

# Low-Cost Learning Management Systems 2008

31 Products for Limited Budgets

By Bryan Chapman, Richard Nantel,  
and the staff of Brandon Hall Research



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## Preface

People purchase Brandon Hall Research's LMS research for different reasons. Some are responsible for selecting the right system for their organization. Others are consultants who wish to advise customers on the strengths and weaknesses of popular systems. LMS vendors sometimes require access to our research to benchmark how their product compares to others. Still others are not yet at the LMS selection stage but require advice on what to look for in a system, as well as help in implementing a selection methodology. To meet your particular needs, this LMS research is available in different formats.

This report is based on the 2008 research, "LMS KnowledgeBase 2008: In-Depth Profiles of 70+ Learning Management Systems, with Custom Comparison Across 200+ Features." The table below illustrates the differences between the information found in the LMS KnowledgeBase and the information contained within this report.

	<b>LMS KnowledgeBase 2008: In-Depth Profiles of 70+ Learning Management Systems, with Custom Comparison Across 200+ Features</b>	<b>Low-Cost Learning Management Systems 2008: 31 Products for Limited Budgets</b>
<b>Number of pages</b>	Approximately <b>4,000</b>	Approximately <b>460</b>
<b>Delivery format</b>	HTML generated from a database	Adobe Acrobat <b>PDF</b>
<b>Number of systems included</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Scope of product profiles</b>	<b>Complete profiles of each system:</b> Includes an At-A-Glance chart, critique, and detailed specifications (approximately 30-50 pages per LMS)	<b>Abridged profiles of each system:</b> Includes an At-A-Glance chart of key features and the critique (approximately 5 pages per LMS)
<b>Frequency of updates</b>	Information <b>updated continually</b>	New edition <b>published annually</b>
<b>Tools for comparing products</b>	<b>LMS Comparison Tool:</b> Allows users to select which systems they wish to compare. Provides a comparison across hundreds of features and characteristics	<b>Comparative At-A-Glance grids of key features:</b> Provides a side-by-side product comparison of the 25 features and characteristics listed in the At-A-Glance charts
<b>Tools to help select products</b>	<b>LMS Selection Tool:</b> Provides the ability to quickly find systems that meet your needs by specifying criteria	31 low-cost products have <b>already been selected</b> for you as possible candidates



	LMS KnowledgeBase 2008: In-Depth Profiles of 70+ Learning Management Systems, with Custom Comparison Across 200+ Features	Low-Cost Learning Management Systems 2008: 31 Products for Limited Budgets
<b>CONTENT CHAPTERS</b>		
Top 10 LMS product and LMS vendor characteristics	✓	✓
High-level steps for your selection process	✓	✓
20 questions to analyze critical needs	✓	✓
Writing a use case for evaluation purposes	✓	✓
Sample use case document	✓	-
Explanation of the criteria to use to assess systems	✓	-
Benchmarking/meta-analysis data	✓	-
Explanation of the criteria used to assess the systems in our research	✓	-
Creative ways to reduce the cost of your LMS	-	✓
List of features to consider	-	✓
Introduction to requests for proposals (RFPs)	-	✓
Glossary of e-learning terms	✓	✓

To address the needs of organizations looking specifically for a low-cost learning management system (LMS), this report selects 31 systems from this research that provide a combination of high value and below average pricing.

Part I of this report introduces the results of informal surveys conducted at a number of recent e-learning conferences. These surveys were used to identify the size of organizations' budgets for



purchases of systems such as an LMS. The results of these surveys make a convincing case for the market need for low-cost systems.

This section then examines one of the most common challenges in finding a system that meets your needs and budget: feature scope creep. This section describes a case where a financial institution failed to find a relatively low-cost solution because they continued to ask for features they didn't need. The section then presents ways to keep feature scope creep away from your selection process. This section also examines why so many organizations choose to develop their own LMS.

Part I also includes the methodology and criteria for selecting the 31 systems featured in this report. The section concludes with a presentation of the dramatic difference in pricing from the lowest to the highest priced system across different size implementations, both hosted and installed. Also included is benchmarking data that provides average pricing for all the systems covered in this research.

Part II provides advice to help in the selection of the right LMS for your organization. The section begins by describing creative ways organizations of all types and sizes have substantially lowered the cost of acquiring an LMS. It follows with advice to help you identify your business requirements. It also provides the "Top 10 Characteristics" most people look for in an LMS. This "Top 10" list is rooted in analysts' experiences of analyzing RFPs (Requests For Proposal) to find what people are really looking for in a system and vendor.

With so many LMS choices, the process of selecting a system can be mind boggling if you move too quickly and compare systems feature by feature. We recommend using a more top-down, systematic approach. The section "High-Level Steps for Your Selection Process" details a systematic approach which can be used to avoid confusion and quickly identify a system that will meet your needs.

Also in Part II, "20 Questions to Analyze Critical Needs" can be used as a work aid when meeting with an e-learning strategy committee. Answering these questions as a team can help you streamline your search process.

Also in Part II is the section "Writing a Use Case for Evaluation Purposes." The phrase "use case" is frequently spoken by computer programmers. They invent "use case" scenarios to determine how end users will make use of the programs they create. Use cases are created very early in the development process, often long before coding begins. At the end of the development process, use cases are utilized as test scripts to see if their original goals and objectives have been met.

Similarly, "use cases" can be employed as an evaluation technique for finding the right learning management system. Far too often, organizations get caught up in evaluating systems based on



their features and functions only. Focusing on these areas only paints part of the overall picture. A well-defined use case can serve as the road map for your LMS test drive.

The section “Features to Consider” includes a list of key LMS features that may or may not be important to your organization. You can use this list as a checklist to help identify potential requirements for now and the near future.

Part II of this report concludes with “Suggestions for Writing a Request for Proposal (RFP).” Constructing an RFP requires considerable research and analysis. Following an established process can mean the difference between finding exactly the system you need and making a costly mistake. This section of the report provides advice about what to include in an RFP to acquire a learning management system.

Part III examines 31 low-cost LMSs that can meet the needs of many organizations. For each product, a screen capture of the system is provided, with a table titled “At-A-Glance,” and a review of the system. Detailed description of the criteria covered in the At-A-Glance tables is also provided to help you interpret the data.

Part IV of this report allows you to look at the 31 systems side by side. The section combines each system’s At-A-Glance table into large comparative grids. These allow you to quickly see the key differences and similarities between the 31 systems without having to flip back and forth through the pages.

The Appendix to this report includes a description of the research methodology used for the 2008 learning management system research, which was designed to be as objective and comprehensive as possible. The report concludes with a glossary of e-learning terms.

The intent in publishing *Low-Cost Learning Management Systems 2008: 31 Products for Limited Budgets* is to reduce the time and effort required for you to select the right LMS for your organization and your budget.