme 2017, 2017

²“Satisfaction with Learning Technology Inextricably Linked to Strategy and Planning,” Brandon Hall Group, David Wentworth, 2017



2. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE AND THEIR NEEDS

In the case of learning platform solutions, the audience – surprise – is your learners themselves. And it's important to recall that user experience is the weakest link in the eLearning chain. In fact, 88% of companies indicated improving user experience was the top reason for switching an LMS³. Get your users involved in the selection process early on – really early. They'll be the ones using the solution on a day-to-day basis, and their collective feedback will be invaluable as you select, champion, and drive forward a new solution.

3. CLEARLY DEFINE EXISTING AND IDEAL-STATE PROCESSES

Have the processes that you currently use and want going forward clearly defined if they aren't already. After all, this is what a consultant would do anyway: being an outside observer, they'd want to develop a good understanding of how things are done as well as the ideal state, but they would also want to apply their accumulated knowledge of best practices, emerging trends, and the optimal tools on the market for your particular situation.

4. RISE ABOVE 'BOARDROOM MYOPIA' AND SEE THE BIG PICTURE

It can be hard to tell when you have been on the inside for a while whether or not you are seeing things clearly and understand what the best approach to your situation actually is. This is why we bring in company-agnostic consultants from time to time. But you don't have to limit yourself to the perspective of the organization. Consume books, articles, and other

media on learning technology, talk to industry analysts, attend L&D conferences, and stay on top of best practices and emerging trends voraciously and bring your accumulated wisdom back to the company with a virtual-outsider's perspective.

5. KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE

Remember that though the immediate goal may be improving your L&D program, the end goal is all about improving organizational effectiveness, achieving operational excellence, and driving revenue. This applies for all enterprise software purchases and implementations, including learning platforms. Too narrow a focus could lead to compromise in other areas, so map out a complete understanding of how the solution chosen will ultimately impact all other areas of the organization. That's how a consultant would do it, after all.

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