



GUIDE TO POLICE ONLINE TRAINING:

How to select, implement and
maximize your LMS



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Law enforcement agencies are increasingly being asked to do more with fewer resources, and all too often, training budgets are the first line item to take a hit. But failure to train can be a liability in the courts, so police leaders are looking for ways to increase the efficiency of training programs. One solution to which many are turning is online learning management systems, which can offer ways to ensure that quality training is conducted at a reduced cost.

However, as is the case when any new technology is introduced, there is a learning curve for those tasked with making the purchasing decision. In this special-edition eBook, we aim to arm police leaders with information that can help them make the best choice. To start, we suggest four questions police departments should be asking as they evaluate a potential LMS partner. We then examine five LMS implementation mistakes and offer suggestions on how to avoid them. Finally, we provide six tips to help the training department encourage personnel to make the most of the new online system.

— Doug Wyllie, PoliceOne Editor at Large

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4 QUESTIONS YOUR POTENTIAL ONLINE LEARNING PROVIDER MUST BE ABLE TO ANSWER

Police administrators are often unfamiliar with learning management systems, so there is a risk of partnering with an LMS vendor that is not suited to them, or is inferior to other options

By Doug Wyllie

When police agencies face a budget crunch, officer training is frequently the first line item to be adversely affected. Training not only has its own costs, it also has the opportunity cost of taking police officers off the street. However, failure to train becomes a liability issue, so police departments are looking for alternative avenues to get their officers trained, but at lower costs.

One of the options trainers and administrators are turning to is online learning management systems. But because they are unfamiliar with this emerging technology, there is a risk of partnering with a vendor that is not suited to their department's personnel and

needs, or selecting a training system with an inferior set of features.

Here are four questions police departments should be asking as they evaluate a learning management system partner.

1 Do you have certificates of completion?

Just like in the offline world, individual officers and departments need to show proof that training has been completed. Many officers keep a binder of their training certificates, and many agencies have an administrator who maintains file cabinets full of such documents. In the online world, most providers

have some option of certification — either an actual document in PDF form that can be printed out or an electronic record of course completion.

A top issue for your end users, police officers and administrators, is accessibility and availability of those training certificates. It must be easy to find and share proof that training has been completed with a host of possible stakeholders — everyone from the compliance manager at a risk pool to members of the court system.

Another issue with certificates of completion is portability of that documentation. Can an individual officer easily access their certificates and use those not only for their day job, but also to verify their training and credentials for any second job they may have that requires the same training?

3 Who are you working with in our state?

Just as you would seek to get the opinion of a neighboring agency when purchasing any other sort of equipment — everything from ECDs to squad cars to sidearms — administrators should ask for contacts at other departments who can testify about the learning management system solution. Here are some questions to ask those references:

- How easy was it to implement the system?
- What is the support like when you have a problem?
- What do you think of the training content?
- How easy is it to access your certification records?
- Were there any unseen or unplanned fees after initial setup?

Using these questions as a guide at the start of your planning will be key to the overall success of the program.

2 Is your training approved for state credit?

State-approved training can vary from state to state, as well as between public safety disciplines. Some learning management system providers do have content that has been reviewed by the state oversight authority and has been approved or accredited, but some do not.

In fact, in some cases, states have simply indicated that they do not approve training courses — online or offline. Instead the state sets criteria for training and empowers a department chief or medical director, in the case of EMS training, to approve training.

As a potential purchaser, the training officer should know what the requirements are for their state and their discipline, and that can help inform them on which learning management system is right for their department. Because many departments can approve their own internally developed and locally instructed training programs, it is critical to know if the training department can upload its own training records to the LMS.

4 What is the fee structure and are there any hidden charges after setup?

Pricing structures can vary for LMS solutions. Some vendors offer multiple options to choose from. There could be an offering that is a one-time flat fee for an unlimited number of users or there could be a per-user/per-year subscription option. Some offerings have a tiered pricing structure for different levels of support after purchase (silver, gold, platinum, for example) which impact the total cost.

The key is to ensure that the vendor is completely transparent about the absolute total cost. No chief wants to get approval from the city council for the purchase of a solution, only to have to go back to those same council members in six months to say, “Well, it turns out I need some more money for the training system.”

Ultimately, the learning management system your police department selects will need the features and functionality you deem the most important. But using these questions as a guide at the start of your planning will be key to the overall success of the program.



5 BIGGEST LMS IMPLEMENTATION 'FAILS' (AND HOW TO AVOID THEM)

Make sure your learning management system rollout is successful by avoiding these mistakes

By Doug Wyllie

The last thing any police department trainer wants to do is to advocate for a new way of doing something, implement the change and then have the whole project blow up in their face. This is a very real possibility for training managers and department administrators who deploy the wrong learning management system for their training department.

Further, even if the perfect solution is chosen and adopted, there are numerous ways in which an LMS program can crash and burn, leaving the agency with a budgetary line item that gets insufficient results.

Here are five LMS implementation mistakes and some suggestions on how to avoid them.

Mistake #1 **Build an in-house, proprietary solution**

Many agencies have that "one officer" who is tech savvy and has the ability to figure out just about any issue related to information technology. Envision this all-too-common scenario in which the tech savvy officer hears that the department is considering various LMS vendors for an online learning solution, and that person responds that they could easily build an in-house platform using a variety of open source technology. "I can save us a ton of money that way," the well-meaning officer says.

Sure enough, this brilliant individual sets up a proprietary LMS on the department's own servers. It's up and running and whenever there is a question or a need for tech support, our eager in-house tech expert is there to help.

Then he gets promoted. Or she laterals to another department. Or he retires.

Now the agency is left holding a system nobody else knows how to run. The department is in a real bind. New users can't be added. Training records are only accessible by a super administrator. Courses that need to be updated are stuck as they were originally created.

Don't let this be your police department. Don't succumb to the temptation to choose the do-it-yourself, in-house solution. Instead select a learning management system with a proven track record, support documentation and customer service to train multiple people at your agency to use and the capability to scale as your department's training needs grow.

Mistake #2

Using multiple applications for training records and storage

Every agency already has a method to track training certificates to ensure their personnel are up to date on state- or department-required courses. This tracking system may be file cabinets in the HR department filled with paper certificates, or it could be some form of proprietary computer spreadsheet maintained by someone in HR.

Administrators implementing a learning management system should recognize that an LMS solution is also a training records management system. Every single training record — from defensive tactics to emergency driving and everything else in between — should be entered into the LMS, making it the agency's centralized hub of training records.

For example, if a department requires that the SWAT team and patrol division complete a 10-hour active shooter response training involving a combination of force-on-force training and a live-fire qualification on the square range, it is essential that the records of completion be maintained in the online LMS platform, despite the fact that no element of the training took place in that environment.

If the LMS vendor does not offer the ability to enter certificates from attendance at conferences or training courses conducted in the real world, the department should move along in the search. Not having the ability to enter offline training records forces the department to maintain two records management systems — a sure path to failure.

Mistake #3

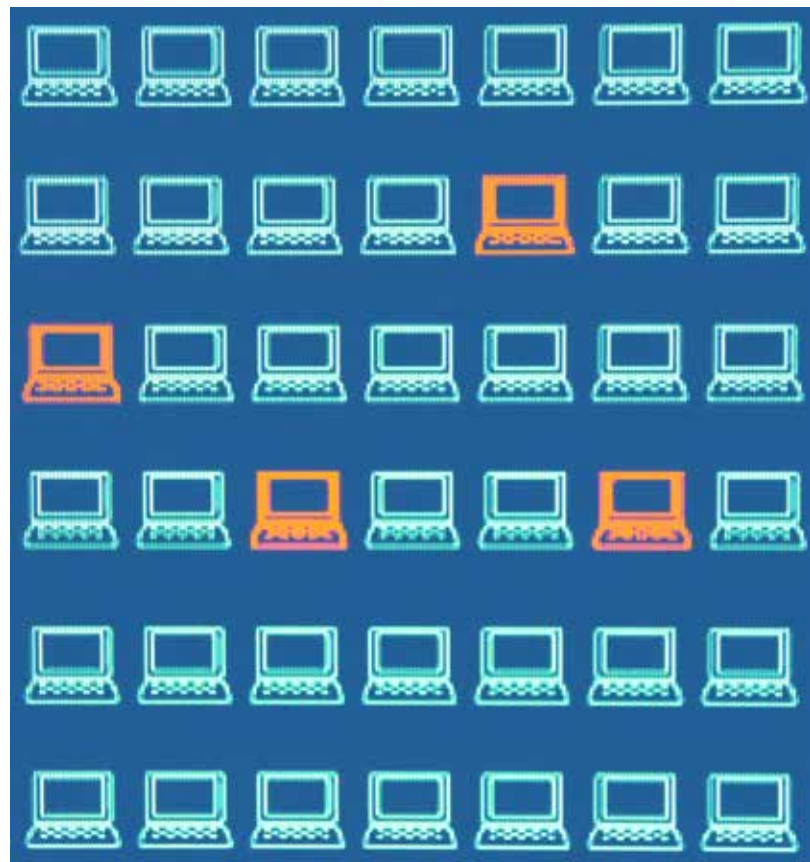
Make online training an optional way to earn continuing education

Having a hands-off attitude about the content in the LMS will doom the program to failure. If the department leaders really want people to use the LMS, the training managers need to assign courses and use due dates. Course completion cannot be voluntary or self-directed.

If a training manager introduces the LMS with the message, "Here's an online training program — do with it whatever you want" they will likely find that for most personnel, "whatever you want" is doing nothing.

The person leading the program should work with the vendor to identify the very best, most compelling courses, and make those the first assignments. This allows users to immediately see the value of an online component to their training, rather than accidentally bumping into a particularly dry or tedious course which could turn them off of the concept.

Another way to assure use of the LMS is to align online training assignments with the training calendar your department has set for the month, quarter or year. Ask the LMS vendor how courses can be assigned at the start of the year for the year ahead.



Mistake #4

Letting users figure it out on their own

There needs to be multiple champions for using an LMS. In addition to the member of the command staff leading the purchasing process, there needs to be other champions. In fact, it may prove best if those champions are line-level officers who have the respect of their peers. Don't expect your personnel to simply adopt and figure out the online training system without encouragement or peer support.

Get the champions involved in the selection process if possible, so they can attest to the fact that the department chose the solution best suited to their needs. Ensure that they are very well trained on the system and are then made available to others who may have questions about how to navigate the online interface.

It's a fail if the department waits until the end of the first year to see how the program is progressing.

Mistake #5

Ignoring the reporting and records management capabilities

It's a fail if the department waits until the end of the first year to see how the program is progressing. Set up weekly — or at the very least, monthly — reports to see who has completed courses and who is falling behind. Intervene when there are stragglers, perhaps tasking the champions to engage individuals who are not embracing the new learning tools.

By regularly checking in on the reports on the end user's participation in the system, the training manager can help to ensure the success of the program.

Implementing a change, whether it's a policy or a technology system, can be challenging. By avoiding these pitfalls, your police department can ensure a successful learning management system implementation and realize the expected benefits that led you to purchase the platform.





6 KEYS TO GETTING PERSONNEL TO USE AN ONLINE LEARNING SOLUTION

Now that your department has an online learning solution, here's how to make sure it gets used

By Doug Wyllie

Every first responder knows that not all training is dynamic, hands-on work. Before (and often, after) engaging in reality-based scenario training, driver training, defensive tactics and other topics, there is a considerable amount of time spent in a classroom, watching an instructor read a PowerPoint presentation.

The fact is, most of these learning sessions can easily be taken from a classroom lecture and conducted online in a robust learning management system. This can save a police department time and money and improve the quality of the learner's experience. Because of these savings, many departments are

moving toward adoption of an online learning management system.

However, some end users resist the change. How does a training manager for a police department influence personnel to engage in the online system? Here are six proven suggestions.

1 Identify a superuser who can influence stragglers

Select an evangelist for online learning. Ideally, this is a line-level police officer who has the respect of his or her peers and has received robust training in how the

system works. An evangelist believes in the value of the LMS the department has selected to implement and the benefits to individual learners. This superuser can help other individuals who have questions about everything, from navigating the user interface to accessing the most compelling content in a proactive and self-guided manner.

2 Assign courses and hold personnel accountable

Pre-determine specific assignments for the quarter or year and use automated reminders that prompt end users about deadlines and training requirements. If users are allowed to simply log on to an LMS when they have time, there is a high probability they will be scrolling a social media site instead, and their training will go unfinished. When officers are required to complete a task, they do it, even begrudgingly.

Start by assigning courses that are most likely to engage users with the training system. A recently created course on officer-down response, mass gathering safety or active-shooter tactics is more likely to make a positive first impression. Save the annual mandatory courses like bloodborne pathogens or slip and fall prevention for when personnel are more familiar with the training system and better understand its purpose.

3 Make LMS content part of the daily "routine"

Create an "every day is a training day" culture in your police department by assigning a short video each day for review during briefing. Five-minute videos can consist of a subject matter expert speaking direct to camera about a specific incident or a general concept. Videos can be scenario-based training or even real-world footage of a recent event.

Another way to create this everyday training mindset is to use the LMS to distribute memos from command staff — important documents like policies, SOPs, general order updates, incident debriefs and AG directives which are required to be read by all personnel across all public safety disciplines — in the online learning platform. Replace the old-school and ineffective practice of posting paper memos to a bulletin board or handing out at briefing by allowing personnel to read documents online. This also allows the agency to track that the messages

and documents have been read. The receipt and reading of the document is recorded in an individual's training files. This can help agencies to prove compliance on high-liability training which is required to be documented in a centralized environment.



4 Have trainers create their own custom content

Get the training cadre to add their own custom-made and blended learning curricula into the LMS platform. Remember that the LMS can also be used to track offline or classroom training records.

Off-the-shelf courses certainly have tremendous value, but public safety personnel tend to respond even better to training content that is unique to their jurisdiction or agency. Trainers who are able to design curricula with video of scenarios captured at recognizable places in town will have a more realistic training experience.

For example, if an agency is going to present training on how to self-apply a tourniquet with the officer's non-dominant hand, the trainer could require that a video he or she had recorded on the topic be viewed online before the hands-on practice and competency assessment session. Record the video at a location in the jurisdiction that is well-known to the officers, increasing the value of the segment.

When the officers arrive at training, that portion of the instruction has already been completed, and the learners can immediately get to work practicing that skill. In addition to saving time in the matroom or training room, this practice encourages use of the LMS platform, and makes the end user's experience better.

5 Train the training cadre on how to use templates for easy upload of their course assets

Don't forget your training cadre. It is vital that the trainers be given specialized and detailed training in how to utilize the system. The better the training staff is at getting custom content into the system, the more content they will produce, thus increasing the value of the platform for the end user.

An online learning management system can help make any police department's training program more effective and efficient.

6 Encourage the training staff to have patience with the process

Just like any other change in policies and procedures, there will be individuals who enthusiastically embrace the new way of doing things. However, at least at first, there will be people who resist change and refuse — to the extent possible — to use the system. There may be a small percentage of people who complain about the new system all the way to retirement.

Training staff must not get disheartened and discontinue their work in assigning existing courses as well as creating new training content. In time, the stragglers will come around.

Recognize also that there will also be large group of personnel who are willing to use the system, but just need some direction in to get started. Don't lose focus on the primary goal — more and better training — because of a small percentage of grumblers and foot-draggers. Focus on the majority of personnel who are willing to make the change with leadership and encouragement from the training cadre.

An online learning management system can help make any police department's training program more effective and efficient. Remember, bring in a superuser early to gain support and maximize the use of the available feature functionality, like building your own courses. These things, along with creating that "every day is a training day" mentality, can ensure your agency sees strong utilization.



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