

*The power of real-world scenarios, the challenge of competitive games,
the promise of performance-based results.*

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING SYSTEMS

Best Tips For Choosing a Vendor

You get the news from your boss. Your company has a new training initiative, which will be very important for the organization. And, guess what — you're in charge!

You know that your company has some smart developers, but will they be available to you, and if they are, will they know how to build an effective training program? After talking to them you realize that what you really need is an outside vendor that specializes in eLearning development.

Now comes the hard work — choosing the vendor. Bad training wastes money and, worse, wastes learners' time. You want to prevent this. What steps should you go through when choosing a vendor for development work? Is it enough to view their website, talk to their salesperson, get a demo disc in the mail?

The main objective at the start is to do everything you can to avoid a bad training experience as the end result. The main reason bad training will come to you as a result of using an outside vendor will be because YOU did not use a thorough process when you made your vendor choice. *You need to ask tough questions and do your homework.*

The Search Process

Sometimes we encourage our potential partners to look at us from the standpoint of synergy. Do the services we offer really fit into your business processes? Can we, as the vendor, assimilate into the business process your organization adheres to?

Vendors that have their own business process, or the ability to assimilate into yours are probably going to be more reliable off the bat. Things to look for in the vendor's business process:

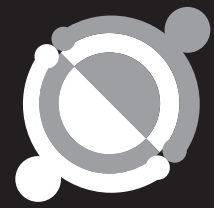
A strong development process:

- Does their process demonstrate a step-by-step approach to developing an eLearning application?
- Are they adept at performing a needs analysis, or at least working with you to develop one.
- What are their mechanisms for delivering the application to you during the process of development?
- Will they be able to show you work in progress?
- When the application is complete what will their deliverables consist of?
- Are they able to develop any necessary student aids?
- Are they able to integrate within your organization to set up servers or provide custom programming in the event you are hosting the application internally.

Skills assessment

Too often companies choose the wrong vendor because they haven't bothered to "look under the hood" at the people who will actually provide the services requested from within the vendor's organization. Rather than guess about the specific skills of the programmers and/or designers it is good for you to have the ability to assess the vendor's staff. Start by asking questions about skill sets, get the names of people who will provide the specific services.

- Do the programmers have extensive experience in developing eLearning applications?
- What tools do they use?



The power of real-world scenarios, the challenge of competitive games,
the promise of performance-based results.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING SYSTEMS

Best Tips For Choosing a Vendor

- Are they certified in the use of those tools?
- Ask if you can speak to the programmers via email or phone.

Quality of results

When you choose a vendor you are purchasing a service and a product. The service is the vendor's time and the product is the end-result application they deliver to you. The quality of this product will make-or-break your students' learning experience. Ensure that you will receive a quality product by going through the following checklist:

- Look for strong samples of previously built applications. Building courseware is similar to building a product. It should contain documentation on how it was built, student documentation on how to use the system. The documentation should reveal that the application uses technology consistent with your company's needs.
- Do the applications use industry-standard technologies that are inter-operable and maintainable by your company?
- Will you be locked in to a proprietary closed system that forces you to rely on this particular vendor for updates and maintenance?
- Does this vendor produce truly interactive learning applications? People only remember 10 percent of what they read, 26 percent of what they hear, and 90 percent of what they experience. Is this application a learning experience, or just shovelware?

- Does the vendor have a strong alliance with one particular development tool, or are they flexible and will they look at your potential project as a way to achieve a defined business goal or just as a way to use their own tool.
- Is the interface design of the application modern looking and consistent. Can it be adaptable to your own company's identity branding?

Guarantees

Even the best vendors sometimes have unhappy clients. Find out what this potential vendor guarantees in the form of a refund.

- Will they offer you a money-back guarantee if the application they deliver is not sufficient to meet your stated business goals?
- Will the vendor provide a feedback mechanism to your end-students?

Conclusion

In conclusion, by using some of the checkpoints we've outlined here, you can look forward to a more successful training development experience.

Remember that developing a good relationship with a potential vendor can be a fantastic investment if you take the time to do the proper leg-work up front.