

Online Learning 101: Part I: Authoring and Course Development Tools

By Susan Landay

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[The first part of this three-part series focuses on authoring and course development tools and techniques for integrating e-learning. In, Susan Landay explores games and interactivity solutions for e-learning. Part III looks at tools used for web conferencing, as well as learning-management systems.]

—eLearn Magazine

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If you're anything like me, you have plenty of experience with face-to-face training, but are drowning in the wake of online (or blended) learning tools.

Uncomfortable with this sinking feeling, I set out to educate myself, while mindful of the need for learners to work with new material on their own and at their own pace. I wanted to identify the best ways for face-to-face trainers to add e-Learning to their repertoire, without the assistance of a fancy IT team or investing tens of thousands of dollars.

To this end, I searched for software tools with relatively low-costs, minimal learning curves, and a focus on lively and interactive tools consistent with best practices in brain-based learning techniques.

To make sense of the myriad of eLearning solutions available in the marketplace, I broke them down into four categories that help explain the e-Learning process:

- **Authoring** (course development and creating your content)
- **Games** and add-on tools (games and interactions to reinforce and/or teach)
- **Conferencing** (connectivity tools used for webinars and synchronous learning)
- **LMSs** (learning management systems to administer and track training).

To help you remember these four components of e-Learning, perhaps this little mnemonic will help:

Any Goofball Can Learn!

In this three-part series, I offer a description and overview of each category as well as an explanation of: 1) the role they play in enabling online experiences; 2) criteria you might use to choose among the vendors; and 3) a few reputable, cost effective solutions for each.

A couple of caveats: My comments, descriptions and prices are drawn from vendor websites, personal research, conversations at conferences, and LinkedIn discussions. Second, because LMSs are quite costly and involve bigger learning curves, I have deemed them to be outside of my scope and offer just a quick overview at the end of Part III.

Authoring/Course Development Tools

The course development/authoring tools are software programs that enable you to create course content. The most readily available of these is PowerPoint. However, many trainers find PowerPoint to have some limitations. For instance, PowerPoint's interface is somewhat cumbersome when creating high-end animations that integrate text, images, audio and video. While PowerPoint is terrific for linear presentations, its interface is more difficult when creating "branching" presentations, whereby a user digs down into any number of buttons or scenarios. Although it contains a robust collection of "slide templates," it does not come loaded with a library of "interactive game templates."

If you are looking to move beyond PowerPoint for course development, following is a list of the criteria you might use to decide among the various options:

- PowerPoint interface:
 - Does the software work within PowerPoint by adding new toolbar items?
 - Does the software replace the need for PowerPoint?
 - Does the software create interactions that can be imported into PowerPoint, in case you'd like to use it for live training also?
- What file formats can be imported/exported? This is important if you want to load your content into a LMS (to be defined later) or some other program.
- Does the software reside on your desktop or online? This is an issue if you prefer to work offline.
- Are courses stored on desktop or online?
- How quickly can you learn the new program?
- How quickly can you create animations of images, text, etc.?
- What types of games and interactions come bundled with the software?

Recommended Vendors

In listing vendors for course authoring tools, my goal was to find solutions that were reputable, cost effective, easy-to-learn, and consistent with brain-based learning techniques. As such, this is not to be taken as an exhaustive list. The prices listed represent standard pricing at the time of writing; prices may be subject to change or discounts.

[ProForm](#) Rapid eLearning Studio by Rapid Intake

This e-Learning Best of 2008 winner has intuitive tools that make it easy to create drag and drop activities, learning games, branching simulations, and RapidCam screen recording. You can modify more than 21 existing templates, turn PowerPoint presentations into e-Learning courses, include narrative audio in screen recordings, edit previously recorded movies, and apply hundreds of pre-built animations to images and text. Included is a Swish Rapid Animation Tool that lets you import and position images and text, synchronize audio, animate anything, then export it as a Flash movie.

Claims to fame:

- Compared to Adobe Captivate, Rapid Intake claims ProForm is cheaper, easier and has more features.
- For Audio editing, use Audacity (free online).

Pricing:

- The most popular Standard Premium Edition (described above) is \$999.
- The basic Standard Edition is \$499.

[Articulate Studio '09](#) by Articulate

Articulate Studio '09 Pro received the "Best Product of 2009" by Training Media Review. All tools in the Articulate Rapid E-Learning Studio '09 work together seamlessly—and all within PowerPoint. "Presenter" makes it easy for anyone to add interactivity and narration to PowerPoint slides. "Quizmaker" enables you to create professional, custom Flash quizzes and surveys. You can insert selected quiz slides into your course. "Engage" gives users the ability to produce dazzling interactive content. The "Video Encoder" component allows users to import any video and convert it to Flash.

Claims to fame:

- Very easy to use and learn.
- Ability to add learning games like Q&A, Sequence, Word Quiz, Wheel of Fortune.

Pricing:

- The Professional Suite is \$1,398;
- Standard Suite (without "Engage") is \$999.
- Individual software components are also sold separately.

[iSpring Presenter](#) by iSpring Solutions

This software program enhances PowerPoint's basic functionality, allowing users to fine tune and optimize the appearance and playback of presentations, distribute courses in the popular Flash format, create quizzes with various types of questions, record and sync presenter video, add Flash and YouTube videos, import or record new audio narrations, add presenter information and company logos, create

unique navigation, design with customizable player skins, and much more. iSpring looks terrific, is easy-to-use and considerably less expensive than comparable products. iSpring is newer to the U.S. e-learning marketplace (the product was introduced in Russia). Although it has not yet been recognized with an e-learning "best of" award, its list of featured customers is quite impressive.

Claims to fame:

- An incredible package at an unbeatable price.
- Also includes easy LMS integration and ink annotation tools

Pricing:

- The Pro version is \$249 and includes a PowerPoint to Flash solution: 10 player templates, audio narration and sync, multiple presenters, content compression, and presentation size control.
- The Presentation version is \$499 and includes all of the above, plus video narrations and sync, presenter video, quiz builder, etc.

Captivate and Presenter (by Adobe)

Adobe has a whole suite of eLearning products, which together are called the Adobe eLearning Suite, which contains Captivate 4, Flash CS4 Professional, Dreamweaver CS4, Photoshop CS4, Acrobat Pro Extended, Presenter 7, Soundbooth CS4, Adobe Device Central CS4, and an Adobe Bridge CS4. Among those, the components frequently used for course authoring are Captivate and Presenter.

Captivate 4 lets you create simulations, software demos, interactive scenario-based training, and quizzes; convert content to Flash; import PowerPoint slides; and add in click boxes, hyperlinks, etc. Presenter 7 lets you easily create Flash presentations and self-paced courses complete with narration and interactivity; import and edit video in any format and export as .SWF files; record and edit high-quality audio; help ensure consistency with branding and customization; deliver advanced quizzes and surveys with question pooling and randomization; publish content as a PDF file, preserving all of your animations; create AICC- and SCORM-compliant content; and integrate with Adobe Acrobat® Connect™ Pro software to deploy, manage, deliver, and track content.

Claims to fame:

- The Adobe name. (Note: this is both a benefit and a drawback, as Adobe is somewhat notorious for poor customer service and sales support.)
- Many people swear by Adobe products.

Pricing:

- The Adobe eLearning Suite is \$1,799.
- Captivate 4 is \$799 and
- Presenter 7 is \$500.

Conclusion

While there are an increasing number of tools available for course authoring, the programs mentioned here are a good smattering of reputable low-cost, easy to learn, systems.

In the next part of this three-part series, we will review the tools available to build games and interactivity into your online learning.

Online Learning 101: Part II: Games and Interactivity

By Susan Landay

[This article originally appeared on June 11, 2010, on eLearnMag.org.](#)

[In Part I of this three-part series, Susan Landay identified the best ways for face-to-face trainers to add a component of e-learning to their repertoire. She reviewed software tools that are affordable, have minimal learning curves and focus on lively and interactive tools—specifically addressing authoring and course development.

Here in Part II, she explores the range of games and "interactivities" that can easily be created and posted for online learning reinforcement; selection criteria for the various offerings; plus some features and benefits of a few reputable, cost effective solutions. Part III looks at tools for web conferencing, as well as learning-management systems.]

—eLearn Magazine

Games and interactivity e-Learning tools are not for creating entire courses, but rather they are useful for quickly and easily loading games and other "interactivities" into existing courses, presentations, a website, or webinar. If you prefer to stick with PowerPoint as your primary course development tool, these add-ons might help you include new dimensions of interactivity and game-play to your existing materials.

In general these tools let you create and edit games, which can be saved into a file format that is easy to integrate into a presentation, email to learners, post or link to online, and embed as links in authoring tools and Learning Management Systems (LMSs).

Definitions

Just to be clear, let's clarify a few words.

Interactivity: any exercise in which the learner must interact with your content and do something with it—play a game, answer a question, sequence tasks, match answers, etc.

Flash: refers to both Adobe Flash, the software program used to add animation, video, and interactivity to Web pages; and to the type of files created with Adobe Flash software. Flash files saved as .SWF (shockwave Flash or "swiffs") can be read and used with a Flash player, for those who don't own the Adobe software.

Criteria for Choosing Solutions

The evaluation criteria for choosing a software package are fairly straightforward:

- How many different types of interactions are included in the package?
- What is the quality of the graphics?
- Do you prefer to create the games online or off?
- Will games be used for self-paced learning or in a guided webinar?
- Do you need to track results and integrate with a LMS?
- How costly is it?

Recommended Vendors

Here, I've divided product solutions into three sets:

1. Interactivities you can post online or link to in a presentation.

Raptivity by Harbinger

Raptivity software has won a ton of awards from the eLearning Guild, Training Media Review, *ELearning!* magazine and others. Raptivity may have the most robust library of "pre-built" interactions that allow for customized content to add pizzazz into your e-Learning courses. "Interactivities" include learning games, simulations, videos, puzzles, animations, interactive diagrams, page-flipping books, interactive questions, surveys, brainteasers, flow diagrams, whiteboard simulations, and tons more. The various bundle options make it slightly difficult to navigate the Raptivity site. So here's a simplified overview: To get started you need to purchase either Raptivity Essential (with 35 interactions) or Raptivity Zest (with 12 interactions). Then, you can add on "booster" or "turbo" packs. The packs most useful in keeping with brain-based learning techniques are the Booster Pack 1, Games, Mindplay, and Wordplay.

Claims to fame:

- Great graphics and ready-to-customize, pre-built templates.
- Easy to track completion status, scores and responses for each interactivity.
- Embeds interactions into hundreds of authoring tools, LCMS, LMS, CMS and live collaboration systems.

Pricing:

- Zest is \$395 and Essential is \$550.
- Most turbo packs are \$295 each.
- The Learning Games combo pack includes Essential, plus Booster Pack 1, Games TurboPack, Mindplay TurboPack, and Wordplay TurboPack; it is available for \$1249 (reduced from \$2130).

Interactivity Creator by Sealund

Interactivity Creator templates include 15 different question games: Matching; Rollover; Sequencing; Fill-in-the-blank; Hangman; Dictionary/Glossary; Question Spin; Image Reveal; Maze; Trivia Game; Block3; Answer, Pass, Score (a football game); Connect3; Fun Feud; and PaddlePass (an air hockey game). The interface is very simple and lets you save games as standard Flash files, before posting them to your website or inserting the game into a presentation. The games look great, are easy-to-create, and the price is right.

Claims to fame:

- Super low-cost.
- Quickly creates custom interactivities.
- An option to integrate with a LMS, for results tracking.

Pricing:

- The price for a single user license is \$299.

Quizpoint by Learningware

You can efficiently create and post online quizzes and games, using pre-formatted templates that let you control the number of multiple-choice answers (between two and six), font size, style, and alignment. You can easily import pictures and sounds into questions, as well as during the quiz introduction and on the info screens; including the right/wrong answer sound is also an option. The games can be hosted on Learningware's server or your own. And because the player is Flash-based, students can access your games and quizzes from any Web browser—no additional software is required. Quizpoint includes two game formats. Participants can get instant answer feedback and the facilitator can track all results.

Claims to fame:

- The invitation wizard lets you quickly distribute the quizzes.
- Easily track how each participant answered each question and how a team did collectively.
- Host quizzes on LearningWare's secure server or your own.
- QuizPoint will keep track of the quizzes that are online and will remind you to update the online quiz after you've made changes on your computer.

Pricing:

- \$995

Thinking Worlds by Caspian Learning

This template-driven software program, launched in April of 2009, allows you to quickly create 3-D games set in a range of pre-designed locations (office, shop, etc.). You can insert people, objects, and questions; and export games to the Web or use them as stand-alone interactivities.

Claims to fame:

- The only 3-D quick development tool I've found!
- SCORM and LMS compliant.

Pricing:

- \$1,499 annual license

QuickLessons by Quick Lessons LLC

This is a 100 percent online and hosted platform. Users can develop online courses at anytime, anywhere. Using the intuitive interface it only takes a few hours to get started. QuickLessons has a library of templates for exercises and quizzes, and 16-plus game templates (Hangman, Cryptogram, Did you Know (like Jeopardy), Time watcher, Clues, Pairs, Millionaire, Fortune Wheel, etc.). It allows for the management of media and educational content; incorporates pre-developed characters with set-up actions and customization options; and lets you export fully Flash-based eLearning courses that can be posted offline, online, and in LMS compliant formats.

Claims to fame:

- Multiple authors can collaborate.
- No software installation is needed and all your games are stored on the Quick Lessons server.

Pricing:

- Individual: \$99 per month per user
- Corporate: \$149 per month per user (allows for collaboration)

BRAVO! Web by C3 SoftWorks

Create beautiful, engaging, training games—Quiz Show (like *Jeopardy*), Showdown, Billionaire, and Spin Off. BRAVO! Web Lite promises easy-to-use game board templates that walk you through the simple steps of creating a game. You type in a category, insert questions, and in seconds, you have a game. You can also post and host games. Bravo! Web lets you develop and deploy SCORM-compliant games with incredible ease and integrate games with your LMS system. The interface is among the most flexible and comprehensive of the many training game builders. Each game lets you identify the percent of correct responses required for passing, send score data as points or percentage, e-mail results, and create printable certificates.

Claims to fame:

- Most customizable option (colors, logos, sounds, etc.).
- Not just an online tool—you can use games both in the classroom and online.
- Post online, host on C3 SoftWorks site, or load onto your own website or LMS.

Pricing:

- Bravo Web Lite is \$995.
- Bravo Web (LMS integration) is \$1,500.

[E Learning Flash Game Templates](#) by ELearning Brothers

If you have Adobe Flash but are not an expert in programming, these Flash-based e-Learning game templates are super easy to customize and update. The eight templates included in the "Big Bundle" include: Millionaire, Shootout, Boardgame, Pyramid, Bootcamp, Spy Challenge, and Golf Challenge, and Gameshow challenge. They are made to work within most rapid e-Learning software systems (Articulate Presenter, Adobe Captivate, Rapid Intake, Adobe Presenter, Adobe Flash, PowerPoint and more).

Pricing: \$700

2. Interactivities you can conduct in a webinar.

[AllPlay Web](#) by Learningware

The software lets you create games that can be used to make a live webinar more interactive and engaging. After you create game-show type questions, you invite participants to your webinar with GoToMeeting or Webex. You'll host the game on your computer while attendees play on their own—mworking alone or in teams. One of the nice features here is that you can customize the look of the game with your own logo, etc.

Pricing: \$1,495

[PING](#) by C3 SoftWorks

This solution combines BRAVO's four TV-style game shows (described above) with some "virtual" response pads, so all of your webinar attendees can stay engaged by "PINGing" in their answers. The game automatically collects the results so you can track results during and after the event. You can use a connectivity/Web conferencing tool, like GoToMeeting or Webex, to launch these games.

Pricing: \$1500

3. Additional stand-alone tools, worth mentioning, that enhance interactivity.

[Camtasia Studio](#) by TechSmith

The screen recorder and editor tool allows you to record what you see on your computer screen. You can include audio/video if you have a mic and/or webcam; easily edit, produce and share "screen shot movies"; and include "picture in picture" treatments, callout text boxes, or basic shapes like arrows.

Pricing:

- PC version: \$299
- Mac version: \$150

[Snagit](#) by TechSmith

A neat little program that lets you capture screen images from photos, scrolling windows or videos; and add annotations, arrows, and more.

Pricing: \$49.95

[Flypaper](#) by Flypaper Studio, Inc.

With this unique software application you can quickly create interactive content and presentation—complete with Flash animations—interactive pages and menus, special effects, transitions, interactive forms for collecting viewer data, branched stories with navigation, and much more. Programming expertise is not needed, and it is much easier than PowerPoint to coordinate timing and animation on slides. Flypaper also includes hundreds of templates.

Pricing:

- \$795 for the desktop version.
- \$1,495 for the professional version.

[Instant Video Presenter](#) by ej4, LLC

You can create and edit videos with a green screen background, which makes overlaying the new content with any other background a simple process.

Pricing: \$149.99

Online Learning 101: Part III: Tools for Web Conferencing and Learning- Management Systems

By Susan Landay

[This article originally appeared on June 17, 2010, on eLearnMag.org.](#)

In this exclusive three-part series, Susan Landay of Trainers Warehouse has been identifying the best ways for face-to-face trainers to add a component of e-learning to their repertoire, without the assistance of a fancy IT team or tens of thousands of dollars of investment.

In Part I, she focused on tools for authoring and course development. In Part II, she looked at software for games and interactive learning. Here in Part III, she finishes with learning-management systems and conferencing applications to conduct live webinars.

—eLearn Magazine

My goal in this three-part series of articles has been to recommend the best software tools that are affordable, have minimal learning curves, and focus on lively and interactive tools, consistent with best practices in brain-based learning techniques.

I have divided the myriad e-learning solutions that are on the market into four categories:

- authoring & course development
- games
- conferencing tools
- learning-management systems (LMS).

(You can remember this categorization using the mnemonic device, "any goofball can learn.") In this third and final article, I will cover conferencing tools and LMSs.

Live Connectivity or Web Conferencing Tools

Connectivity tools, also known as web conferencing tools, describe the ways you would bring remote learners together for a specifically synchronous experience. If learners are attending a training asynchronously, that is, at different times, they might "meet" at an online URL, in which case a live connectivity tool is not required.

However, if you need to conduct a webinar or bring learners together in real time (synchronously), your system must enable people to communicate orally at the same time that they are all viewing a common computer screen.

Criteria for Evaluation

There are quite a few vendors offering this capability right now, such as WebEX, GoToMeeting, and ConnectPro. When deciding among the various vendors, consider these questions:

- How much chat/interaction is possible?
- How many people can it accommodate?
- Does the system have a muting ability?
- Do participants view your screen or a server screen?
- Do you need to be on the phone and online for the meeting to continue?
- Do you want participants to continue to interact with materials and each other when meeting is over?
- Will a meeting room be required?

Recommended Vendors

[WebEx](#) by Cisco

This is a service that is billed monthly. It combines real-time desktop sharing with phone conferencing so everyone sees the same thing while you talk. It is among the most popular web conferencing tools out there. Cisco offers different packages with different features.

Choose among two packages, The Meeting Center product offers real-time presentation and application sharing, ability to pass control to other trainers or to learners, cross-platform support (Windows, Mac, Linux, Solaris), mixed-mode audio-standard phone plus VoIP-in the same session, and ability to record sessions for on-demand playback.

The Training Center product includes all of the above plus, break-out session and hands-on lab functionality, integrated testing, learner registration, tracking and reporting, LMS integration, and e-commerce function to support credit card, debit card, and PayPal transactions for training.

Claims to fame:

- Conduct conversations and discussions in breakout rooms.
- Option for simulcasting the audio over VoIP and telephone at the same time. (VoIP stands for voice over internet protocol. It's a way of using your computer to make free phone calls. Skype is the most popular VoIP provider.)
- Audio recording enabled.

Pricing:

- Meeting Center: Base price for up to 25 participants – \$49.00/month (can be expanded up to 500 participants at additional cost)

- Training Center: Base price for up to 30 attendees and 2 facilitators – \$250/month (can be expanded up to 1000 participants at additional cost).

Go To Meeting by Citrix

This is a conferencing service that is billed monthly. It offers great flexibility and many interactive features.

Go To Meeting is one of the more popular web meeting tools out there. The package offers a great deal of flexibility and a lot of useful interactive features, as well as tools for the instructor to gauge if the participants are "paying attention."

Features include: chat, specific application sharing, recording, phone and computer audio, share either whole screen or select applications, plus pen, highlighter, and spotlight tools. Users say it's ideal for 15 (personal version) or 25 (corporate version) people, and is among the easiest and least expensive.

Citrix also offers Go To Webinar, which is ideal for groups of around 1,000 attendees. It allows host polling, but is focused more on participant listening than on participating and chatting. You can choose to "mute all" or selectively "unmute."

Go To Training, recently launched, lets you send content to attendees prior to training, post downloadable documents that can be viewed and referenced during sessions, and welcome up to 200 attendees.

Claims to fame:

- Instant meetings with a single click
- Invite others on the fly and/or instantly change presenters
- Transfer keyboard and mouse control
- Integrated scheduling with Microsoft Outlook

Pricing:

- Free 30-day trial
- GoToMeeting: starts at \$49 per month
- GoToWebinar: starts at \$99 per month
- GoToTraining: starts at \$149 per month

Acrobat Connect Pro by Adobe

This conferencing service can be purchased either through "specialist resellers" or online. Annual plans, monthly plans and pay-per-use plans available.

Many people swear by Adobe's Connect Pro web conferencing service, saying it's easy to use and rich in features. Connect Pro lets users create unlimited meeting rooms, meet with up to 80,000 participants, share screens, teleconference, chat, use computer mic and speakers, manage live e-learning sessions, upload Flash, MP3 and simulation files, record and store classroom sessions and content, poll participants, and more. With this tool, "meeting rooms" are created on Adobe servers.

ConnectNow is a simpler subscription service intended for 3 to 20 participants, collaborating online. It allows for screen sharing, chat, notes, and whiteboard, but not teleconferencing. It does allow online word processing and creation of PDF documents, limited online storage, and unlimited document downloads.

Claims to fame:

- Great for multi-media presentations
- Instant access; all users need is Adobe Flash player which most already have

Pricing:

- Free 30-day trial
- Connect Pro: about \$55 per month (\$0.32 per minute per user)
- Acrobat.com's ConnectNow Premium Basic (up to 5 attendees): \$14.99 per month
- Acrobat.com's ConnectNow Premium Plus (up to 20 attendees): \$39 per month

Office Live Meeting by Microsoft

This is an online conferencing system for which you pay a per user, per month fee, with a minimum of five users required. Service is billed monthly with no one-time fees.

Microsoft Office Live Meeting 2007 is an online meeting space that your organization subscribes to or hosts internally. It works when you install Microsoft Office Live Meeting on your computer. Meeting attendees can deliver a presentation, brainstorm ideas, edit files, and collaborate on whiteboards. Features include live and recorded video, chat, slide and application sharing, VoIP, and public switched telephone network (PSTN) audio, and audience feedback tools.

The Standard User license is for up to 250 participants. The Professional user lets you conduct sessions with up to 1,250 participants and store unlimited shared meeting recordings for 360 days.

Claims to fame:

- Interactive and engaging for groups of all sizes
- Integrates with MS Office and existing systems
- Easy to use and familiar for organizers and meeting participants

Pricing:

- Free 30-day trial
- Professional User: \$15.42 per user per month (five user minimum)
- Standard User: \$4.58 per user per month (five user minimum)

DimDim

A free service for up to 20 attendees, DimDim lets anyone host and attend live meetings, demos and webinars using just a web browser.

The free version of DimDim lets you share documents, web pages, whiteboards, audio, video—even record your events—with no software to install. You can use a short, permanent vanity URL and co-browse web pages.

An upgrade to DimDim Pro is recommended for up to 50 participants and comes with additional collaboration tools, including: secure meetings, customized logo and brand, free API sessions (you can start session from within Moodle, Facebook, or your web site), video conferencing and basic meeting reports.

Dim Dim Webinar is suited for up to 1,000 attendees. It has all the above features, plus event registration widgets, advanced event reports and analytics. With DimDim, some feel that you get what you pay for, others swear by it.

Claims to fame:

- Open source, free service
- Customize with your logo/brand with no upcharge
- Create "mash ups" that let you bring web services like Flickr, PollDaddy, and YouTube right into your meeting

Pricing:

- Free 30-day trial
- DimDim Pro: \$25.00 per month
- DimDim Webinar: \$75.00 per month

Learning Management Systems (LMSs)

The final component in the e-learning universe is referred to as a learning management system, or LMS. Most simply, an LMS is a software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, and reporting of training programs, classroom and online events, e-learning programs, and training content.

[Wikipedia's definition](#) is concise:

“LMSs range from systems for managing training and educational records, to software for distributing courses over the Internet with features for online collaboration. Corporate training uses LMSs to automate record-keeping and employee registration. Student self-service (e.g., self-registration on instructor-led training), training workflow (e.g., user notification, manager approval, wait-list management), the provision of on-line learning (e.g., [Computer-Based Training](#), read & understand), on-line assessment, management of continuous professional education (CPE), [collaborative learning](#) (e.g., application sharing, discussion threads), and training resource management (e.g., instructors, facilities, equipment), are dimensions to Learning Management Systems.”

Criteria for Choosing an LMS

Many large companies have their own LMS system and many small training providers don't need one at all. I should say here that because an LMS is not "needed" in order to begin offering e-learning and because they are generally quite costly, they are somewhat outside the scope of my goals, as stated at the outset of this article. However, in the interest of understanding the full scope e-learning, I'll share these few brief notes.

If you're looking to differentiate among the many LMS providers, you'll probably want to consider price, service, ease of use, number of users and/or learners it accommodates, whether you host on your own server or the provider's, inclusion of course authoring software, inclusion of conferencing software, ability to work with other software you have, and general sophistication of the system.

Vendor Options

As I said, many LMS systems are quite costly. Of the few I list here, some look like a pretty good value for trainers who can't afford a large, robust system; others are providers whose names came up most frequently over the course of my research. Because this was outside of my scope, the notes are a bit more scant.

[Moodle](#)

Moodle is a free and open source LMS. Some say Moodle is quite cumbersome—but it's free! Some LMS vendors work off the Moodle platform and enhance it, giving users a low-cost solution but with better service, such as the two listed below:

***Pricing:* Free**

- *Vendor-enhanced option:* [EasyCampus by Educadium](#): \$29 per month

Based on Moodle, EasyCampus includes course templates and wizards; enrollment and reporting tools; social networking tools; payment services; etc. The Professional version features unlimited courses, 500 user accounts, and 2 GB storage.

- *Vendor-enhanced option:* [Remote-Learner](#)
Remote Learner advances the capabilities of Moodle and offers support. \$795 per year for the entry-level package, called Sandbox.

[Odijoo](#)

Odijoo lets you develop and post online courses for free, and takes as its fee 10 percent of your revenue income.

Odijoo's service includes a tool to create courses online or import Articulate courses, which you can conduct as facilitated or self-paced courses.

Pricing: 10 percent of the revenue you take in from charging for courses (paid monthly)

[Atlantic Link](#)

Atlantic Link offers the whole package: an LMS plus rapid e-learning software. Based in the U.K., Atlantic Link has been in the U.S. since 2007. Its platform enables concurrent developing (two users can give feedback at once). It also lets you record and edit audio, and it works with Captivate and Camtasia. A host of fun interactive activities are built into the software.

Pricing:

- \$2,700 + \$6,000 + 18 percent update fee for the Perpetual package
- \$3,300 per year for the hosted LMS version

[Course-Mill](#) by Trivantis

Course-Mill is an affordable, lower end LMS for unlimited users.

Pricing:

- \$14,995 (software)
- \$7,500 setup + monthly fee for the hosted solution.

Others LMSs

Many more great LMS providers are available and recommended. Their prices are not quoted online (or here) because packages vary depending on the number of trainers, students, frequency of learning

events, etc. Their pricing also varies depending on organization type (e.g., for-profit business, education, government, etc.). You should expect to pay a set up fee as well as a per student cost. Some of the vendors whose names come up frequently are Blackboard, Learn.com, Saba, WebCT, and NetSpeedLearning.

Closing Thoughts

A great deal is involved in eLearning, and there are a plethora of solution and service providers, but once you understand the four categories—authoring, games, conferencing and LMSs—and remember the mnemonic device ("any goofball can learn"), it will get a lot easier!

Is it really necessary? Yes!

Research and intuition tell us that if we give learners time to work with material on their own and at their own pace, and if learners have fun during the learning process, and if learners have frequent repetition and reinforcement of that new material, their retention rate increases.

Today, with the proliferation of these cost-effective tools for eLearning, trainers doing traditional face-to-face training can, with just a bit of effort, add online learning to their repertoire to enhance classroom experiences.

About the Author

Susan Landay is president of [Trainers Warehouse](#), a women-owned business that offers hundreds of effective, innovative and fun products for trainers and educators across all industries. Prior to joining

Trainers Warehouse in 1997, she was a consultant and trainer in the field of negotiation and conflict resolution. She is a graduate of Yale University and The Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University. Her early work experience included being a professional clown for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.