

## Seven Steps to Successful Software Selection

Selecting software, a learning management system (LMS), or any other enterprise software, can be frustrating if a thorough and responsible selection process isn't followed. The following seven key steps will assist in choosing the right software for your organization.

### Step 1: Establish a Business Case

Successful software selection begins with the recognition of the business need to be resolved. A business case is a structured proposal for change that is justified in terms of costs and benefits. It includes the reason the software is needed, expected business benefits, alternatives considered with dialog for the rejection of each alternative, expected costs of the project, a gap analysis, and the expected risks. It is from this justification that the software selection process advances.

### Step 2: Specify Requirements and Establish a Stakeholder Team

The second key step is to record current and future needs. These are the needs of the organization that are to be met by the future software. This task may be daunting but identifying and describing who, what, when and results provides the baseline for the entire selection process. Ranking the business requirements is also crucial at this step to determine the "must haves" and the "nice-to haves".

Be careful to stay focused on the business requirements and not the software requirements. Don't get confused by a laundry list of features. Identify and document what you want to accomplish from a business point of view.

Use cases are also established at this point in the selection process. Use cases document how the software will be used by members of the organization such as the learners, the administrators, and the managers. The use-case scenario uses the same parameters as the business requirements as far as defining who, why,

what, when and the result. The difference is that the scenario combines several business requirements to articulate a complete process.

This is the best time to establish a stakeholder team. Stakeholders are individuals that are actively involved, or otherwise have a stake in the outcome. They will exert influence over the selection process objectives and outcomes. Their responsibility and authority range from contributions in surveys and focus groups to full project sponsorship, which includes providing financial and political support.

### Step 3: Identify Vendors

There are numerous vendors that tout their software as the latest and greatest solution for your business needs. Before moving forward in the selection process, it is prudent to pre-qualify vendors who can meet some of the general requirements. This step will help reduce time spent evaluating RFP responses and attending vendor demonstrations.

### Step 4: Request for Information

It is very time-consuming comparing each vendor's proposed system features. One way to reduce this time drain is to send potential vendors a brief list of key questions covering the mandatory features needed to satisfy your major requirements. This is called a request for information or RFI. A good guideline is to send RFIs to three to five vendors. This optional step helps determine the best vendors most likely to meet your needs.

### Step 5: Request for Proposal

Once the business requirements and use-case scenarios are completed, they should be compiled into a request for proposal (RFP) and sent to vendors with



the highest potential to meet your needs. An RFP must accurately communicate your organization's needs to vendors and elicit accurate and concise vendor proposals. All questions in an effective RFP must be clearly stated so there is no vendor confusion, and they must be clearly worded to elicit a focused answer.

Evaluating vendor responses is no simple task. Your well-constructed RFP is essential to obtain consistent vendor responses. Typically a quantitative analysis is required to make an "apples to apples" evaluation of the responses.

#### **Step 6: Vendor Demonstrations**

It's now time to invite your final vendors to demonstrate their software. Vendor demonstrations are important to get a good look and feel of the software. To ensure the vendor demonstrations are valuable, the vendors should respond to your business requirements and demonstrate your use-cases. It is important to include your Stakeholders in this step of the selection process.

Before you make an investment in the future of your organization, follow these seven key steps to help the selection process run smoothly. It is a big task, should you need help ISC has experienced personnel that can help.

(To help you get started see this month's give away tool: Software Selection Evaluation Tool.)

A good tip is to request a sandbox system prior to making the final purchase decision. A sandbox is a prototype of the system that vendors can offer prospective clients. This gives you an opportunity to explore the software before the sale is complete. Select the vendor that is most able to meet the needs, present and future.

#### **Step 7: Contract Negotiations**

The final step of the selection process is negotiating a suitable contractual arrangement with the vendor. A well-drawn up contract should protect you and the vendor against unforeseen circumstances. It's important to include a member of your Procurement team during the negotiations and to avoid agreeing to the vendor's standard terms. Negotiating a contract is the best 'give and take' method to come to an arrangement that covers the particular needs of your organization.