

How to Select the Right eLearning Authoring Tool

10 Considerations to Help You Make Your Decision



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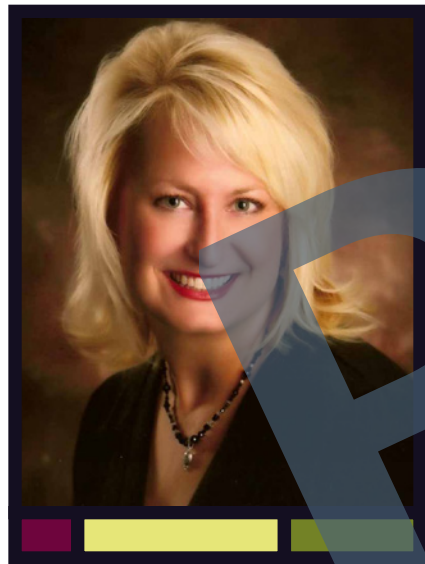
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Acknowledgements

Authoring tools have been around for over twenty years and every tool has its own benefits and drawbacks. Nevertheless, when you're responsible for achieving business results, it's hard to execute a winning blueprint when you are limited by your authoring tool.

With so many authoring tools offering numerous benefits, it can be challenging to find the one that meets your eLearning needs. While your authoring tool needs may vary depending upon training needs, budget, and your organization's requirements, there are critical questions worth exploring before making a purchase and investing time in a product. This eBook will help you with some tips on choosing the right authoring tool.

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What are the training requirements?

More and more people are getting into the training/learning and development field and creating ever more eLearning products and solutions. Before you choose an authoring tool, it is important to understand the needs and requirements of your specific training project. Does it need to be eLearning or face-to-face training? Would an instructional poster or job aid meet the learner's needs? Do you need to track if the user completed the training? If it does need to be eLearning do you need images, videos, and/or virtual reality? What are the outcomes that you want this training to accomplish? How are you going to show that you met that goal?

The answers to these questions will vary and this is where a Needs Analysis and/or a Task Analysis is beneficial.

Once you understand the business training needs required, you can decide what can be accomplished with a job aid, a video, or eLearning. With a clear understanding of the project, the eLearning tool features and capabilities can be reviewed to ensure it meets your current and future needs.

Content authoring tools

The foremost feature of any eLearning authoring tool is the ability to create material quickly. Most of these learning projects will include pages or slides, images, text, audio and video.

From there you will look at which tool suits the development need. Are you going to create a simple page-turner or single scrolling course? I.E: if your developers are new to the field and most comfortable with PowerPoint, this might be the most efficient choice. If you have a need for branching scenarios or simulations using analogies and case studies, you will want to make sure your authoring tool can meet those needs.



What is accessibility?

Accessibility in eLearning involves the creation of an online learning experience within which as many people as possible can participate. Around the world, government agencies, those with government contracts, educational institutions, and many businesses focus on accessibility because their country has laws protecting the rights of people with disabilities.

While there are laws protecting the rights of people with disabilities, these laws vary on if the law applies to public sectors, private sectors, and the government. In Canada, the law is known as Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) or the Canadian Human Rights Act; in Europe, it is the European Accessibility Act (EAA); in Ireland, it is the Discrimination Disability Act (DDA); in England, Scotland and Wales, it is the Equality Act of 2010; or in the United States, it is Section 508. No matter what it is called around the world, people are working diligently to make sure that accessibility standards are harmonized and don't contradict each other. These laws are most often based on the international, technical standard of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) developed by World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).

It is essential to be aware of the existing standards and if your project is subject to any laws. This knowledge of whether accessibility is a gesture of goodwill or a crucial requirement will affect the development process and the tools you choose.

Accessibility is often equated with serving the needs of people with disabilities and many businesses look at accessible eLearning as a means to alleviate the litigation threat; if we instead look at accessible eLearning as an opportunity to give learners multiple ways to access the content, we will create a better learning opportunity for all participants.

According to the Center of Disease Control, 26%, or one in four adults in the United States, lives with a disability. If one quarter of your learners cannot access your learning content, imagine the impact on your organization—including profitability.

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html>

In the modern workplace, accessible learning has broadened to include considerations for every learner of any age, in any state of health, with different needs and abilities. As the corporate world moves to embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion, the focus on accessibility has increased as accessibility is an outcome of inclusive design.

“Accessible eLearning” refers to making courses accessible to those with visual, auditory, physical, and/or other disabilities.

What tools or features are included to help me develop my content?

In the simplest sense, a rapid authoring tool accelerates training development and delivery. As a general rule of thumb, this speed is accomplished using one or more of the following strategies:

- Provide pre-built templates
- Provide starter content
- Reduce complexity by limiting authoring choices

While those items are important, we should also look at the Authoring tool as a long-term investment; for example, in addition to current requirements, one should also keep an eye on the future when searching for the appropriate system. It is often tempting to make a decision based on the requirements of current projects. But what will the situation be in a few months or in a year or two? Just because a company may not currently need mobile learning, gamification, accessibility, and/or interesting, unique courses, does not necessarily mean that will be the case in the coming year(s).

It makes sense to choose an authoring tool that not only meets current needs, but also offers development potential for the coming years with a tool that has flexibility and scalability.

What should I look for with flexibility?

What kind of learning do you want to create? Scenarios, games, micro learning, branching, pre-assessments, or through storytelling? Is your tool highly template driven, fully open, or both? Even in eLearning, trends come and go. Some stick around while others don't. Is your tool investment short-term trendy, or in it for the long haul? Will you hit a wall and be forced to make a costly change when you want to add virtual reality or accessibility? Does your tool encourage the flexibility to create your own layouts and templates? Does it encourage and allow you to reuse learning objects? Sharing and reusing content is very important for today's developers.

What should I look for with scalability?

How much eLearning content do you need to produce and how quickly? Is there workflow that boosts productivity after your initial investment and does it increase over time? In today's rapidly changing world, we need to be able to do more with less so the authoring tool should also scale up to the demands of updating and upgrading your projects. While all of the major authoring tools offer themes and templates to assist in your development, and as mentioned with a previous consideration, many of these built-in assets can also be used to assist with the inclusion, localization efforts, and accessibility. Templates can range from a single page layout, to a more complex interaction, to a set of matching layouts with the same overall design



What type of support and training do you want or need?

Both novice and expert developers will benefit from access to readily available product support and training. Software products usually come equipped with a knowledge base and or some form of documentation. Some also offer an online community where you can interact with other developers and designers, ask questions, and get troubleshooting help.

While some resources will be better than others, being unable to reach an actual person in your moment of need can be frustrating. Therefore, you will want a clear understanding of how support tickets are handled and who answers them. While very few companies offer on-demand phone support 24/7, they

should at least offer a phone number, live chat support, and/or a sales representative who can assist during urgent situations. It is also worth asking if product support comes with your purchase, or if it is charged separately as this can make a big difference in your authoring experience.

Permanent contacts, workshops, webinars, consultancy services, both before and after the purchase are all measures of good service, thus creating a trustful rapport with the service provider as this is normally a long-term relationship.

In addition to regularly scheduled webinars, some additional support and training could include: tutorials and how-to guides, video guides, updates and upgrades. The company should also include instructor-led training through the company or training partners.



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