Is your learning system up to the job?

Mike Goldsmith of Wizard Learning looks at computer based learning management systems.

We are all too aware of the continuing need to invest in staff so that they maintain competence within their current roles and are able to develop further.

None of this is cheap however. The risk of spending a fortune on training and development packages that don't achieve what we want from them is unfortunately, all too common.

Many might immediately blame the training provider for selling sub-standard material. Whether or not this is the case, purchasers may wish to ask themselves if they have given the training provider a robust enough brief for the content of the material and the methodology used in transferring it to the learner.

The aim of this article is to help you address your potential needs when using one particular method - computer based learning management systems (LMS). It should enable you to analyse what is available in the market place and help guide you to invest wisely in your chosen system.

The great plus point with computer based systems, is their potential to be available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Even where face-to-face training or other learning methods are used, computer based systems can play an important part for instance, with the provision of pre-course material and post course testing.

It may be that you are currently assessing whether the arrangements you already have in place are keeping pace with the latest technological developments, or you might be looking to purchase a purpose built system for the first time. Unfortunately, within the financial services industry as with many other sectors, little exists in the way of set standards for the ideal learning management system.

One way to address this issue is to use a relatively simple checklist of the items and features that you know are available on such systems and which you feel could be needed by your organisation. The checklist could of course be used more than once and will help with any future system you want to use.

Price is always going to be an important factor but by using the following checklist, you can at least rate the systems available to you in terms of both their cost and also the features that are included within them.

Checklist

Access

- Can access be quickly set up? These days, there should be little reason why personal registration cannot take place immediately or within 48 hours for block access.
- Can the system be used 24 hours a day, 365 days a year?
- Can the user log in from any PC anywhere in the world?

- System speed. Do pages turn immediately and is there no delay between questions?

Training material

- Are you able to quickly add to the system both in terms of your own reading material and that of the training provider?
- Are you able to quickly jump between sections and chapters?
- Are you able to download material such as PDFs to allow the user to print selected items?
- Are you able to design and show online presentations?
- Does the system allow audio and video presentations to a high enough standard?
- If learning content is supplied by the system provider, what is its quality and are the writers adequately qualified?

Assessments and exam types

- Does the system provide a range of assessment and exam types? For instance, does it offer written answer questions giving the user the ability to replicate the format of this type of exam? Does it offer multiple choice questions assessments that could have several as well as single correct answers?
- Does the system offer the user the ability to self-mark or alert a trainer that a completed paper is ready to be marked?
- Where assessments on the system are centred around given scenarios, is the user able to access the case study easily or have it in full view whilst answering the questions?
- Does the system provide some fun such as multiplayer or interactive features?

Assessment design flexibility.

All of the following variables should be able to be selected within the system:
- Number of questions per assessment
- Number of times that the assessment can be taken
- Marks available for each correct answer
- Pass rate and grading on each assessment. Instant confirmation should be provided at the end of each assessment. There should be an option for results to be emailed to the student, or trainer or system administrator with a full listing of incorrect answers
- There should be the ability to impose a time limit to answering questions or alternatively leave an unlimited time.
- There should be the ability to provide an (optional) information text with each answer.

Records

- All results should be able to be recorded
- A fully automated learning log or CPD certificate should show the results of each completed assessment together with recording the hours of study time
- High score charts should be an option possibly with the ability to decide the numbers of users appearing. For example it could show the top 10 to 15 results
- All users should be advised what position they rank in the database to help them benchmark how they have performed.

Presentation

- The system should look aesthetically pleasing and be easy to navigate around
- It should be designed to match the look and feel of the client's current website
- It should be flexible enough to easily change the entry page wording and include any messages or instructions with the results.

Cost

- You should not have to sacrifice any of the previously mentioned features in return for cost savings as the best systems on the market should already incorporate them
- If you feel that your system is not providing all of these features or you think that its costs are too high, you should shop around for the best deal
- To speed up the process we recommend that a good starting point would be to prepare a short note of the number of potential users, volume of material required and who will supply the learning material.
- We also suggest that you ask the system provider which of the items on our checklist they have available.

Searching for and maintaining adequate computer based learning management systems is not an easy task. However, following a structured approach in devising what your needs are against what a system can provide, can help to successfully plan your future training and development strategy to provide effective learning within budget and on time!

Wizard Learning has helped many students pass financial planning exams since its launch in 1999.

Delivering thousands of assessments every day, Wizard Learning offers ALL the essential items needed in a computer based learning system.

Our success does not make us complacent though!

In fact, the system's flexibility has enabled us to develop entirely new and original products for those working in the financial services industry in addition to the comprehensive menu of training and assessment material we provide in respect of financial services qualifications.

For example, we have successfully launched competence related training material on the FSA's Treating Customers Fairly initiative as well as a monthly CPD package.

There are constantly new items being added to the Wizard Learning System aimed at making your job easier to manage.

Visit **www.wizardlearning.com** or contact Mike on 07817 156829 or email mike@wizardlearning.com for a discussion on how we can help your organisation with its learning needs.