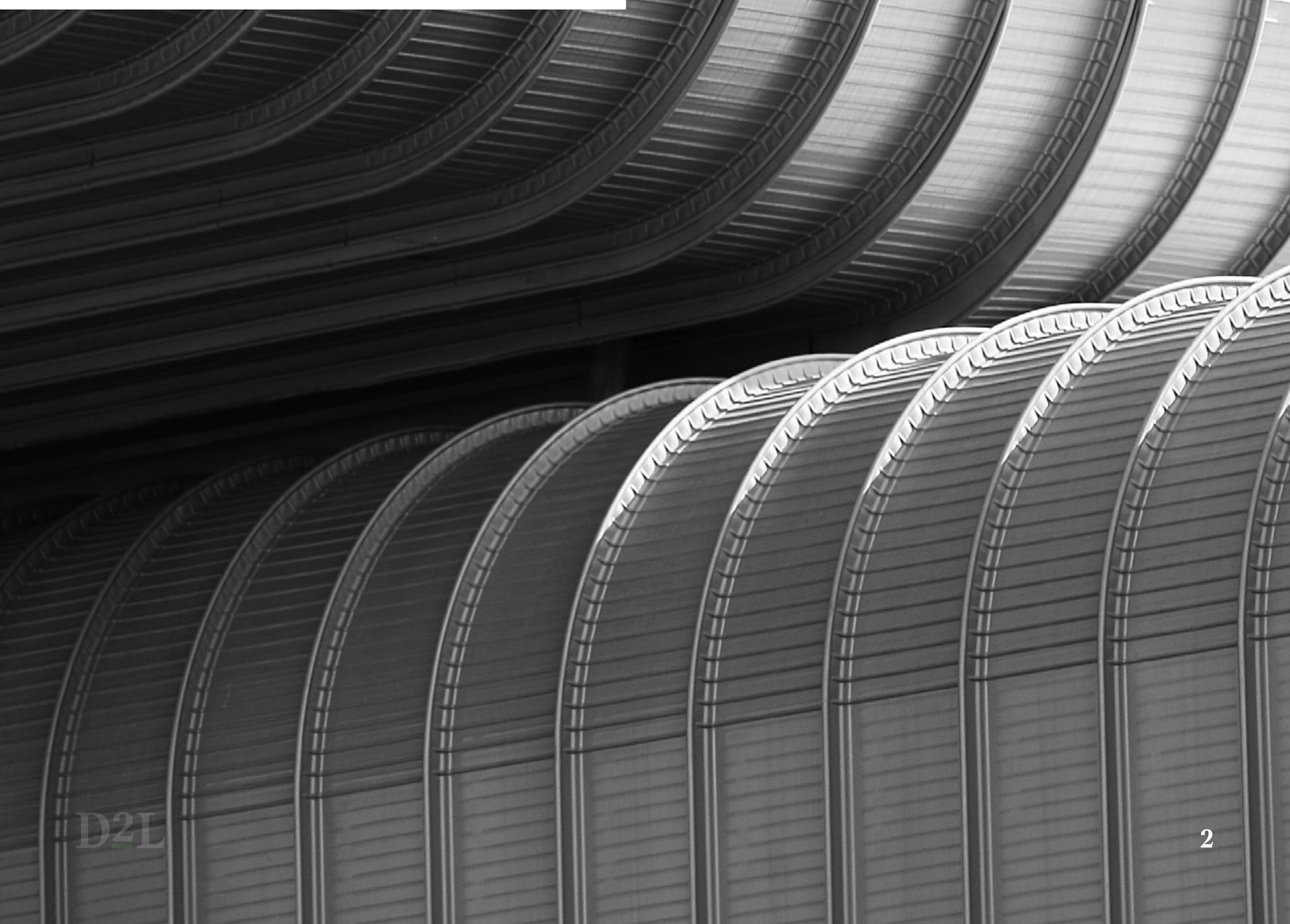
D2L

9 Things to Consider Before Making an LMS Switch

Innovative teaching methods, developments in technology, and new learning environments are reshaping education for both students and educators. These advancements impact not only how students learn but also how colleges and universities deliver educational content. Providing students with high-quality education in these constantly changing times rests on using a robust and flexible learning management system (LMS).

Your LMS functions as the heart of your academic institution — it not only hosts and manages learning material, but also helps students to successfully hit learning outcomes. However, if your LMS no longer serves your institution's needs, it's time to consider switching to a system that works for you. This switch may seem as daunting as selecting your initial LMS was, but with careful planning and the right approach, you can have an efficient and smooth switch.



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This eBook covers nine key considerations you need to be thinking about before making an LMS switch:

Defining Problem Areas

The first step in switching to a new LMS is to consider the problems you are having with your current system. Speak to different users of your LMS platforms, such as learners, administrators, and your IT department, **to uncover the pain points with your current LMS.** It's difficult to gain feedback from every single user of your LMS; that's why you should look to have representatives from different groups to make sure a variety of opinions are heard.

Switching to a new LMS must be a well-considered decision. Your reasons to switch need to be justifiable and could include any of the following: outdated interfaces, inability to track learning outcomes, recurring costs, lack of vendor support, or poor adoption. Understanding the current issues with your platform will allow you to explain to LMS vendors what you need in your new platform.

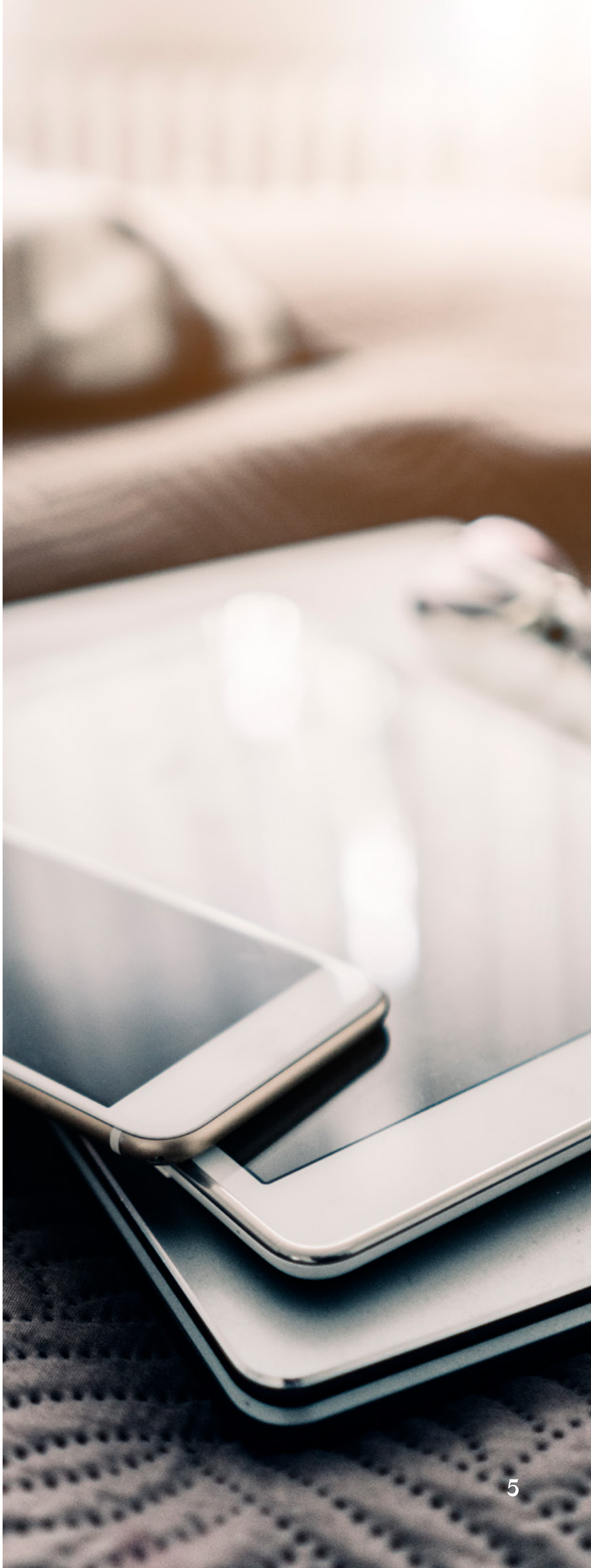
Gathering Expectations for the New LMS

Once you have identified the problems with your current LMS, the next step is identifying the must-have features. What are the goals of the change, and how will a new system help reach these goals? As you did when defining problem areas, make sure to collect feedback from a variety of stakeholders at your institution.

This could look like:

1. An LMS with robust analytic tools so educators and administrators can track user engagement.
2. A personalized LMS that allows you to set up individualized learning paths for students to proceed through content at their own pace.
3. An LMS with constant uptime and a continuous delivery model to allow your IT team to focus their efforts on other priorities.
4. An intuitive LMS that learners and educators can easily navigate and are excited to use.

The primary aim behind an LMS switch should be to find a platform that suits your current and future needs. Remember, this step should help you resolve the problems you had when identifying your needs. Pinpointing the reason why you're not happy with your current system will help you know what you want from your new LMS. It's also important to outline the features in your current LMS that you want to keep, as doing so will help you work with a vendor to find a platform that suits your needs.



Conducting Feasibility Checks

After you have defined your problem areas and gathered expectations for your new LMS, the next step is to do a feasibility check. A feasibility check helps you assess whether certain hurdles are too high for you to take on. It'll help you understand if an LMS migration will require more resources than you currently have.

The goal here is to identify the main challenges you may face when implementing your new LMS. This can include data migration problems, training challenges, end-user acceptance challenges, workflow management, and more.

A feasibility check makes sure that **problems** are thoroughly considered and **handled** with the appropriate vendors.

Your new LMS provider will generally assist you with the migration process; however, it's important you get an idea of what this will look like and any potential snags that may come up.

Making a Timeline

You'll want to create a timeline that provides an idea of when certain tasks need to be carried out and by whom. Begin this process by identifying the main points associated with an LMS switch, such as:

Creating a timeline with the main tasks allows you to set feasible goals to stay on task. After this process, work with your vendor to see how aligned its representatives are with your tasks in the time frame you have defined. For example, when will you start converting courses? When will you implement integrations? Throughout this process, it's also important to reflect and assess the goals you are hitting and how they align with your identified needs.

Planning for Data, Content, and Users

This is one of the most critical aspects of the LMS migration. It includes data mapping, data cleanup. Given that your old systems will have databases and workflows different from those of your new LMS, data migration requires careful planning.

Data Mapping
While the vendor is responsible for taking care of what data will go where, it's important for you to map out the data in your existing LMS that you want to shift. This is because structures and logic vary from one LMS to the next, so data mapping is an important initial step in the migration process.

Data Cleanup
When using an LMS, data is often updated, optimized, and modified over time, which leaves behind unused or redundant legacy data. Another step when migrating LMS systems is to clean up your data. This means identifying and deleting duplicate files, unnecessary accounts, and outdated user data.

Your LMS vendor will be mainly responsible for this step. However, key members within your team may be involved to clarify how the data will be represented in the new system.

Creating a Communication Plan

Before making the switch to a new LMS, you must also consider your communication strategy. This should include institution-wide announcements as well as targeted communications to specific groups. Consider adding these four components into your communication strategy:

1. **Building Awareness:** Communicate clearly to all users of your LMS the vision, the mission, and the objectives of the switch. This can even take place before you select an LMS vendor, as doing so will keep everyone in the loop. Use multiple channels such as emails, announcements, videos, and employee boards to build internal awareness.
2. **Creating Understanding:** Help users understand how this switch will affect them personally. Communicate the reason for the change in such a way that people understand the context, the rationale, and the need.
3. **Encouraging Acceptance:** Support users in the migration process by making them feel involved; allow stakeholders to ask questions, request clarification, and provide feedback.
4. **Committing to Communication:** Communicate to your users throughout the entire "switch process." Hold interactive workshops and forums for everyone to explore the changes together while learning more.

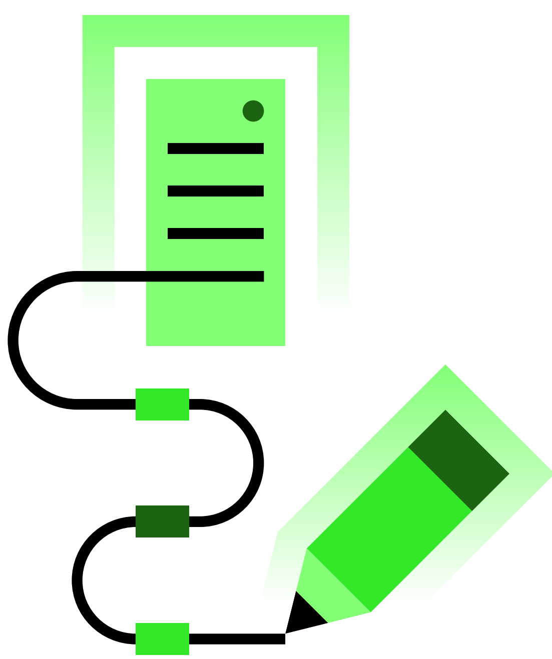
Switching to a new LMS is not an easy process. The right communication plan can help keep your stakeholders informed, engaged, and empowered, setting you on the path to a seamless switch.

Implementing a Training Strategy

Providing training is critical when switching to a new LMS. Reflect on the training you provided your users in the past and ask the following: What worked? What would you like to change?

Then, consider implementing the following tools and resources:

- Videos: Share videos with the users about the new platform, such as tutorials or demos. This helps make sure everyone receives the same information and provides a portable and consistent learning experience.
- FAQ: Create a knowledge base or a “Frequently Asked Questions” page to offer solutions and advice to users. Continually review this page and add answers based on questions you receive from administrators and students.



Work with your LMS provider to share vendor-led training, such as:

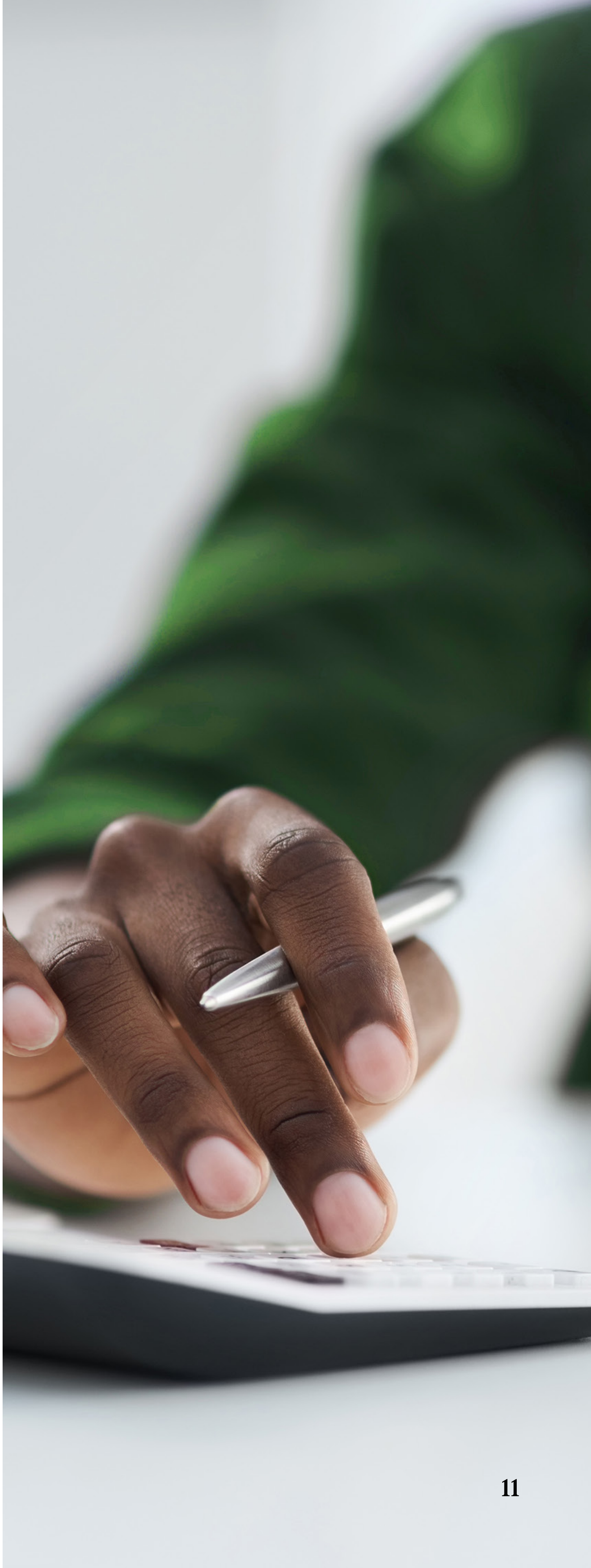
- Facilitator-guided Content: Share live expert sessions to provide additional support, advice, and best practices for LMS users. These sessions can conveniently be grouped into streams and series, assisting with taking the guesswork out of creating an effective learning path.
- Self-guided Training: Provide LMS users with a variety of instructional videos, step-by-step demos, hands-on activities, and more so they can jump directly into a cultivated library of topics.

Throughout the switching process, it’s important to be in communication with your vendor. Discuss the training that the company provides and see how this fits within your strategy. The overarching goal of your training should be to encourage greater acceptance of your new LMS and help users seamlessly use your platform.

Factoring in Costs

Cost is always a major consideration in eLearning decisions. However, the cost of an LMS goes beyond the licensing and infrastructure. There are additional factors, including number of users, maintenance, implementation, integrations, and customization, which impact your overall cost—not to mention there are a variety of LMS pricing models, such as per user, per registered user, or per active user.

Since there are many factors involved in pricing, it's important to have an idea of how your LMS will be used to accurately evaluate the cost of different solutions. Keep in mind that the main influence for choosing an LMS shouldn't be price. Rather, it should be finding a system that meets your needs and helps users achieve learning outcomes.



Selecting an LMS Vendor

The LMS selection process involves many stakeholders and factors to consider. This eBook has outlined the best practices for migrating and selecting an LMS that works for you.

Once you have shortlisted a couple of LMS vendors, send a request for proposal (RFP) to each of your vendors asking for pricing quotes, implementation time frames, and support options. Compare the responses you receive from each vendor and communicate with them to see how they can meet your overall learning needs. The main idea is to identify an LMS with use cases that are relevant to the problems you shared and other required elements you have outlined.

Ready to talk to an expert?

Let our team of change management experts handle the details of switching to the D2L Brightspace LMS so your instructors can stay focused on what's important—helping all learners reach their potential.

TALK TO AN EXPERT >

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