How to Choose an Online Learning Solution

The 14 Most Important
Questions That
You Need to Ask

Linked in LEARNING
WITH Lynda.com CONTENT

You Need the Right Learning Solution to Close Critical Skills Gaps

"How can I identify and close critical skills gaps?" This is one of the most pressing questions on the minds of nearly every C-level executive these days. And, it's no surprise. With the tight labor market and the rapid pace of technological change, organizations are under tremendous pressure to acquire the necessary skills to stay competitive.

According to PWC's 2019 Global CEO Survey, the CEO's who were extremely concerned about the availability of key skills stated that not having them could have two big business impacts: the inability to innovate effectively and an expected rise in people costs. As a talent developer, you'll be happy to know that they believe retraining and upskilling was the most important way to close skills gaps at 46%.

Traditional Learning Management Systems (LMSs), or what Josh Bersin, global industry analyst, calls the "learning and training ERP system," are not evolving fast enough to help solve the skills gap problem. As a result, hundreds of new learning technologies have emerged which makes your job of selecting a new learning platform more challenging today than ever before.

This Guide Will Help You Select the Right Online Learning Solution for Today and Tomorrow

When choosing an online learning solution, there are so many factors to consider: content quality, convenience, ease-of-use, relevance, recency, applicability, and the list goes on. Not only do you need to think about what your organization needs today, but you also need to anticipate about what it will need in the coming years. After all, enterprise software decisions are typically a multi-year investment. That's why getting it right is so important.

"It's time for learning professionals to think about LinkedIn differently. Yes, the company is the largest professional network. Yes, it's a fantastic platform to find jobs and people. But now it's a serious learning solution, and one with some pretty interesting competitive advantages." [1]

Josh Bersin,
Global Industry Analyst

The **14** Questions You Need to Ask

Whether you have just begun the evaluation process, or you are getting ready to make a final selection, this guide will equip you with **14 of the most important questions** that you should ask each technology provider on your short-list to help you make the right decision for your organization.

Learning Content Considerations

1 Is the learning content relevant and up-to-date?

This is one of the most important factors that can help you decide which learning solution to purchase. Here's the rub. Every learning solution provider says that their content is relevant and up-to-date, but is it really? It's worth double-clicking and finding out exactly what up-to-date means.

Action Item: Ask each learning solution sales representative the following questions and make sure that their answers will meet the learning needs of your business for years to come.

- How many courses are added per week?
- How relevant is their content to your industry right now?
- How do they keep up with the rapid, ever-changing demand for hard and soft skills?
- How do they choose where to invest in content creation?
- How do they decide which content to retire and how often?
- Have their learning paths been endorsed by professional organizations?

With over 14,500 courses taught by real-world experts—and more than 60 new courses added every week—the LinkedIn Learning library is always up-to-date with the most in-demand business, technology, and creative content.

Before we even select an instructor or produce a course, we start by analyzing LinkedIn data from 630M+ members and 20M+ job descriptions o guide our decision-making about what skills are most in-demand. A team of content managers then look at industry trends and what our customers have requested to create a content roadmap for each library.

Interestingly, Microsoft Office applications are consistently the most watched courses on LinkedIn Learning. Because LinkedIn is now owned by Microsoft, we deliver refreshed courses on Excel, PowerPoint, and the rest of the suite on the day a new version of Office launches.

Also, many of our learning paths are officially endorsed by highly respected professional organizations and companies including the American Marketing Association, Google, and CompTIA.

Subscribe to the LinkedIn Learning blog to find out what courses we release every week.

"The change in usage and freshness of the content has been night and day. The relevancy of the material has been striking. It was just so on point and applicable to employees across the organization."

Jodi Atkinson,
Global Learning
Director, Deltek

② How broad and deep is the content?

You are looking for an online learning solution that everyone in your organization can use—from the employees in your corporate offices to your front-line workers around the world. So, it's important that you understand what's included in each learning library that you're considering to ensure that it will meet the needs of all learners.

Action Item: Here are a few dimensions to consider:

• Is there a wide spectrum of hard and soft skills content?

• Does it address the most in-demand skills?

• How many courses are available in the languages you require?

LinkedIn Learning has over 14,500 courses across three libraries: business (4.3K courses), technology (4.3K courses), and creative that includes architecture, engineering, and construction (5.4k courses many of which were part of the Lynda.com library). Courses are available in 7 languages: English, French, German, Japanese, Spanish, Manderin, and Portuguese. On average, 60 new professionally produced courses are added every week to ensure that learning content is always up-to-date, relevant, and applicable.

"For the sheer number of courses and subjects offered, and the fact they're constantly updated, it's very good value for the money."

*Lance Whitworth,
Organisational Development and
Learning Consultant,
Special Broadcasting Service*

③ How credible and expert are the instructors?

Think back to your school days. You hopefully had some great teachers whose wise words still resonate and you probably had some who made class feel like a big waste of time. The same is true for online learning. Even if the course content is excellent, if it's not delivered in an engaging, credible way, then the skills that both learners and companies want to build won't happen.

Action Item: Sample a broad spectrum of courses and then ask each learning solution provider the following questions:

• How are instructors vetted?

• Are your instructors actors? If so, then who creates the course content?

• Are they professors? If so, then do they have real-world experience outside of academia?

• Are they real-world experts and what are their credentials to teach a course?

• Do they represent a diverse set of perspectives and backgrounds?

At LinkedIn Learning, we recruit real-world experts with real-world expertise, who are also outstanding instructors with a knack for connecting with learners. We don't use actors, and in most courses our instructors speak directly to learners, emulating 1:1 instruction.

Our Content Managers scour best-selling books, schools, industry websites and conferences, industry associations, community forums, and social media to find the best-of-the-best.

We ultimately select our instructors based on their credibility in the industry, their passion for the topic, and how well they can articulate complex topics in a way that's easily understood. They also have to communicate in a compelling way on camera. As a company committed to diversity and inclusion, we also make sure that our instructor community is representative of the LinkedIn community as a whole.
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"The quality of the instructors is great. And, there are so many of them, that it's easy to find one that resonates with you. Find someone who's speaking to you and listen to what they have to say."

*Quay Eady, Director,
Table Games Analytics,
MGM Resorts International*

4 Is the content professionally produced?

Your learners are sophisticated media consumers. Even if learning content is extremely compelling, a learner will disengage if it's hard to see, hear, or if it is filmed with a low-grade computer camera. You might expect low-quality content on YouTube, but not on an online learning solution. Your learners may also get distracted by stilted, inauthentic scenarios that are performed by actors.

Action Item: Take the time to really dig into the content library of each learning solution and ask yourself:

• Does the content look professionally produced?

• How crisp is the audio quality on both computers and mobile devices?

• Are there helpful diagrams and graphics to enhance learning?

• Are screen capture demonstrations easy-to-follow?

We approach producing a course with the same care and attention as a Hollywood movie. In fact, much of our staff comes from the entertainment industry. If you walk through LinkedIn Learning's production studios in Carpinteria, California or Graz, Germany, then you'll notice that they look exactly like a studio backlot—complete with sound stages, audio bays, and the most sophisticated editing software available today. We have honed the process over the last 20 years as Lynda.com and now, as LinkedIn Learning, we're looking for even more ways to make learning content more engaging and dynamic.

"The content is professionally produced and not user-generated, so our learners experience this really professional learning opportunity and it's consistent across the entire global organization."

*Jodie Schaekel,
Global Program Manager for
Learning and Development,
BCD Travel*

5 Can you add content from other sources?

Did you know that [72% of employees](#) say they would be motivated to engage with relevant online learning content featuring company leadership or management? Regardless of how strong a learning library is, it's important to create custom learning paths from the best learning content—regardless of where it comes from.

Whether you want to add a video of your CEO welcoming a new hire or would like your sales leaders to share best practices with their team, adding videos and documents to learning paths should be as easy as a few clicks.

Action Item: Make sure that the learning solution you choose supports video (mp4, m4v, and wmv) and document (PDF, PPT, and DOC) upload with custom tagging so that content is easy for learners to find on both desktops and mobile devices.

LinkedIn Learning offers all of these features and more. With LinkedIn Learning, you can blend your own proprietary content (which by nature is hyper-relevant to their learners) with our industry-leading content. You can also mix and match content in Learning Paths and Collections to create a completely customized learning experience.

Interested in learning more about how to integrate customized content into your learning programs? Then download the "[5 Ways to Increase Learner Engagement with Custom Content](#)" eBook. It also includes a list of LinkedIn Learning courses that you can take to create videos internally.

"LinkedIn Learning has completely opened up its learning platform to external content partners. It is not just an amazing array of content, it is a corporate learning platform. The company wants to become a single place for all organizational learning content."

Josh Bersin,
Global Industry Analyst

6 Does it prepare your employees to earn new professional certifications?

Your IT department manager wants her Microsoft Azure certification and someone on your creative team would like to earn their credentials on the Adobe suite. You're on the hunt for a learning solution that can help all of your learners globally prepare for professional exams and certifications.

Action Item: Prepare a list of your requirements in this area and ask each learning software company if they have what you need today or whether specific certifications are on their roadmap.

LinkedIn members have over 400 types of industry certifications and licenses, and we use that data to inform which courses we will develop to support their careers. Engaging test-prep and CEU content come complete with intensive practice exams and assessments to help lock in learning.

LinkedIn Learning Has Certification Preparation Courses for:

Business:

PMI Project Management Institute   NASBA   SHRM BETTER WORKPLACES BETTER WORLD™   h HR CERTIFICATION INSTITUTE™

Technology:

aws   CompTIA.   MCSA

Creative:

A AUTOCAD   3DS SOLIDWORKS   Adobe Creative Cloud

Learner Engagement Considerations

7 How easy is the platform to use?

As sophisticated consumers of video, your learners have high expectations when it comes to finding, accessing, and playing video content. They want a learning experience that is "Netflix-like," intuitive, and easy to understand quickly. If it's clunky, hard to navigate, and search and filtering is not helping them find what they're looking for, then they might never come back.

Action Item: Enlist a few of your teammates to play around with each learning platform you are evaluating. Even better? Stand over their shoulder and watch how they engage with the content. How quickly can they get to the homepage? How fast can they find meaningful content? Do they intuitively understand how to navigate the interface? And, last but not least, ask them how they feel. Inspired and interested? Or frustrated and exasperated?

Your employees are already visiting LinkedIn on a regular basis to catch up with their networks and stay informed on news. LinkedIn Learning engages learners (who connect their LinkedIn account with their LinkedIn Learning account) immediately in their feed and in the sidebar with relevant micro-learning promotions. In fact, these learners engage with content 1.5x higher than unlinked accounts. And, it's an interface that already feels familiar because it's a seamless extension of LinkedIn.

"It's a very user-friendly tool. We have to spend very, very little time teaching the employee how to use LinkedIn Learning."
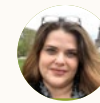
Jodie Schaekel,
Global Program Manager for
Learning and Development,
BCD Travel

8 How personalized are content recommendations?

Sometimes learners can feel overwhelmed by the sheer size of a learning library. How do they know which piece of content will be worth their time? That's why personalized recommendations are such a critical feature to increase learner engagement. The moment a learner clicks to an online learning homepage, they should immediately see content that is both relevant and immediately applicable to help them navigate their day and career.

Action Item: Today, every learning platform uses artificial intelligence and machine learning to help increase the relevancy of personalized recommendations.

Ask each solution provider how they approach personalized learning and their vision for how this capability will get better over time.

Because all of your LinkedIn Learner user accounts are connected to the LinkedIn network with 630+M members, we can deliver highly personalized content recommendations based on a learners' job function or skills as they correlate with their peers in their industry. We can also deliver personalized content recommendations based on learning goals and their peers within your organization. This means that you can spend less time curating content and more time working on more strategic initiatives such as identifying skills gaps and assessing the impact of your learning programs.

"The personalized recommendations from LinkedIn Learning are amazing. They're a big sell for us here, internally."

Naphtali Bryant,
Director of Learning and Development,
ServiceTitan

9 Is learning social and interactive?

There are many ways that people learn, but one type has been <u>scientifically proven</u> to be more effective than any other—active learning. Instead of passively listening to a lecture, our brains absorb and retain new learning by actively engaging with learning content, instructors, and other learners. That's where social learning, or learning from or with others, fits in. Social proof that a course content is valuable leads to a 5% increase in learner engagement.

Action Item: Social learning is still an emerging technology, but here are some things to think about:

• Can instructors and learners interact?

• Can learners see what courses their coworkers and industry peers have taken?

• Are there quizzes and knowledge checks throughout a learner's journey?

LinkedIn Learning enables learners to ask questions and have discussions with instructors and the broader course community. With each course, we let learners know who at their company, and in their network, have liked a piece of content. Plus, most courses come with chapter quizzes and accompanying documentation including tools, templates, worksheets, and key takeaways that learners can download and use to apply their new learning right away.

"Frankly, online learning works better than in-person training. We know from brain science that what is taught in a three-to-five day classroom training is not likely to stick. A four-month interactive and engaging online program is better to boost performance."

Nora Schoenthal,
Director of Expertise,
Henkel

10 Does it offer both micro- and macro-learning?

Talent developers are moment makers. By that, we mean that talent developers orchestrate and surface the right learning at the moments that matter most to learners. For example, you might offer an entire learning path when a learner has a career milestone like getting promoted or becoming a first-time manager. You also make sure that when employees run into an 'I don't know how to do that' moment, they know where to turn for just-in-time learning.

That's the main difference between macro- and micro-learning. Macro-learning is a complete learning series (typically a few hours or longer) and micro-learning is a specific skill learned in the precise moment of need (typically a few minutes). You need both.

Action Item: Test drive each learning platform with two mindsets—as a new manager unsure of how to motivate their team (macro-learning) and as an office worker needs to understand the finer points of building a pivot table in Excel (micro-learning). Then, ask yourself the following questions:

• How easy was it to find what I was looking for?

• Did the course or chapter description meet your expectations?

• Do you feel like you learned what you needed to learn?

LinkedIn Learning's courses are broken down into 400,000 micro-learning videos that are typically less than 5 mins long. We also offer over 300 multi-course learning paths designed to help employees master a series of related skills and achieve a meaningful goal. These learning paths go deep to help an employee learn a new skill or take on a new role. Interested in seeing an example? Check out the "Becoming a Manager" learning path.

"I love how the topics are broken into short training modules, but even better is the fact that they are further broken down into two-to-three-minute chunks and well-indexed. This makes learning possible in small bits and you can easily pop back to review sections that you want to."

Paul Thomas,
Customer Success Manager and Pre Sales Specials,
Quadrotech

11 How user-friendly is the mobile app for learning anytime, anywhere?

According to [Deloitte's 2018 Global Mobile Consumer Survey](#), Americans view their smartphones about 14 billion times per day—an average of 52 looks per user. Given that phones are attached to our hip, it's no surprise that learning on mobile devices is up [5% over last year](#) on the LinkedIn Learning platform.

Action Item: As part of your consideration process, we recommend that you download each of the learning platform vendors' apps, try them out for yourself, and then ask these key questions:

• Is the app easy-to-use?

• Can you easily find the content you're looking for?

• Can you download content and learn when offline?

• Does it have both mobile video and audio-only formats?

LinkedIn Learning's mobile app makes it easy to find the exact content that you're looking for and take a course while commuting or even download courses and play them in offline mode. All courses are also available in audio-only mode. This feature is great when you're on the road. Download it and give it a try ([Android](#)) ([Apple](#)).

"Whether you are learning from a desktop, mobile, audio or visual device, LinkedIn Learning has a format for everyone. Learning has never been easier for employees on-the-go."

*Alyson DeMaso,
VP of Learning and Capability Building,
The Estee Lauder Companies*

Learning Administration Considerations

12 Is it easy to manage a large number of learners?

Administering learning across your organization can be a daunting task, particularly for large organizations. Your admin homepage should make it easy for you to perform any task with just a few clicks. When considering an online learning solution, you should think about the quality of your experience as an admin, just as you are considering the experience for learners.

Action Item: Ask for a demo of the admin panel and run through a few use cases such as:

• Creating a group

• Uploading learner profiles in bulk via a CSV file

• Curating a learning path

• Viewing learning activity broadly or within groups

Also, it's important to make sure that your online learning solution is SAML2 2.0 compliant. Why? Because that means that it can seamlessly integrate with most single sign-on (SSO) providers which streamlines the learner account creation process, makes it easier for learners to login, and lets you manage user access more effectively.

The LinkedIn Learning Admin dashboard is simple and intuitive with a powerful set of enterprise-grade features including the ability to make managers sub-admins to administer learning within their teams. You can also create groups and subgroups to help keep everything organized.

"LinkedIn Learning has an incredible Customer Success team who is there to help you every step of your LinkedIn Learning journey—from integrations and activations to how to drive higher learner engagement."

Angie Holt,
Senior Director, Global Customer Success,
LinkedIn Learning

13 Does it give you skills insights?

As a talent developer, you've always understood that identifying and closing skills gaps was a big part of your job, but now your entire leadership team has prioritized it. Before you can even begin to close skills gaps, the first thing you need to do is identify them. According to LinkedIn Learning's 2019 Workplace Learning Report, talent developers take a multi-pronged approach to identify skills gaps including administering internal assessments (74%), monitoring business KPIs (66%) and attending meetings with executives and senior managers (61%). But, shouldn't your learning platform do this for you, too?

Action Item: Ask how the learning solution that you're considering identifies skills gaps and if it is dependent on assessments. Although skills data can be generated by administering assessments to each learner, low response rates can leave you with information on only a small percentage of your organization.

LinkedIn Learning Skills Insights uses LinkedIn's vast inventory of skills data from over 630+M members, the largest of its kind, to give you a complete skills inventory and then recommend the best content to help close known gaps. It displays those skills in an easy-to-read table that maps where skills reside within each area of your organization. It's important to note that all skills data is displayed in aggregate to protect employee privacy.

"With the insights from LinkedIn, we can curate lists that align to our future strategy and see if people are learning about those skills — and keep adjusting from there."

*Heather Duttweiler,
People Development Consultant,
Allianz*

14 Does it have robust analytics and reporting tools?

We live in a data-driven world. That's why it's important that you have the right learning data at your fingertips to continuously improve your programs and to showcase how learning is impacting the business. Learning analytics must go beyond basic engagement numbers. They should clearly show you how the skills employees are learning are helping close skills gaps, a top C-suite concern.

Action Item: Make sure that your learning solution has the following capabilities:

• Downloadable reports on learner activation and engagement

• Course metrics including most watched courses by team, region, etc.

• Ability to create custom attributes to monitor and track

• Integrates deeply and seamlessly with your LMS

The LinkedIn Learning analytics and reporting dashboard has all of this and much more. We also share how benchmarks, based on industry and company size, that lets you know if you are tracking ahead or behind your peer group.

"Demonstrate fiscal responsibility to your CFO and use the reporting tools inside the platform to demonstrate return on learning (ROL)."

Neil Cunningham, head of L&D, Exponential-e

Action Item Checklist

1 Is the learning content relevant and up-to-date?

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• How many courses are added per week?

• How relevant is their content to your industry right now?

• How do they keep up with the rapid, ever-changing demand for hard and soft skills?

• How do they choose where to invest in content creation?

• How do they decide which content to retire and how often?

• Have their learning paths been endorsed by professional organizations?

2 How broad and deep is the content?

Action Item: Here are a few dimensions to consider:

• Is there a wide spectrum of hard and soft skills content?

• Does it address the most in-demand skills?

• How many courses are available in the languages you require?

3 How credible and expert are the instructors?

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About LinkedIn Learning

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