



## What are the types of learning management systems?

There are many types of LMSs available depending on your needs and budget. There are even free learning management systems such as open source software that by definition are 'open' i.e. the source code is freely available for you to use and to adapt to your own needs. Many users of open source software will make improvements or use add-ons for their own needs, and then put it back out into the community for others to use. Open source LMSs can grow rapidly if they get enough interest and input. While you may not get any official support for an open source LMS, there will usually be a strong community base online with forums or email lists where you can ask for and offer help.

Of course there is also the commercial type of learning management systems. If you're paying for an LMS then you'll get a more robust product, you're also likely to get good documentation and you'll probably have a good level of support as well. A commercial product may be more stable and bug-free than a free version, but of course there are always exceptions to that rule so it's a good idea to read reviews of various LMSs before you make your choice. Check out the features to ensure that everything you need is included.

You'll also need to consider whether to use a *deployed solution* or a *hosted system*. A deployed solution system will generally be set up on computers within your premises and behind your firewall. A deployed solution (or Internal System) may incur extra costs as the setting up of the system is likely to be done in-house rather than remotely. An installed system may also require more maintenance and support than you're able to provide unless you have a dedicated IT team ready to support it. It is vital your system stays up and running so before you choose this option make sure you have people with the relevant skills available who will be willing to fix problems as soon as they occur.

With a hosted or SaaS (Software as a Service) LMS a lot of the work is taken off your hands, the system runs on someone else's server so you don't have to worry about server load or maintenance. The system will be set up by your provider and they should also take care of backups, or at least offer you a simple interface to schedule your own backups. A hosted service is normally up and running as soon as it's ordered since the service provider will be used to the procedure. In some cases it can even be done automatically by the system upon electronic request. They'll also be able to implement any updates and fixes remotely for you.

A deployed solution will have a greater initial cost as you'll have the software and installation to pay for, but it may be more cost effective in the long run. With a hosted system you'll have less to pay initially, no software purchase costs, no installation fees and limited technical problems but over the years you may end up paying out more than if you'd opted for an installed LMS.

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