THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CHOOSING AN ONLINE LEARNING PLATFORM

A step by step blueprint on how to make the right choice that fits your needs and budget

skillshub

Contents

Introduction

So, you're thinking about procuring an online learning platform for your organisation or you're in research mode about what they're all about.

It can be an overwhelming and daunting task because there is so much choice out there.

Our goal for this guide is to help you make an informed decision and we've got **several practical exercises for you** to work through so that you can crystalise your thoughts about what you need in an online learning platform.

Some platforms come with all the bells and whistles. Others are basic. It all depends on what your goals and objectives are.

For example, here at **Skillshub**, our **online platform** is ideal for **small to medium sized businesses** with learner numbers of up to 10,000. All our features, benefits and functionality are just perfect for an organisation of that size and what their requirements typically are.

But Skillshub is probably not going to be the best solution if you've got 100,000 learners worldwide to train. It's horses for courses. We didn't set out to cater for all sizes of business. Some providers do and they fail miserably because they do not have an in-depth understanding of their target market.

What are the benefits of an Online Learning Platform?

Before we get into the nuts and bolts of this guide here are some top-level advantages of using an online learning platform.

Reduces the cost of delivery

One major advantage of using an e-learning platform is that the costs of training delivery are much lower in comparison to conventional methods where a trainer would be required to physically train in person.

There are many associated costs with face-to-face delivery that include printed materials, design and development time and expenses, venue or room hire, travel expenses for the trainer and the learners plus potential overnight stays. Then you've got the time spent travelling.

Scalability and speed

Imagine what the costs and organisation would be to put 150 staff through compliance training? Just a 1-day course for everyone would result in about 15 groups of 10 all needing to be trained. With a platform you can create the materials once and then your people can work through the modules when it's convenient for them.

Now imagine that a new process or a piece of vital information needs to be cascaded and trained through your company. With the use of your platform, you can deliver learning and development at scale and quickly.

Learning in the flow of work

A manager has a difficult conversation to be had with a team member who has crossed the line. They can hardly go on a course at such short notice. They could probably go to Google or YouTube, but the quality is questionable. Instead, they can login to your platform, access the elearning library and work through the animations and videos about holding difficult conversations.

This was an immediate need and your platform and its content was there ready. This is learning in the flow of your work and online learning platforms are great for this.

Reporting

A learning platform can provide lots of useful data that you can use. You can track progress and activity. You can track participation as well as test and assessment scores.

Consistent learning experience

The beauty of using a platform is that you can control the content that goes on it. Therefore, all your learners will receive the same standard of training no matter where they are based.

Flexible learning that saves time

Your people can learn whenever and wherever they like. It's a flexible system that is always on. Your learners can take their training at different times and work at their own pace.

Personalised learning

Apart from any mandatory or compliance training a platform provides each learner with the opportunity to create personalised learning journeys so that any training they take is relevant. Whether it is complete courses or the odd session here and there through browsing the content library, it will all be relevant

This guide is designed to help you sort through the different types of e-learning platforms that exist, by looking at their common features, their benefits, and the potential downside of them.

This guide will have it all.

It would include useful templates on how to gather information and make the best information on the e-learning platform that suits you. Whether you're a learning and development manager or human resource manager, you'll find this material useful in making the right choices.

I hope you take a lot from it and please don't hesitate to email my team or me personally with any questions you may have.

Thanks

Sean

Sean McPheat
CEO – Skillshub
www.skillshub.com
sean@skillshub.com

Set Your Goals – "Begin with the end in mind"

The title of this chapter is one of the habits from Stephen Covey's book **"The 7 habits of highly effective people"**. And is an important place to begin. Many times, when people want to decide they start from the beginning, but no one starts a journey without thinking of the destination.

How far your destination is, determines the kind of vehicle that you would require to get there.

The same is with choosing an e-learning platform, you begin with the end in mind, and this means you look at what you want to achieve and let those metrics inform your decision of what platform best suits you.

Don't think of the features just yet, think of what you want to achieve with the platform in the first place.

Understanding how these goals that you have outlined, directly or indirectly impacts the growth of your organisation.

For instance, asking "what skills do I want my employees to acquire?" is a good question, but the main question that should govern this question is, "What is the vision of my organisation and where does learning and development fit in that vision?"

How else can your organisation track progress, or develop KPIs if you do not have a clear vision of where you are heading, and the skills needed to take you there?

An important rubric in e-learning is to understand how to measure progress. A good e-learning platform would provide you with easy-to-use tools that aid you in measuring progress.

But this becomes easy when there are clearly defined baselines for KPIs.

For instance, if you run a marketing firm, an important aspect of your business would be **how to effectively utilise online tools to boost sales for your clients.**

With this defined, you can now proceed to outline the available skills your team has. This helps you understand what you have, and what you need to have.

You can then develop deliverables, and design suitable learning experiences for your staff.

You can measure KPIs after a period; you can measure how effectively they have learned to use online tools, and how they have used that to make sales.

You cannot have the desired result using an e-learning platform if you have not defined clearly what your goals are.

You therefore understand what you want, and how useful an e-learning platform would be to giving you what you want. By asking the right questions you can build an effective strategy that would help you leverage e-learning platforms to the fullest.

Critical Questions That You Need To Ask Yourself

*"We've heard from a lot of platform providers
that their LMS is used a lot. Skillshub is used a lot!
But these are just vanity metrics.
What you really want are business impacts
and real, tangible outcomes."*

Sean McPheat

What is my ROI after choosing this platform?

ROI justifies why your organisation would spend money on learning and development, especially if your organisation is a small or medium sized enterprise.

You want to be able to understand how much you are spending and how much comes back to you. This would help you understand if investing in the platform is worth it or may be an investment that isn't necessary right now.

After you design your goals, you want to strategically understand how the training impacts your organisation. For instance, if you spend £10,000 on a platform to develop 100 employees, you want to know how the training affects them, and ultimately the organisation's growth and success.

Platform usage metrics are not enough here.

We've heard from a lot of providers that their LMS is used a lot. **Skillshub** is used a lot! But these are just vanity metrics. What you want are business impacts. You want to know that productivity has gone up, that sales are increasing, that staff are staying longer with you and that customer satisfaction is on the rise.

It is true that the cost of training using online platforms is less than what it would have been with conventional means, but nonetheless, the organisation is investing in its staff, and should be able to measure the impact of the training sessions on staff productivity, and overall company performance.

Being able to **calculate ROI** accounts for three important reasons:

- Are the employees really learning, and how would they take what they have learned and apply it in real life situations?
- What is the benefit of this training individually and for the company generally?
- How does this training impact our **Learning and Development Strategy**, and ultimately, the company's vision?

ROI can be measured in terms of financials and at the same time, it can be measured by impact.

- What was the effectiveness of the employee before and after training?
- Did they complete the training?
- Did the company's revenue increase?
- Did customer satisfaction improve?
- How long will it be until the organisation begins to enjoy the benefits of the training?
- Does the platform deliver in-depth, research backed content?
- Did productivity improve? How much time (money) did it save?

These are very important questions you must consider before choosing an e-learning platform.

Using Skillshub, we heard from a learner that had worked through the negotiation skills sessions from our **elearning content library**. By implementing the learning, they saved their company over £200,000 in a renegotiated contract just by using the BATNA technique.

It just happened that this learner wasn't one of the top users of Skillshub from that company but what they did learn, they implemented. And that's the most important thing.

What kind of platform are you looking for? Basic, or a platform that gives you everything?

After you have considered your goals, and the ROI, you want to think of the type of platform or plan that you want to introduce to your people.

Do you want something simple and straight to the point, or do you want something very sophisticated?

Some platforms offer way more than you currently need and you will pay for the privilege too!

Don't get blind-sided by "Our platform uses AI" and "You can implement social learning" – these sound great and they are, but do you need these right now?

Would getting your people used to a learning platform, learning in this way, and IMPLEMENTING the learning be enough right now?

The answer is most likely yes if you're starting out. Remember, your people need to get buy in to the system too!

These options and more are available, but you should choose based on your company's learning and development goals.

What is the size of my organisation and what kind of platform will fit?

Understanding where your organisation is, can greatly influence the kind of platform it needs.

Is it a small/medium sized organisation, an enterprise, or an educational institute?

Each of these organisations have their specific L&D strategies, based on where they are, hence the kind of services they would require would differ, and there are tools designed for each of these organisations and their stages of growth.

For instance, the training tools used by a university will be different from what a financial firm would require. For a university there might be a requirement for Tutors to be able to mark work and load up comments for example. In terms of a financial firm, they might just need a simple platform for compliance training purposes.

Another example would be the difference between small/medium businesses and an enterprise.

Both have their different needs and would require different tools.

The difference many times does not exist in the tool used, but in the scale at which these courses are implemented. A small/medium sized business may train from 10-500 staff depending on their capacity, but an enterprise would need a platform that can handle lots more. Normally in the high thousands.

As mentioned, enterprises need to train thousands of people and sometimes customers, partners and even the public.

This means the platform that enterprises would require should be able to handle the large influx of users and their data. But for a small/medium business, ease of use, ease of setup and the ability to implement the learning should be the primary focus added to

What is your budget?

Your Learning and Development budget will greatly influence your choice of platform.

In considering your budget, you may want to consider these other factors that affect training costs:

• Industry

Industry specific training is more expensive than generic programs. The industry also determines the level of training required; for instance, hospitality may not require extensive training in comparison to tech-based skillsets. Like Amazon, the organisation spends so much money onboarding workers who have no technical skills into technology. Healthcare, also, because of the specificity and delicacy of the profession requires more and more attention in training than some other industries. Other industries just want a platform for their compliance training and dare we say it, as a tick in the box exercise (yes, we have come across those exact requests!)

• Training for role specificity

Creating role specific training for staff, helps to increase their effectiveness, and this may cost more than training everyone at the same time.

The platform may not be an issue here, but the content might. Will the quality and type of content be sufficient to cater for all the various roles in your company.

That's why **bespoke elearning** is so important.

• Experience level

This also plays an important role in building a budget. You cannot train a junior member of staff like you'd train a senior manager for example.

Online training eradicates all the other forms of costs like training costs where you must purchase materials, time costs, administrative costs, travel costs, etc.

Exercise – Setting Your Platform Goals

Work through these questions to help you start to formulate your learning platform requirements.

What's your organisation's vision/mission?

Do you have an L&D strategy? What is the overall objective of it? (If you don't, create one!)

How many employees will you need to cater for? What levels are they at? Do they have any specific requirements? Have you completed a training needs analysis of the areas they need to improve or be equipped with to deliver the vision?

Over and above the training needs analysis (if completed) what skills do you think your organisation lacks, that if it had, would make a big impact?

What is the size of your business? (Small or medium businesses, enterprise)

What is your initial ballpark budget figure?

What Features Will You Need?

Before we begin, have a brainstorm of what you would like your platform to do and the features it would have. **Write down up to 10 features below...**

Self-Assessment Exercise

Important Features To Consider

You need to find a platform that meets your specific needs, but there are some features that you really need to look out for if this is all new to you.

Therefore, in this section we have compiled a list of the **MUST HAVE** features we feel will benefit you.

NB: While reading through, please indicate at the end of each feature, if the feature, for you, is not needed, nice to have, must have, maybe later, or something you can have much later.

This will start to build up a picture in your mind of what you need.
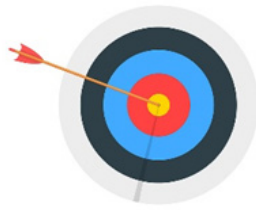
Key Feature

The Platform Should Be Designed By L&D Experts

The development of the platform will always be carried out by techies and developers but what about the design of the platform?

This MUST ALWAYS have been created by L&D experts who understand the L&D industry, how people learn and retain information and from a learner experience point of view.

Some platforms have all the bells and whistles and look great. Your initial reaction is "wow" But a closer look shows that the learner experience is awful and has not been clearly thought through from a learners point of view and their needs.

The best learning and Development strategies for employee development incorporate a mesh of technological solutions and an in depth understanding of human behaviour.
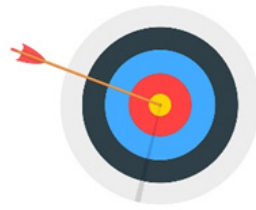
This empowers the L&D expert to build suitable curriculum and learning experiences that can have maximum impact, and maximum impact is defined by how much of the information is retained, the direct influence the retained information has on the company, and an increase in the quality of life of the individuals involved.

Many organisations also are taking advantage of the neuroscience-based learning methodologies that help ensure long term retention. This method is referred to as **microlearning**.

Therefore, any platform that is actively designed by Learning and Development experts who understand the industry and understand human behaviour will deliver better results based on research and facts. A platform developed by Learning and Development experts would provide more useful tools, because these experts are conversant with the industry and trends.

How would you rate this feature? Tick below.

Not Needed	
Nice To Have	
Must Have	
Maybe For Later	
For Much Later	

Key Feature

The platform should be user-friendly, proactive and have a seamless learner interface

Nothing ruins a learning experience online like a platform that has an untidy user interface and is clunky to use.

According to data, the number one reason why many people don't conclude learning online is because they find it difficult to navigate a site, easily find a course, or the site lags.

This means that a good platform is designed with its target users in mind. From the sign up, to the way courses are found, the ease of navigation, and ability to search out content easily, everything should be done to deliver a seamless user experience. Also, the platform should be aesthetically appealing; this is because many of the users have been exposed to brilliant user experiences and aesthetics and would quickly compare that experience with what they receive on the platform. Many times, the way the platform is set up would facilitate learning and the rate at which learners return to learn.
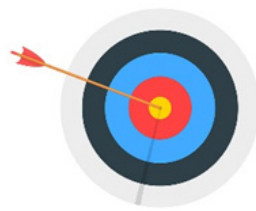
In user experience, one rule is that if the site needs multiple actions to access information, or it becomes too burdensome to locate certain files or assets on the platform, users hardly use it.

Experts know that users of online platforms have short attention spans and require fast solutions.

Therefore, If the platform is not easy to use, your learners will not use it, and if you invest in such a platform, your investment can be lost because your employees would not enjoy learning on the platform, time would be wasted, and the level of effectiveness would be impacted negatively. No matter what a site offers, if the platform doesn't offer ease, your people will not use it.

How would you rate this feature? Tick below.

Not Needed	
Nice To Have	
Must Have	
Maybe For Later	
For Much Later	

Key Feature

Responsive design

A responsive design is not to be treated lightly. Many employees will engage learning platforms after their work hours, and if a platform is not responsive, or cannot function on multiple devices, it can discourage learners.

Before making your choice, test the platform, and test it across multiple devices to see how it works.

How would you rate this feature? Tick below.

Not Needed	
Nice To Have	
Must Have	
Maybe For Later	
For Much Later	

Key Feature

Variety!

Learning processes that involve variety have been known to encourage performance and sharpen problem solving skills. The idea is to expand the number of ways a learner can think, learn, express their feelings, solve problems to stimulate interest. A platform that is limited in variety is also limiting how learners can be productive. Variety also gives way to the various ways individuals can learn; this means that variety recognises that not every person learns the same way. It also enables learners to develop self-awareness, by showing them options that they excel in, versus options that they may have suffered through.

For example, can learners just browse through the platform, looking for what they want, when they need it in the moment of need? Can they create their own **personalised learning journeys** and schedule these to run when they want? These are just two examples of providing variety in a platform.

How would you rate this feature? Tick below.

|	
Not Needed	
Nice To Have	
Must Have	
Maybe For Later	
For Much Later	

Key Feature

Ease of data migration

Data is the new gold. But how easy or difficult will it be to transfer all your learner's data to another platform if you are not happy with the provider or the platform? Or you simply outgrow it or want to change?

Will you need to start from scratch again? 😦

Be careful with this. You may not have even thought of asking the question and some providers will not be forthcoming in telling you that it will be impossible or very difficult to transfer learner data to a competitor!

How would you rate this feature? Tick below.

Not Needed	
Nice To Have	
Must Have	
Maybe For Later	
For Much Later	
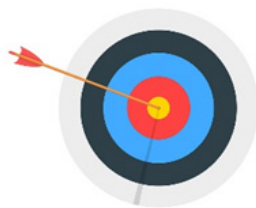
Key Feature

SCORM and or xAPI compliant

Before 2001, many platforms experienced this problem: if a course was uploaded, and the university or the platform changed its LMS, it would lose the entire collection of courses it had previously uploaded because the courses would not be compatible with the latest changes. The SCORM was introduced to checkmate this.

SCORM is short for Sharable Content Object Reference Model. Internationally, SCORM is the standard for online courses. This means if your content is published with the SCORM format, it can be recognised by any learning platform globally.

These standards are important in any field and allow for interoperability. Think of SCORM like downloading an app from an app store, some apps are compatible with IOS while some are compatible with android, and some are compatible with both devices.

For applications that can be used across operating software, ensure that developers don't develop software for every device that exists. This is what SCORM is like, it is the standard for every online course if the designers of the course want their courses to be featured across platforms. A list of technical requirements if you like, that tells designers how to make a course that would work on any platform.

There are five versions of SCORM, and it is important that your platform is compatible with at least one of these five versions. This allows for you to have a wide variety of learning assets. Most learning content is either SCORM or xAPI compatible. This ensures that they meet the industry requirements.

The Experience API, or xAPI, is a software developed for e-learning that tracks and records various types of learning systems and profiles learning experiences.

These experiences are recorded in something called a Learning Record Store (LRS). This API collects data about a person or a group from many technologies. The idea is to collect the data about experiences that matter, since learning happens everywhere and every time.

Once a platform integrates this API, data is stored about the learning experience of the individual or group of people, and this provides an opportunity for experts to form suitable learning strategies that can help learning, by making learning more personalised.

How would you rate this feature?
Tick below.

Not Needed	
Nice To Have	
Must Have	
Maybe For Later	
For Much Later	
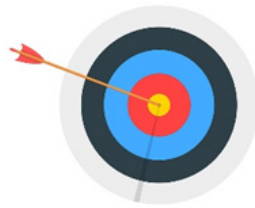
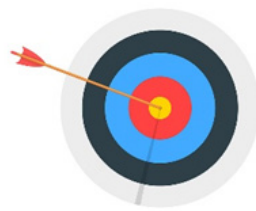## Key Feature

Automated learning processes

Automation saves a lot of time, and if the learning process is automated then it saves not just the organisation more time but allows for learners to have a personalised learning experience.

Many times, the hassle of having to go through a platform to select the best courses to apply for can be herculean, if a platform shortens that time by having an automated suggestion option that gives learners options that can better enhance their learning experience, it makes the learning journey more effective.

The platform should have push notifications, and suggestions that enable this–much like going through Amazon or any streaming platform.

How would you rate this feature? Tick below.

Not Needed	
Nice To Have	
Must Have	
Maybe For Later	
For Much Later	

Key Feature

Easy, effective administration and reporting

It's very important that you evaluate the platform from an administrative point of view.

The learners are most important for sure but please do not overlook the importance of how easy it is to use from an administration and policing perspective.

Make sure it's easy and quick to upload learners and content to the system, without having to do everything manually.

Also, make sure that the reporting provides you with what you need. From a learner, their line manager, department, and company viewpoint.

Make sure that progress can be tracked.

Also, a platform should give you access to control certain user behaviour.

Because the platform has a purpose, and a lot of online platforms give freedom to socially interact, you want to be sure that you can regulate these activities so that the platform is focused.

How would you rate this feature? Tick below.

Not Needed	
Nice To Have	
Must Have	
Maybe For Later	
For Much Later	
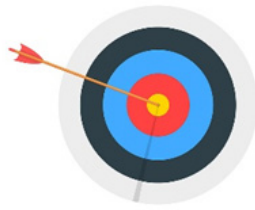
Key Feature

Does the platform have Social Learning tools?

Social media is so integrated into our lives. Social learning tools have been integrated into a lot of social media platforms with the understanding that many people learn socially.

If the online learning platform has the presence of a social learning and interaction tool it gives room for learners to interact with one another, share experiences, like, comment and spur growth.

Asides from courses uploaded, users can have the opportunity of perusing user-generated content, and this has tremendous impact on shaping culture, and facilitating learning.

Please do not go into this with blinkers on though. If you are going to use and implement social learning, then it needs some rules and controls around it.
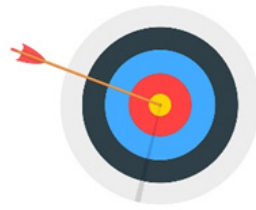
For example:

• Who controls what content a learner can generate themselves and how to upload this?

• What about quality control and validation of content?

• Who will police comments that are not appropriate?

If you're starting out on your online learning platform journey, then this might be best left until you're further down the road a little.

How would you rate this feature? Tick below.

Not Needed	
Nice To Have	
Must Have	
Maybe For Later	
For Much Later	

Key Feature

Branding and customisation

One important aspect of branding is the ability to mimic familiarity.

This means, humans tend to interact with things that they can relate with, or things that make them feel safe, and not out of place.

If the item, or concept seems too foreign, they would refrain from interacting with it.

So, relatability is a big plus in learning. If your learners or users cannot relate to your platform, if it feels foreign, they may not interact the way you may expect them to.
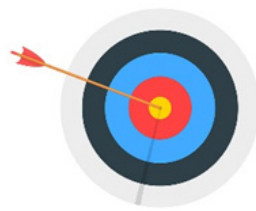
So, branding the platform to your colours might be important to you. It should also be easy to have your schedules on the platform integrated with your calendar, so you don't need to log in to know when you have a task.

A platform that allows for customisation and branding; allowing you to personalise your learning space, gives you room to inspire more interactions. The learners will feel just at home.

Ask if the developers can customise the platform (at a cost) so you can have it exactly how you want it.

How would you rate this feature? Tick below.

Not Needed	
Nice To Have	
Must Have	
Maybe For Later	
For Much Later	

Key Feature

Space for fun and rewards

The amount of user engagement we see in gaming platforms is simply because of the reward that comes from engaging in these games.

Psychologically this is the same reason people have addictions.

When the brain goes through stress, it tends to want to take a break, and reward itself for the job well done, whatever activity it does to relax and reward itself, would cause the body to reward it with a biochemical called dopamine. The brain loves this.

A platform that understands human behaviour would incorporate these elements into it and get users to compete for rewards.
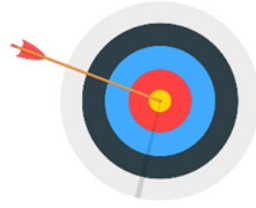
These incentives encourage users to see learning as fun; even if they have to sweat it out, they will get rewarded.

Incentivising learning is also a way to keep users engaged.

How would you rate this feature?
Tick below.

|	
Not Needed	
Nice To Have	
Must Have	
Maybe For Later	
For Much Later	

Key Feature

Cross cultural interface

You might have learners and administrators from different countries. Some interfaces allow you to change all the wording within the platform into different languages.

How would you rate this feature?
Tick below.

Not Needed	
Nice To Have	
Must Have	
Maybe For Later	
For Much Later	
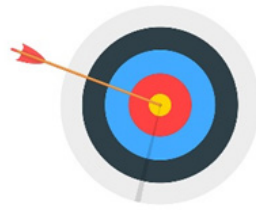
Key Feature

Assessments, tests, reviews, and certification

You want to be able to test the level at which your staff have grown throughout the learning process. You need a platform that allows you to build tests that really gauge learning, and then apply these tests to the other existing reviews from the learner's participation during courses, and how they learn.

This approach would give you a holistic approach and enable you to understand how effectively your staff have done.

In addition to that, you need a platform that can automate this process as well, to give you effective feedback on how well your staff are participating in the learning process.

Certification is evidence that a person has received a level of training. A good e-learning platform should give certification so that participants can have physical evidence asides their work, to validate the learning experience.

This process can be automated or adjusted to your taste. If you want to offer certifications at the end of each course, or at the end of the entire training process, it is up to you.

Offering certification at the end of a course you know how many of your staff participated and if they participated in the learning process or not.

At the end of each course, a test can be given to help you understand this.

How would you rate this feature? Tick below.

Not Needed	
Nice To Have	
Must Have	
Maybe For Later	
For Much Later	
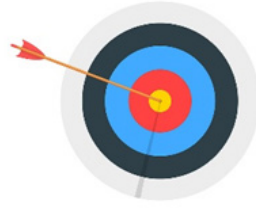
Key Feature

Video conferencing integrations and webinars.

Virtual training is so important for remote workers especially if they work from home some or all of the time. So, a platform that supports video integrations might be useful. However, if you already use Zoom, Teams, Google etc. then it might not be a priority for you right now.

How would you rate this feature? Tick below.

Not Needed	
Nice To Have	
Must Have	
Maybe For Later	
For Much Later	
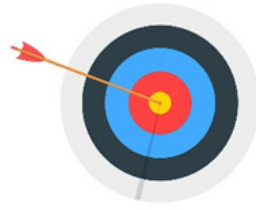
Key Feature

Scalability

Scalability is the ability of a platform to reach more and more users and have more and more engagements. You want to host your courses and training on a platform that can allow multiple users and would not lag as many users use it at once.

Learning platforms need to recognise that organisations will grow, and as these organisations grow, the demand for more space for training would come.

A platform that can grow with you and meet your organisation's needs is important.

You don't want to have to change LMSs in the future due to the inability of the platform to meet your needs. The process of having to change after investing so much in a previous platform can be a lot, like moving into a new office space, the amount of time spent settling in, and tweaking a few things in comparison to simple upgrades done to an already existing and familiar platform.

So, before you invest, check if they can handle your growth. You can ask for the development roadmap to know where the platform is headed, and how this can benefit your organisation before you invest.

How would you rate this feature? Tick below.

Not Needed	
Nice To Have	
Must Have	
Maybe For Later	
For Much Later	

Key Feature

Security and reliability

A platform that has access to user data should also promise you security. The protection of your staff, or your organisation's learners and their information against spams and fraud should be the utmost priority of any platform that you should register with.

So, look for a platform that has advanced safety protocols, and meets safety protocols globally before you register.

Also, you want to read through their privacy policy and see if it aligns with international standards, or if they have any exclusions that they are allowed by the law to have but may not be in your favour.

You may also want to run a background check on the team that has built the platform you are registering on, to ensure that they are not involved in any sort of privacy piracy and are aware of privacy restrictions.

A reliable platform is one that provides high availability hosting architecture, that offers an average of over ninety-nine percent uptime. How many interruptions have they had? How long is their app available? How do they handle their upgrades and maintenance? If the platform is not available then it means your learners cannot access it; if they are consistently unavailable, your learners would not be motivated to use the platform. The seamlessness of functionality is a priority in choosing the right platform.

How would you rate this feature?
Tick below.

Not Needed	
Nice To Have	
Must Have	
Maybe For Later	
For Much Later	
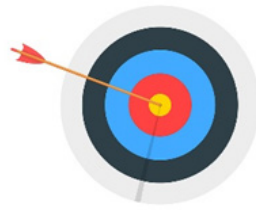
Key Feature

Having content on the platform

Some platforms come fully prepared, and you don't have to worry about uploading your own content, especially when the platform is designed by Learning and Development experts, who understand what your staff need to learn.

Because of their involvement, the right kind of courses are uploaded to the site, and all you have to do is log in and enjoy the content.

This doesn't in any way disturb your administrative roles, or take away your control, the platform rather offers you content from experts over a variety of topics that are essential to the growth of your organisation. You can still add your own content to the platform as well.

If you do not want any pre-populated content then you can make this clear especially when you have your own courses, and would rather train your staff your way, than use the content on the platform.

How would you rate this feature?
Tick below.

Not Needed	
Nice To Have	
Must Have	
Maybe For Later	
For Much Later	

Features Checklist

Please **populate your answers** into the table below to act as a guide.

	Not Needed	Nice To Have	Must Have	Maybe For Later	For Much Later
Platform designed by L&D experts					
User friendly, proactive, seamless learner interface					
Responsive design					
Variety					
Ease of data migration					
SCORM and/or xAPI compliant					
Automated learning processes					
Easy, effective administration and reporting					
Social learning tools					
Branding and customisation					
Space for fun and rewards					
Assessments, tests, reviews, and certification					
Cross cultural interface					
Video conference and webinars					
Scalability					
Secure and reliable					
Pre-populated content					

You can take this one step further if you wish and **weight your answers**. Some features will be more important to you than others.

Overall, it will come down to a compromise between the features that are available, the quality of the staff and support and of course, the cost.

Approaching & Shortlisting Suppliers

Having to choose between the hundreds of platforms out there in the e-learning universe can be very stressful.

You'll want to make sure that the platform you choose has the right features plus there are also a lot more considerations that we recommend you consider.

We're going to look at those factors within this section.

In this section we are not focused on technicalities alone, but other factors that can really help you make the right decision.

We understand that humans design systems, and the way the people in an organisation treat you will also reflect the philosophies of that provider as well and that starts right from the moment that you come across that provider.

What Else Should You Evaluate With A Provider?

Provider website

You want to look at the quality of their website. Is it easy to understand? Do you feel it's easy to navigate? Are there any errors on the site? Does it have a corporate feel to it or more of a supportive, family feel? Did they pay attention to details? What is the speed at which items load on the site? Your first impression is very important.

Handling your initial enquiry

How well did they handle your enquiry? From how easy it was to get in touch to the speed of response, all of this is important. These questions are all about customer service and the value the provider put on your brand and your business. Did they respond to you quickly?

Did they respond to you because you are an enterprise, or did they ignore you because they assumed you didn't have the numbers? Truth is that, not every provider targets small/medium sized businesses, it is best you look for platforms that would offer you their services. This doesn't mean you have to settle; you should look for platforms that would offer you quality services like you are an enterprise. You want to choose a platform that values you, and no matter how much you are investing, or how much traffic you bring, would offer you the same level of quality they would offer an enterprise or a big business.

Salesperson or L&D professional?

Who handled your enquiry? What was their job title? Was it a Business Development Manager? A Sales Executive? Or was it an L&D Manager? How did you feel about the salesperson that handled your enquiry? Too desperate? Were they more like an order taker rather than someone who really understood the L&D industry? You should follow your gut feeling. If you sense that they sounded too salesy, or they sound too desperate, they may be hiding something.

You want to make sure that they really understand the industry and they are not trying to sell something to you that won't meet your needs. Many times, our gut feelings are internal systems forged from experience that are there to protect us from unassuming danger. Follow your gut feeling.

Do they understand the L&D world?

Another way to see if they understand the industry is to see what they offer, versus what you are requesting. If they feed off your list, or they don't demonstrate a certain depth in how they answer or ask questions there is a high chance they don't understand the L&D industry, and just want to take your money. You can refer to our list of features, use that as a compass to build a list of requirements, so that you can ask very informed questions and get solid feedback that will help you make your decision.

While interrogating them, ask yourself if you feel confident in their ability to provide what you need.

If the entire conversation sounds off, you should walk.

Explore the marketplace

This helps you to understand how things happen in the marketplace, and helps you find your best fit. It is not a smart business strategy to always buy from the first person you meet, unless you have gone through their competitors, and you are satisfied with what they are offering.

This would also help to create a competitive process.

That is, rather than only engaging one organisation, involve more than one company and this allows you to make a more informed decision, as you would have gone through the available options to decide what you want and what to look for. So, before sending out that proposal you may want to pick the companies you want to be involved with a lot of consideration—and streamline.

Searching through the market can be time consuming, but here is a hack you can implement as you explore the market. If you don't have large needs, and the project is a small one that would require just one company to solve, you can involve about three to four carefully selected organisations.

If you have larger needs, you may want to include about six to eight companies. This way, you can see what is offered generally in the industry and you know what to look forward to. By doing this you are allowing these organisations to put up their A game and allow you a better chance of getting the best deal. For emphasis, it is important that you streamline this process— the process of choosing, because the more organisations you have to profile, the more time you'll waste.

Ask for a demo (and evaluation)

How else can you ascertain the quality that a platform would give you if you don't ask for a demo?

But asking for a demo alone, doesn't answer the question, you may have to involve stakeholders.

Get them to preview what these suppliers are offering you, so that they can weigh in and offer advice beyond what you may have outlined. Apart from the stakeholders, you may want to involve the end users. They are the direct consumers of the product, so you may want to get their opinion on the matter so that you can make a more informed decision.

When engaging the demo, write out the features and criteria that you'd like to judge the product by (you can refer to our list on the features an e-learning platform ought to have).

Deliverables & Features That A Demo Should Contain

Did the supplier understand our requirements? Did the demo demonstrate this?

- Did the demo just jump straight in with a tour of the system, or did they first ask questions to understand our requirements in more detail?
- Did the demo feel too generalised, or was it tailored to what we want?
- Before the demo was designed, did the supplier listen to our requirements and have conversations around them or did they do what they thought was best?
- During the demonstration, how did the supplier show that they understood the industry and our company's goals and requirements?
- Did the supplier demonstrate good people skills during the demonstration?

Features we required

- Were all the features we requested covered?
- Were there any glitches?
- Any features unavailable and why?
- Would we need to pay special fees for some features?
- Did they add features that we did not ask for, and how important are these features to our goals?

Can the platform and e-learning provider grow with us?

- Did their demo show their short, medium, and long-term plans?
- Did they demonstrate how they want to have us for long term?
- Is their platform scalable? Can we have more numbers as we grow?

Easy to use

- Does a learner/admin have to be a techie expert to use the platform?
- How easy was it to navigate through the platform and find things?
- Was the platform too bulky and clustered?

Budget

- Are they budget friendly?
- Any hidden charges?
- Does their proposal meet our budget?

Quality of support we need

- How warm and empathetic are they?
- How responsive were they to our requests?
- Did it take them time to respond to us?
- How did they treat us, and how did they make their offers? Too hasty? Or they were ready to offer us the best, even with our budget?

Will the platform evolve?

- What is the developmental plan of this platform?
- Would their changes affect us negatively or positively?
- Would our data be affected as they evolve?
- Would the terms of our engagement also change and would this make it difficult for us to work with them?
- Are their objectives in line with ours?

Does the platform come with content?

- Are there various topics contained within the platform?
- Is there a variety of content types on the platform? Animations, presenters, graphics etc
- Can we mix and match the content and create our own programmes?
- Are there are short quizzes to test knowledge?
- Can we add our own content to the platform if applicable?

What resources do you provide to help us embed the learning?

- Does your content come with key takeaways?
- How does your content help our learners to implement the learning?
- Do you provide any resources for the line managers of the learners?

Implementation of the platform

- What are the lead times once we say yes?
- What are the key milestones before full deployment?
- Can you train our people on how to use the platform and content?

Ongoing Support & Customer Service

It's important to **ask questions around the level and quality of on-going support** that you'll receive from the provider.

Does the provider just take your money and run?

Or do you get a real sense of a true relationship and that they would be there for you no matter what?

We cannot emphasise how important this is. What's the point in having a fabulous platform if it's implemented in the wrong way with no learner training and poor support when your learners do have any questions?

It makes all your hard work a waste of time.

You then hear stories that "The platform doesn't work" or "No-one likes it" when in reality your learners just don't know how to properly navigate around the system and can take advantage of just how good it is.

And that's down to the quality of the after-sales support.

Questions To Ask The Provider

Here's some questions that you can ask and some areas to investigate further:

- Do you have a customer experience team? (Ask to meet with one)
- Is your customer service system automated, or do I speak to a person, or do you have both?
- What are your response times and SLAs for support?
- How do we create a support ticket?
- Do you have tutorials and videos explaining how to navigate your platform?
- If I don't like a feature, how do I report it, and how long would it take to adjust it?
- If I want to opt out from a certain feature, how do I go about it?
- Do you offer incentives from time to time?
- Will I have to pay for support?
- How easily can I reach you?
- What training will our learners receive?
- What training will our learner's line manager receive?
- What training and support will our administrators get?
- If we have recommendations for the platform, who do we tell?

Will The Platform Grow & Evolve With You?

A very important question to ask is:

"Will the platform grow with us?"

Answering this question is one of the most important aspects of making the choice of an LMS platform.

Any platform that doesn't evolve will quickly become obsolete, and therefore in choosing a platform, you should consider these changes.

You should ask some questions during the process of deciding, so that you are sure of the direction of their organisation and if it is in sync with your company's goals.

- What happens to my data as the platform evolves?
- What new features are planned to be added in the future?
- Can you show me your development roadmap for the platform and your content?
- Are the costs fixed or will your new features mean we need to pay more?
- If we sign up to receive your e-learning library, will we receive any new content that you create without any extra charges?
- If we need to tweak the system, are you able to do this?

As mentioned, you should ask the provider for their **development roadmap.**

A development roadmap is a strategic plan that outlines the improvements, releases and milestones that are coming down the line.

It provides you with the knowledge and peace of mind that the provider is constantly improving and is forward thinking. It can also inform you of when you might want to take advantage of those new features as well.

For example, you might not need social learning right now and indeed your chosen platform does not currently offer it. But if their roadmap states that in 9 months the system will be able to offer social learning then you could start to make some plans to implement then if the time will be right then.

All of this can feed into your own Learning and Development plans. Informing your learners of what's coming will excite them.

Last Thoughts

We hope that this guide has been helpful.

Choosing the right learning platform is an important choice and it all starts with whether your company is ready for one.

Remember, you don't need to go "all in" with every single feature that you can think of.

When all is said and done, your primary objective with any platform is **learner engagement** and then how that learner applies their new knowledge and skills and **turns it into real, tangible business outcomes.**

Skillshub is an online learning platform ideal for small and medium sized businesses with up to 10,000 learners. Here are some links and ways in which we can help you:

Branded Online Learning Platform

Have your own branded online learning platform with or without our 750 e-learning courses. Learners can create their own programmes by mixing and matching different modules to create and schedule their own personal learning journeys.

Bespoke Online Learning Platform

Create your perfect platform by taking Skillshub and adding any bespoke design and development elements to it.

Skillshub Subscription

Give your learners unlimited access to 750 e-learning courses through our Skillshub subscription service. It's not branded, and you don't have your own platform. Instead, we provide logins to Skillshub so your people can access all our courses.

e-Learning Content Lease

If you have your own platform and are looking for engaging content, then you can lease some or all our e-learning content library.

Bespoke e-Learning Content Development

We have a team of L&D writers and e-learning developers who can create bespoke content from scratch, or we can take your existing online or offline materials and turn them into something wonderful.

Skillshub, 5 Orchard Court, Coventry, CV3 2TQ, United Kingdom

W: **https://www.skillshub.com**
E: **info@skillshub.com** T: 02476 998 101