

## e-Learning: Technical basics

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Before you can start training in the real world you need some offline enablers - training text books, training rooms and equipment, somewhere to keep your enrolment and assessment records and more. e-Learning is underpinned by technology and requires its own series of enablers before you can start. Below is a short list of questions and clarifiers that you can ask your prospective e-learning provider so you know you've covered the tech basics of an e-learning initiative.

### **What's an LMS and where do I get one?**

An LMS is a Learning Management System, in general terms a giant piece of internet enabled software that allows many people to connect to them to administer, facilitate or participate in e-learning. It's the online equivalent of the building and equipment you would use to make training available and to conduct the training. It should allow you to:

- Deliver/facilitate training
- offer and accept enrolments
- create and house learning material
- create and house assessment items
- create and house records

There are many LMSs to choose from all with varying levels of complexity and functionality, however most LMSs now cover the same basic functions. To simplify the selection process take the time to write down tasks that you would do in your real world training organisation, ask yourself if these are functions you will need online, particularly if you will be delivering training to a place you will never physically see, then ask your prospective learning provider if their LMS offers these functions.

### **Do I need a server?**

An LMS has to sit on a piece of computer hardware that is able to handle the strain of a lot of people connecting to it via the internet. Some LMS providers provide this hardware, others do not. Make sure you know whether the package offered includes hardware as well as specifications of how many people can connect to the machine without causing a problem.

### **What about server administration, who does it?**

Servers come with a variety of Operating Systems such as Windows, Linux, Novel. Someone will have to install both the operating system and your LMS on the web server. Of course should something go wrong with the server you'll need someone to do fault finding and repair of the system. Make sure you know who you are able to call and who will fix it. Complications may arise if the people who are looking after the web server are unfamiliar and separate to the people who are looking after your LMS.

### **What about technical issues - who do I call, who fixes them?**

What if something goes wrong with the computer hardware in your server? Who identifies the problem, buys and installs replacement parts - how much downtime can you expect? What about bugs or issues with the software itself? Make sure you know who you can call if you have one of these issues.

### **Where do I host my LMS/server?**

As an internet enabled application your LMS and server need to be hosted by a Hosting Provider. Make sure you know if this is something you are supplied with, or if you must source it yourself or are able to do it in-house. How crucial is it that your LMS not go offline? If your hosting is being provided, then what kind of risk management has been put in place to keep your LMS and data safe in case of fire, theft, human error, power loss?

### **What about firewalls and security?**

As an e-learning provider you are placing what can be sensitive information such as learner records, assessment information, intellectual property and privacy information within reach of a tech savvy culture. They may be tempted to access this data without your consent. Are any safety measures being offered by learning or hosting providers to keep these people out?

### **Who backs up my data and recovers it if something goes wrong?**

Imagine the worst case scenario: the learning material, assessment records and all other data is destroyed. How badly would this affect your business? If this would hamper your business make sure you are aware of whether data backups are being provided and who you need to call if you need to recover lost information.