Rebuilding LMS – Learning Moves to the Stratosphere

Lacey Clifton

Old Dominion University

IDT 617

Dr. Alan Reid
Abstract

One of the hottest trends in software has made its way to the Instructional Design and Technology field: Software-as-a-Service, more commonly known as SaaS. With the ability to scale easily to fit the smallest and biggest projects, SaaS models are being applied to Learning Management Systems in professional and university settings. When Edmodo, an LMS popular with K-12 schools, went to a SaaS model, they jumped from 10M members to 51M members in just 3 years. One of the biggest differences between traditional LMSs and SaaS LMSs is the use of the Cloud for the software’s server, offering many benefits for learners, instructors, and designers including easier access from mLearning devices.

Keywords: LMS, Learning Management Systems, SaaS, Instructional Design and Technology
**Introduction**

Online schools, distance learning, mLearning, and eLearning all require a standardized method to allow students to receive assignments, submit projects, and engage in learning. These systems are often referred to as ‘portals’ by end-users because they serve as an access point, an entrance to learning away from a brick-and-mortar facility. In Instructional Design and Technology (IDT), these portals are known as Learning Management Systems (LMSs). LMSs serve businesses and universities with on-demand modules, document management, evaluation tools, calendars, and other learning aids. But when the LMS is weighed down by an outdated infrastructure and learner access is impaired or prevented, the LMS becomes a hindrance to the instruction rather than an open door. To remove poor infrastructures from the field, LMS developers are turning to the Cloud.

**Demand for Learning Management Systems is On the Rise**

Demand for Learning Management Systems that meet learner needs for accessibility is on the rise, which should come as no surprise to anyone. Online schools advertise heavily for at-home courses and mobile technology adoption is intensifying across the board. Docebo®, a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) LMS for businesses to train employees, did some research and estimates that between the years 2017 and 2018 the LMS market will grow by about 23.17% (Docebo, 2014). Keeping in mind that they (admittedly) focused on surveying the use of LMSs for businesses, it is easy to believe this number could be much higher when the growth rate of online universities is factored in.

Currently, Moodle™, Edmodo®, Blackboard, and Collaborize Classroom® are the most popular Learning Management Systems by both number of users and number of customers.
(Capterra, 2015). Docebo is near the bottom of this popularity list, but that is likely to change and not due to an expensive marketing campaign or new investors. Docebo makes it very clear to potential clients that they use the SaaS model for their software delivery, a model that has been used in the software industry for quite some time and a term business owners and key decision makers are becoming more and more cognizant of every day. SaaS LMS is not only one of the top trends in LMS development (Pappas, 2015); it’s going to be crucial for its survival under the pressure of modern learners.

Moving On Up Into the Cloud

In a SaaS model, everything is in ‘the Cloud’ which is an overly mystifying term to express hosting information or software in multiple servers strung together through online connections. All client, user, administrative, and developer access is done through an Internet connection – no software is ever downloaded. This system has become popular in the software industry due to its long list of benefits, including: mobile access, lower overhead by reducing the need for in-house IT and the expense of physical servers, faster implementation phases, the ability to create a change in the cloud and have it replicate to all instances of access in real-time (a course update, university/business policy change, or user access is immediate to everyone), a guarantee of little-to-no downtime because a cloud is often hosted across public servers (like Amazon’s server which hosts even large companies like Netflix because a ‘public’ server doesn’t mean you don’t need a password to get in, it just means it is ‘shared by many’) or private servers in earthquake/fire/flood/bomb-proof sites, and best of all… no updates to fuss with requiring effort by every client or every end-user. The SaaS host is responsible for keeping the software up-to-date with changes in applications like a new Apple operating system for mobile devices, not the account holder. Originally, mobile access was just an added bonus of SaaS software, but
now that mobile access has become an essential in our lives rather than a convenience, mLearning is on the rise and end-users have an expectation for mobile access that can only be fulfilled by an LMS in the Cloud.

**The future of SaaS is now.** Many businesses and universities have already begun replacing their legacy systems for Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), such as finance, human resources, and customer relations management (CRM), with SaaS solutions (Gartner, 2014). The model has been tested and proven in many industries, paving the way for LMSs to follow down a smooth road to success with SaaS.

SaaS LMS solutions work for everyone, which is the beauty of the trend. They can be scaled in price based on the size of the client and are usually paid on a monthly basis because SaaS is a subscription, not a purchase. This makes SaaS the perfect solution for the rising stars in LMS development, like Docebo and other newer platforms that didn’t make Capterra’s (2015) popularity index, which make up 58% of the LMS market share (Docebo, 2014). Currently, 87% of LMS platforms use web-based applications and only 30% of those are a SaaS model (Capterra, 2015), but if the predictions of the experts at Gartner are right, which they typically are, these numbers will only increase. In 2012, Edmodo released a SaaS solution for schools after raising $15M from investors for their own internal upgrades when the demand for their LMS projected substantial growth (Heussner, 2012 and Chikodi, 2011). At the time, they had just hit 10M members. In less than 3 years, Edmodo has increased to 51M members (Edmodo, 2015), a growth rate of 410% which would have been impossible without a scalable solution.
Conclusion

Software-as-a-Service is a proven delivery method for software that can meet the demands of users locally, at a distance, or on the go. When the current Learning Management System giants can’t expand fast enough to meet the demands of today’s learners and instructors, SaaS LMS providers will be ready to pick up the slack with their scalable solutions to serve everyone from the smallest businesses to the largest of online universities. LMS providers will need to join the Cloud or risk becoming a legacy provider.

References


Edmodo. (2015, April 24). *Literally couldn't have done it without you. We have connected 50 million learners! Thank YOU from #Edmodo HQ* [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/edmodo/status/591766822245900289.
