

Make Your Software Vendor Work For You

In the following article, Cem Erdem gives his thoughts on how lifelong learning programs can best develop effective partnerships with software vendors. Erdem explains that the best partnerships extend beyond the buying and selling of software systems into ongoing communication between both buyer and seller. Erdem then sets his focus on the ways in which software vendors distinguish themselves in these partnerships with lifelong learning programs. The author tells us several of the most important features that potential customers should look for from their software vendors. Erdem concludes that the best partnerships are forged on open communication between learning programs and software vendors.

Abstract

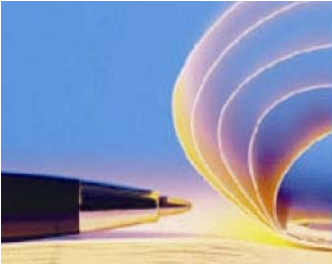
We know that it helps to analyze the roles that various groups play in your learning program, and from there, to optimize each group's supporting role in creating rewarding learning experiences. Creating partnerships with the various participants in learning can help you grow your lifelong learning program in many ways. In this article we focus on the support services that go into helping your learning organization – vendors whose goods and services you use to help your program. We will take an in-depth look into what makes a good software system vendor.

Cem (gem) Erdem,
CEO and President,
Augusoft, Inc.

Effective support services help your business in many ways. The main reason behind creating partnerships is to expand your program's resources beyond what it currently has. By creating partnerships with established support services, your program can gain crucial resources with a smaller investment of time or money than if you tried to grow these resources alone. When you create a partnership with an outside stakeholder, you can rely on their strengths, and they, in return, can rely on yours.

Finding the right support service is a matter of analyzing what they can do for you, and how well they match up with your program. Here are some tips on finding the software vendor that will go beyond offering a mere software system, a software vendor whose expertise will become an integral part of your business.

Software vendors that create effective products take your business considerations into account when designing their products. They know your business needs in addition to their own. They create their products to meet the changing business needs of your institution. When looking at a software product, go over the feature list: Does the product fit your basic business needs? Does it seem as if it was built to fit actual lifelong learning experience?



Effective support service partnerships are best forged between flexible businesses. If a vendor has a flexible approach to its business, it can create an individualized management system that fits your program's unique needs through small customizations. Can their product be fitted to your program, and not just a "typical" customer?

Successful vendor partnerships also plan for flexibility from your program as well. Their software doesn't constrict your business operations. When you add a new software system to your learning program, it is natural to change your business plan/learning model to fit it as you tailor your registration processes to best utilize new features. Software vendors should be able to expand or scale back features in their product to meet your needs. Your organization should be able to make small changes to your business model to better use your management tools, without needing an overhaul of your software system.

Good support service providers have accessible and knowledgeable customer service. They can answer your questions quickly, and help you find a solution that best fits the direction your business is going in. They have knowledgeable staff that know your business, as well as their own. They can help you with tailoring your business practices to help fit the software. They can help combine your current business practices in the best way with your software solution.

Additionally, the effective learning software company keeps up to date with trends in their industry. When you buy education materials from a publisher, you need to make sure that they are up to date. The same applies to software management systems. The vendor needs to keep abreast of the newest trends in technology, so that it can best harness these technologies. But they also must use these technologies in a way that is appropriate for the lifelong learning industry. This means finding a balance between accessibility and ease of use. A technology that is too new may not always be accessible by your customers, nor will it be easy for you to use.

These are the features you want to look for in a partnership with an outside stakeholder in the learning management industry. Obviously, in any partnership there is some give and take, stakeholders can gain from your business knowledge as well, and may make demands of you when creating new products. Communication is paramount in making sure you get the best out of a partnership with a lifelong learning software company.