



# Firm University

## Lessons Learned

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# Learning Management Systems in a Web 2.0 World

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The general learning management system (LMS) market is evolving quickly. The primary driver behind this rapid change is the recent demand for integrating more extensive functionality, such as talent and performance management, informal learning and social learning. There is also the desire to more closely integrate the LMS into other enterprise applications so that it becomes embedded into daily life.

The decision process for adopting an LMS in a law firm has been a tussle between the sometimes competing requirements of the IT and professional development departments. LMS providers have developed their systems starting from two opposite sides of the law firm. As a result, while a system might be ideal in every respect for IT's purposes (e.g., elegant handling of multiple short e-learning topics), it is sometimes lacking in functionality for the other (e.g., incorporation of state bar rules for CLE).

The race is on for who can not only supply the perfect LMS that satisfies both sets of traditional demands, but also for who can best accommodate the advent of Web 2.0 functionality, performance and talent management, and informal learning.

The new functionality available in a Web 2.0 world includes some interesting features, which will be very useful to law firms and will liven up the learning experience for users. The new functionality will undoubtedly allow law firms to deliver learning more closely aligned to their business goals and demonstrate the true value of training. Indeed, the LMS now allows trainers to prove beyond a doubt the worth of what they offer. From the point of view of law firms, here are some of the more useful aspects of new LMS functionality:

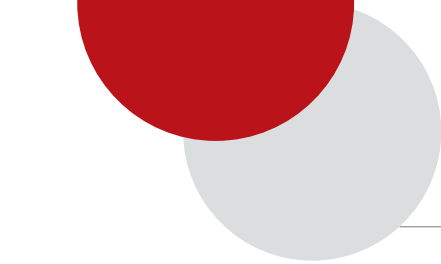
### **PRACTICE-SPECIFIC INTERFACES**

#### **Making Learners Stay**

The LMS must compete for attention with many other work demands and computing opportunities available to the learner. To do that successfully, learning professionals can now make their LMS "stickier" both by encouraging more visits and increasing the learners' length of stay. With Web 2.0, the learner-facing home page can now be dynamic and active, giving visitors new and relevant data each time they visit, making it a more interesting place to visit.

Some suggestions from vendors include:

- **Have different interfaces for different practice groups**



or roles within the firm and encourage practice or group ownership of these areas

- **Make the home page as dynamic as possible — many parts are now updateable**
- **Communicate changes either by e-mail or RSS feed**
- **Make the content precisely relevant**
- **Update and change the content on the home page often**
- **Include an “Amazon-style” rating system for the courseware and classroom training in order to encourage quality and further usage**

Essentially, the take-home message is that you can now make the system dynamic, which encourages learners to engage with the system.

#### **Language Interface**

Learning management systems have been deployed by so many firms worldwide that interfaces are now available in different languages. For firms with an international presence, making the LMS available in the local language can help user adoption. This might be a luxury for internal learning purposes, but it is essential for those offering training to overseas-based clients.

#### **INFORMAL LEARNING TOOLS**

Learners now have access to a plethora of informal learning online: Google, YouTube, chat groups, blogs, wikis and other sources of information. How does the learning professional control or compete with this? At present, most informal learning applications can be squeezed into Google gadgets or Web parts. By including this technology within a learning system, access to recommended wikis, blogs and social networking sites can be encouraged and managed to form a useful part of a formal learning program.

Informal learning and job-based learning is estimated to be about 70 percent of total learning in an organization. By promoting and managing chosen aspects of informal learning in the LMS, a firm can provide a more holistic learning environment and formalize informal learning.

Informal learning in all its forms should be harnessed by the LMS. Some suppliers provide performance support tools, which allow access to training directly from the relevant part of an IT application. Trainers can keep tabs on what is being

viewed this way through the LMS and prove the extent to which training is being utilized. This is a significant breakthrough, allowing trainers to obtain double value from content by offering it both in the LMS and with context-sensitive support tools.

#### **COMMUNICATION AMONG USERS**

The chief learning officer of telecommunications giant BT recently stated that people learn best from their peers. So it makes sense for a LMS to enable learners to communicate new ideas and thoughts to each other. This is particularly useful when put in place around a rollout and associated blended learning plan, where communication of ideas is encouraged through blogs and chat forums. This allows users to interact, promote good tips and tricks and speedily flushes out any practical problems.

BT also allows its engineers to post their own instructional YouTube videos to the LMS. There's an idea to ponder: capturing and leveraging the material created by the best support staff! It's a great idea worth considering.

#### **PERFORMANCE AND SKILLS MANAGEMENT**

There has always been pressure on the attorney-to-staff ratio, but now that firms have had to shed personnel in so many areas, it's even more important to know that those remaining have the requisite competencies to perform their jobs.

Many of the new LMS's are equipped with performance systems that integrate personal review processes and associate competencies with learning interventions. This allows performance and career development to be aligned with recommended learning and helps embed learning into the firm's culture. People are willing to take training; they just need to know what is expected of them. We know from experience that when learning is made part of their review process, it gets done. Firms we know who use this approach find that as soon as the learning is made available to users, it is sometimes done within the first couple of hours.

#### **CORE COMPETENCIES AND ASSESSMENTS**

##### **Learning, Not Just “Training”**

Individual performance can now be evaluated against competencies, which enables the identification of skills gaps. Once identified, the skills gaps can be automatically paired with suitable learning resources.

Some LMS systems now allow a user to choose which type of learning they wish to use in order to fulfill the learning objective. In this “equivalency,” a learning objective is associated with several learning resources of equal value, thus allowing the learner to choose the method.

For this to be manageable across the firm, trainers need to be able to create different combinations of user groups with associated core competencies. With today's increased

flexibility, trainers can create and edit competency frameworks and multiple categories and groups of competencies without difficulty or headache.

### **Assess Skills**

The LMS of today will allow trainers to assess skills both pre- and post-training (Kirkpatrick Level 2). Not only this, the LMS should allow them to recognize the skill gaps and deliver training targeted directly at users. For instance, if you test your secretary in Word skills, and it turns out he is weak on section breaks and footers, the LMS generates a training plan with just those learning resources. It then tests him again to prove that the lesson has been assimilated.

Modern LMS's allow trainers to report on Kirkpatrick Level 3 (Behavior) and Level 4 (Results), so that they can complete the process of proving a return on the training investment.

### **IMPROVED REPORTING**

The reporting functions of LMS's have improved greatly. Driven by training professionals keen to prove the value of training to the business, a typical LMS will now have about 40 standard reports and offer the ability to produce custom reports against most any criteria one can imagine. This is an enormous help to overstretched training departments who are often so busy training that they have no time to record their achievements in detail. With today's systems, trainers can report on every aspect of their users' training and development: skills gaps, skills analysis, resources, users who have not met CLE, total lesson time, etc.

### **CLIENT TRAINING AND E-COMMERCE**

#### **Adding Value for the Firm**

Now that it is easy to customize the front-end of LMS, many firms are providing training to their clients this way. This is an excellent opportunity to offer value-added services to clients and gain a competitive advantage. Many firms also view this as a source of considerable income.

#### **Direct E-Commerce Capabilities**

To facilitate income generation, some new LMS's offer e-commerce to process payments. Advanced features can include creating business rules for transactions, such as discounts for certain learner types or course bundles, managing shopping carts and checking certifications or learner status to determine eligibility.

### **VIRTUAL CLASSROOMS**

These features are not new, but they are being used more often, so it is important that Web-conferencing and virtual classroom tools are seamlessly integrated into the LMS. This becomes an important factor when choosing a system.

### **SEARCH FEATURES**

For the LMS of 2010, a critical feature will be search functionality. As firms increase their use of online training and other online repositories of knowledge, it becomes harder for users to find the formal and informal learning opportunities they need. A powerful search capability is essential.

### **MAINTAIN THE LEARNING PORTAL**

The LMS can act as the learning portal itself, or it can sit behind an intranet or customer portal. Portals offer great advantages — they give users a single point of access to the LMS and many other applications, as well as giving the company one place to publish new information very quickly.

Closer integration with enterprise applications such as SharePoint is now possible. As Michael Barshinger, President of Proficiency Partners, said, "Web 2.0 functionality is beginning to increase the use of law firm intranets, elevating the importance of a more integrated approach to learning management. Firms who are investing in this area see significant value in applications that include context-sensitive intranet integration."


Web technologies can be used to front-end existing LMS's and create tailored portals that provide seamless access to launch and track content from the LMS, without the learner ever seeing the LMS itself.

### **GREAT LMS FOR THE LEAST EFFORT**

Making a choice of an LMS has been a long, slow process for many firms as they try to accommodate all their desired objectives. Now that it is common practice for an LMS to be hosted externally without any lapse in security (60 percent of large organizations are now using a hosted LMS), it is feasible to try them out on a project-only basis. This is a risk-free strategy and allows a firm to start applying the facilities offered by an LMS without having to conduct an exhaustive feature comparison exercise. Now that blended learning is gaining acceptance as being the most effective learning strategy, it makes sense to avail yourself of a means of delivering it with the least manual administration.

#### **The Project**

Pick any project going firmwide, and use an LMS to help you deliver the training successfully. It might seem a bold step to pick a mission-critical project such as an Autonomy iManage or InterAction rollout, but those are the ones where you will be able to show that a blended learning approach is most cost-effective, as well as gain local involvement and commitment. With an LMS to provide the infrastructure, you can now offer a perfect



blended learning rollout that incorporates a strategic blend of learning methods, each one carefully designed to achieve specific goals.

### **The LMS**

Pick a trusted LMS, and select core functionality within that system (it doesn't need to have all the above functionality). You can import learner data from your active directory or HR system and then set up learning tracks to mirror the different learning objectives of your various groups of users.

### **The Planning**

Plan for preparatory marketing communication webinars or online learning to announce the business benefits of the upcoming rollout.

### **The Learning**

Put in place preparatory, or prerequisite, e-learning to reduce time required in class. Once completed (the LMS will automatically report on this and assign upcoming classes), users can sign up for classes or workshops that they can book through the LMS. Once complete, you will have a full set of management records showing how many people attended the full blended-learning program and, if you have added assessments, what their overall achievement rates were.

You can set all this up with a lead time of around two to three weeks and have the LMS available for the duration of the rollout. When complete, you can either keep it for ongoing training, or just turn it off. All in all, a simple but effective way of underpinning a successful project rollout and proving user skill levels. **ILTA**

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