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Handy Tips for Better Handouts

By Carolyn B. Thompson
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Whether the handouts you develop are extensions of a learner's manual for group or on-the-job training programs or stand-alone pages for a seminar, they can be created to motivate participants with an interactive and fun style. By following some basic guidelines and using a few helpful tips, you can improve the quality of your handouts so that they will never be seen as boring.

Style and form

If you are developing handouts to accompany a training manual, use the same style for the manual, handouts, flip charts, overheads, screen shows, and other visuals. This adds a sense of continuity and professionalism to the presentation package. The visuals should complement one another in content and appearance (i.e., having similar fonts, graphics, and formats).

Sometimes the style or form of a handout can be used in an interactive manner during an icebreaker or sharing session. In his book, *Red Hot Handouts: Taking the Ho Hum Out of Handouts* (1999, Jossey-Bass), Dave Arch offers an example handout called "The Coin Toss." Grid squares on a handout are filled with content, and seminar participants, standing a foot away, toss several coins onto their handouts. Participants then summarize for the group the area into which most of their coins landed.

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Other ideas for making handouts appear more interesting include using

- colored paper,
- odd sizes and shapes of paper, and
- eye-catching graphics.

Tips for using handouts effectively

1. Distribute handouts to learners at the time they need to use them--not before.
2. Make the handout useful in supporting the learning objectives.
3. Think creatively. For example, a handout that folds into a paper cup can be used to illustrate how to test whether an idea holds water.
4. Design your handouts using a combination of
 - how-to information,
 - fill-in-the blank layout,
 - exercises or activities,
 - user-friendly bulleted information, and
 - charts or illustrations.

If you are in doubt as to whether handouts should be used, remember that handouts are appropriate when

- the learners should not see the information ahead of time (example: role plays, games, etc.) and
- the material to be presented is a single learning objective that can be met with one piece of paper.

For more information on making the most of your handouts, visit Presentations.com.

Carolyn B. Thompson, president of Training Systems, Inc., Frankfort, Illinois, is a member of the Professional Development Section. Copyright 2001 Carolyn B. Thompson.

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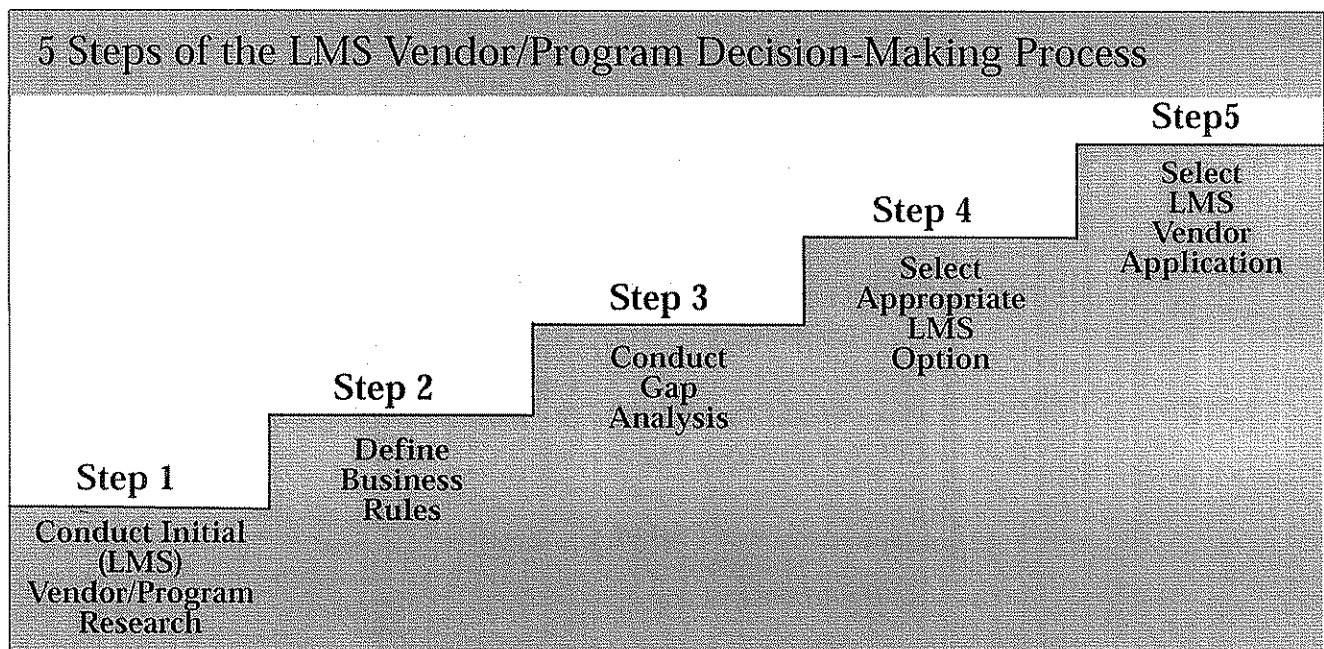
Overview

Selecting the right Learning Management System (LMS) and achieving a successful implementation that culminates in real business success is a daunting challenge. This is particularly so for the organization that has historically relied on non-technology based training methods. Evaluating the myriad ancillary technologies that contribute to the creation of a comprehensive e-Learning infrastructure can appear to increase the complexity of the challenge exponentially. The LMS selection process should be part of an overall strategic e-Learning plan.

Based upon practical, real world experience gained through working with a multitude of clients, LMS systems and related technologies, we have honed a process that provides a clear path from initial conceptualization to the realization of a correctly selected, carefully tailored, and robustly operating eLearning platform. This program has been developed by our consultative staff who have actually overseen this process including:

- creating custom tailored solutions and modifications at the code level
- integrating with various existing IT applications and databases
- recovering programs that have gotten off on the wrong foot.

As an introduction to this process, the diagram below lists the 5 basic steps in the initial phase of the creation of an e-Learning environment, the selection of the LMS.



As with most technology-related endeavors, attention to details is critical. The following 'steps' outline the relevant factors which should be taken into account when following this process.