



e-Learning in Associations &  
Professional Bodies

**United States v United Kingdom**



## Background

WBT Systems has spent the last five years working with Associations and Professional Bodies, helping them implement online learning programs. TopClass, our Learning Management System (LMS) is a software platform that helps associations manage, track and sell training courses and events online. We've implemented TopClass at several associations and professional bodies both sides of the Atlantic.

We've always had our own thoughts and perceptions as to what the key drivers and e-Learning differences were between organizations based in the United States compared with those in the United Kingdom. Lively debate between the WBT sales, marketing and professional services divisions was one of the reasons why we decided to conduct this survey.

But more importantly, we also wanted to understand similarities and differences in what was going on in the industry so that we could tailor our services and ultimately offer a better and a more specialized and relevant service to our UK and US customers.

So the upshot of this was that we set out to produce a report based on a brief survey, one that compares

current e-Learning practices in the UK with those in the US, specifically within associations and professional bodies.

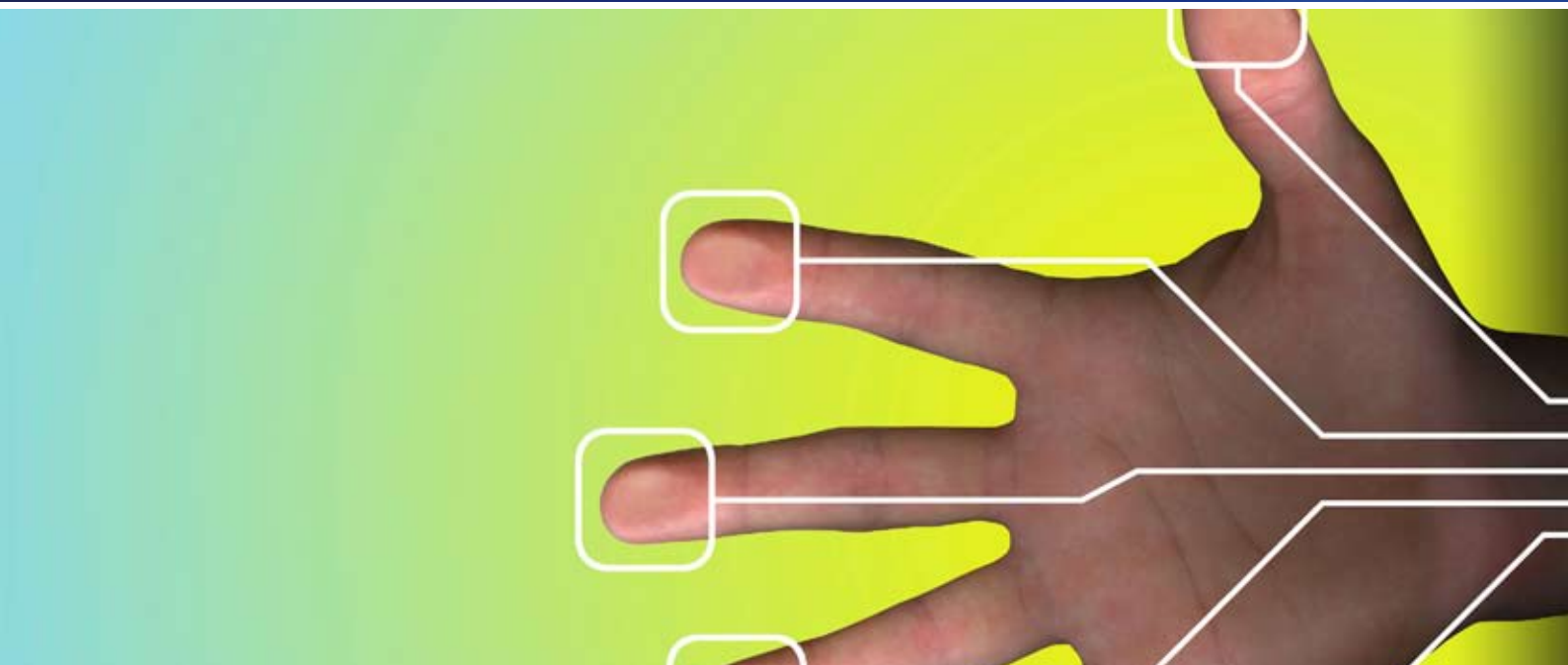
### **The Survey**

The survey covers a number of key areas including; different types of training offered, online learning formats, Learning Management System usage, functionality and implementation plans. We received over one hundred valid survey responses from organizations ranging in size from 60 to 680,000 members. We've compiled the survey results together with our commentary in the pages that follow.

### **Our Thanks**

We'd like to thank all those respondents who took the time to complete our survey. We hope you find the results interesting and informative, and perhaps they will provide you with some ideas of what your organization might want to consider from an e-Learning perspective going forward.

*The WBT Team*



## Survey Take-Aways

Results and further analysis on individual survey questions will be provided in the section that follows, but before we proceed, we've highlighted a few key survey take-aways. These are the findings that we thought were most interesting.

### **Learning Management System usage is higher in the UK**

Survey results indicate that Learning Management System usage is higher in the United Kingdom than in the United States. 45% of organizations in the UK are using a Learning Management System to manage training, compared with 38% in the US. While the percentage difference is not significant, the fact that UK associations have a higher LMS adoption rate is certainly contrary to expectation.

The reason for the higher LMS usage in the UK may be attributed to a simple difference in LMS terminology. As we all know, the term "LMS" means different things to different people but WBT has generally found in its dealings with associations in the US that a Learning Management System is considered to be a formal system or software application for managing and tracking training programs.

On the other hand, in the UK, professional bodies generally consider a Learning Management System to be any kind of web-based application that facilitates course completion. The more loosely defined UK LMS terminology may be the reason for higher adoption levels found in our survey.

### **Learning Management Systems in US offer greater functionality**

The second point of note relates to Learning Management System functionality – when asked about the range of functionality provided by LMSs, survey results showed that for each of the seven technical capabilities surveyed, LMSs in the US offered greater levels of functionality, compared with those in the UK.

The biggest technical differences were seen with eCommerce and self-serve certificate printing, where a much higher percentage of LMSs in the US offered these capabilities. This also ties in with the point outlined above regarding LMS terminology. If UK organizations use the term LMS more loosely, then it makes sense that LMS functionality in the UK will be lighter than that offered in US systems. However, it may also be attributed to budget constraints in UK organizations.

*“Learning Management System usage is higher in the United Kingdom, but UK systems are not as functionally rich as those in the United States.”*

## Results in Brief

**Blended learning** (mix of classroom and online learning) is offered by 89% of US organizations and 71% of UK organizations.

The number of organizations that **only** offer classroom training, with no online learning, is **four times higher** in the UK, compared with the US.

Webinars are more than twice as popular in the United States **and are offered by 95% of associations**. This percentage is much lower in the UK at only 38%.

**Learning Management System usage is higher in the UK** with 45% adoption rate compared with 38% in the US.

**One in five LMSs** used in both the US and UK do not have the ability to view a learner's training history.

While the US topped the stats on each of the Learning Management System functional areas, in many cases the results were relatively close. The two big exceptions were;

- **Certificate printing** - only 18% of LMSs used in the UK provide self serve certificate printing compared with 71% in the US.
- **eCommerce** - more than half of the Learning Management Systems used in the US have an eCommerce engine compared with a quarter of UK systems.

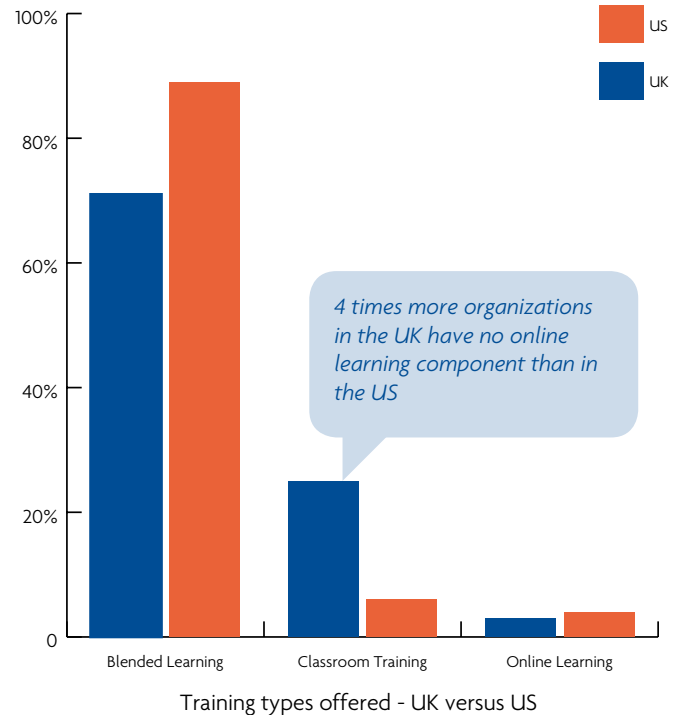
**Read on for the full results...**

# Q1: What type of training does your organization offer?

We asked participants about the type of training offered at their organizations and provided three choices – classroom training, online learning or a mix of classroom and online (blended learning).

## Results

- Blended learning was most popular across all organizations in both the US and UK. A comparison by country shows that 89% offer blended learning in the US compared to 71% in the UK.
- 6% of US associations offer classroom training as the only training option compared to 25% in the UK. This means that four times more organizations in the UK have no online learning component.



## Our Take

As expected, blended learning was most popular across organizations in the US and UK. This is hardly surprising since it's generally accepted that the most effective type of learning is a blend of both classroom and online learning. Students have the advantage of face-to-face interaction with their fellow students, and tutors have the ability to share and discuss different ideas and concepts in their chosen area of study. Learners can also study online in their own time, review videos & podcasts and take quizzes or exams to test their knowledge.

Looking at the "classroom only" category, (i.e. those organizations that do not offer online learning as a training format), almost a quarter of UK organizations fell into this category. By comparison, in the United States only 6% of organizations responded that they only offer classroom training.

Considering usage of Learning Management Systems is higher in the United Kingdom, this finding came as a surprise.

One potential explanation for this is that UK associations and professional bodies represent extremes. Some seem to have embraced technology to a high degree while others have avoided it completely, opting to stick with only classroom-based training.

The higher level of "classroom only" training in the UK makes us wonder how these associations track attendance and award CEUs and certificates. Perhaps there is still a significant amount of manual re-keying of attendance data into spreadsheets?

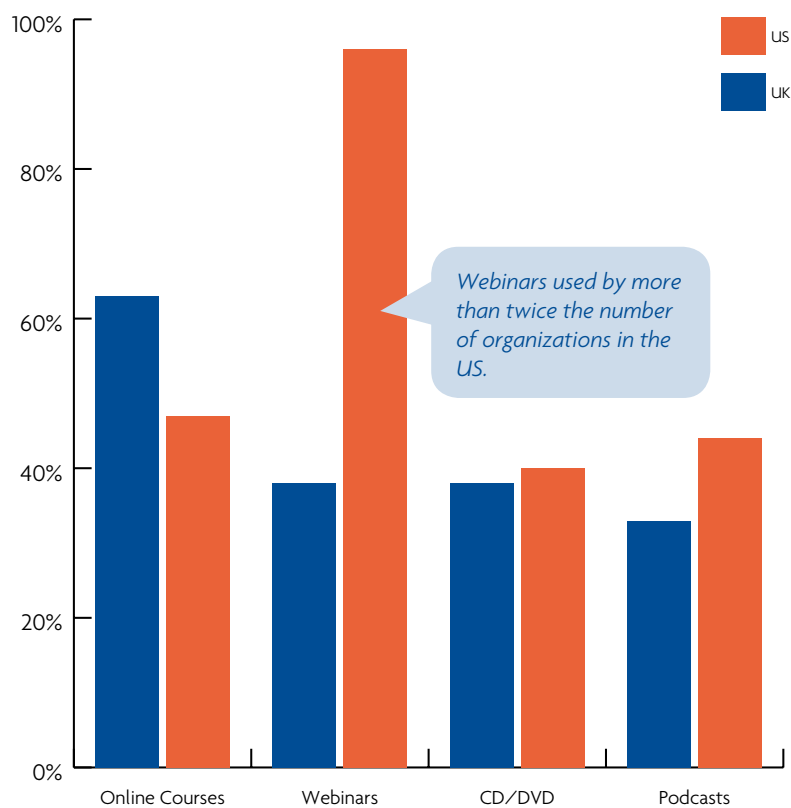
## Q2: What kind of online learning does your organization offer?

We asked participants about the specific types of online learning offered, and provided four choices - online courses, webinars, CD/DVD and Podcasts.

### Results

Webinars were most popular particularly in the United States where usage was significantly higher compared to the United Kingdom.

95% of organizations in the US offer webinars compared to 38% of organizations in the UK.



Types of online learning offered - United States versus United Kingdom

### Our Take

*As expected, webinars are extremely popular among US associations. The US market in general seems to have embraced webinars simply because of their many benefits. These include the ability to reach a wider audience, low delivery cost, optional recording and repeatability and general accessibility.*

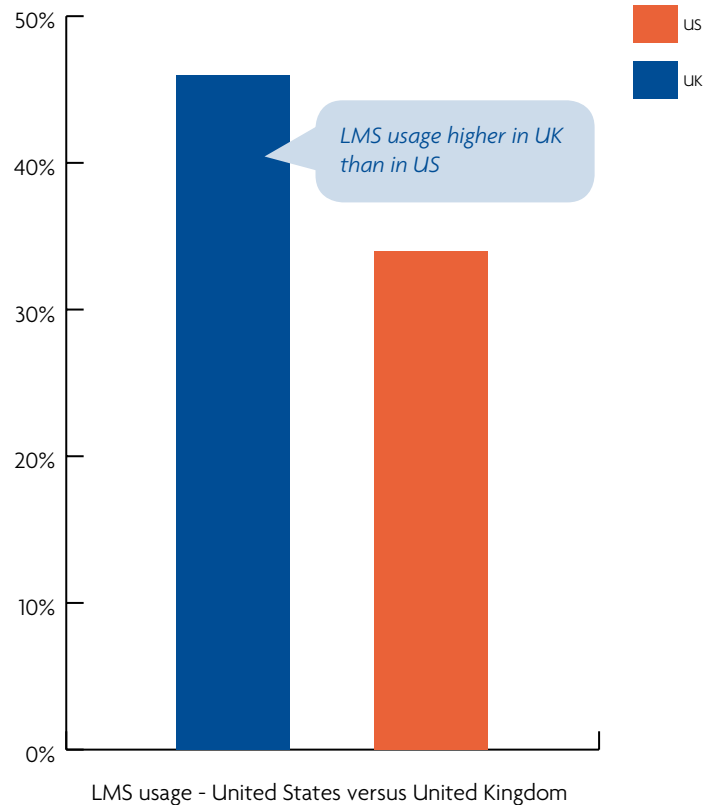
*By comparison, webinar adoption is much slower in the UK where they are used by only 38% of organizations. Given the numerous advantages and benefits of webinars as an effective, flexible and cost effective training format, it is surprising that they are not more popular.*

## Q3: Does your organization use an LMS to manage training?

### Results

More than a third of all organizations across the United States and United Kingdom are using a Learning Management System to manage training.

A comparison by country shows that 45% of UK organizations are using an LMS while 38% of associations in the US have implemented one.



### Our Take

*Interest in e-Learning technology has increased in recent years, primarily as a result of budget cutbacks in travel related expenses and employees not wishing to be away from the office. For this reason, it was expected that LMS usage would be a bit higher than the 35% found across all organizations.*

*WBT feels there may be a lack of knowledge when it comes to the benefits of using an LMS to manage*

*and track training. Potentially LMSs are seen to be expensive, complex or generally out of reach of many organizations. If this is the case, LMS vendors need to better publicize the benefits in terms of the revenue generation and cost savings that can be achieved from using an LMS. We do expect that as organizations become better informed, LMS usage will increase.*

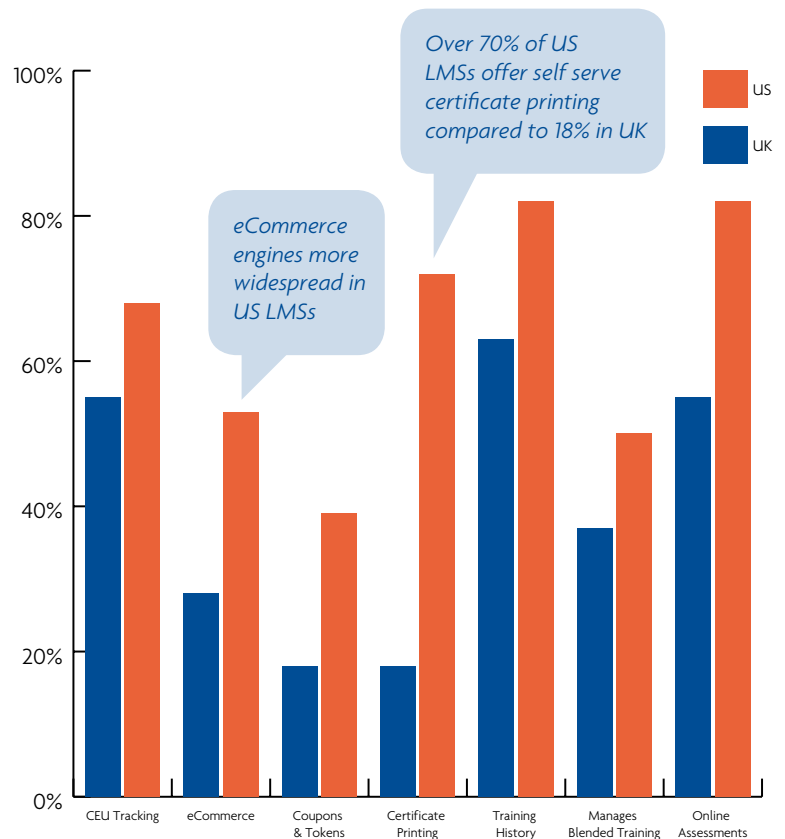
## Q4: What functionality does your LMS provide?

For those organizations using an LMS to manage training, we asked about system functionality, examining seven key functional areas - CEU tracking, eCommerce, support for discount coupons, certificate printing, training history, management of blended learning, and online assessments.

### Results

LMS functionality by country shows that systems used in the US offer higher levels of functionality across each of the key feature areas. The biggest variation was seen with self serve certificate printing where 71% of US systems include this functionality, while only 18% of UK learning management systems offer it.

In addition 72% of Learning Management Systems used in the UK do not have an eCommerce engine for online purchases, compared to 48% in the United States.



Learning Management System functionality – UK versus US

### Our Take

*The results to this question highlighted some interesting information - one in five LMSs used in both the US and UK do not have the ability to view a learner's training history. A training history displays a learner's detailed list of the courses taken, examinations completed, certifications and any other information relating to a learner's training status. WBT believes this functionality to be a necessary part of any learning management system, yet one in five LMSs does not have it!*

*Another point worth noting is the fact that a significant number of LMSs do not have the ability to track Continuing Education Units. CEU and CPD tracking is extremely important for associations and professional bodies, yet more than a third of LMSs do not offer this capability.*

*The ability for members to print their own certificates is also a major benefit not only from a cost perspective where significant savings to be made, but also from an administrative perspective. Preparing, printing and postage of certificates can be both costly and time consuming. More than two thirds (71%) of US organizations are reaping these benefits, but this does not seem to be the case in the UK, where a mere 18% of LMSs offer this functionality.*

*At the beginning of this report in the take-aways section, we touched on the fact that difference in LMS terminology in the UK and US may account for the higher LMS adoption levels seen in the UK. This may also explain why LMS's in the UK have lower levels of functionality.*

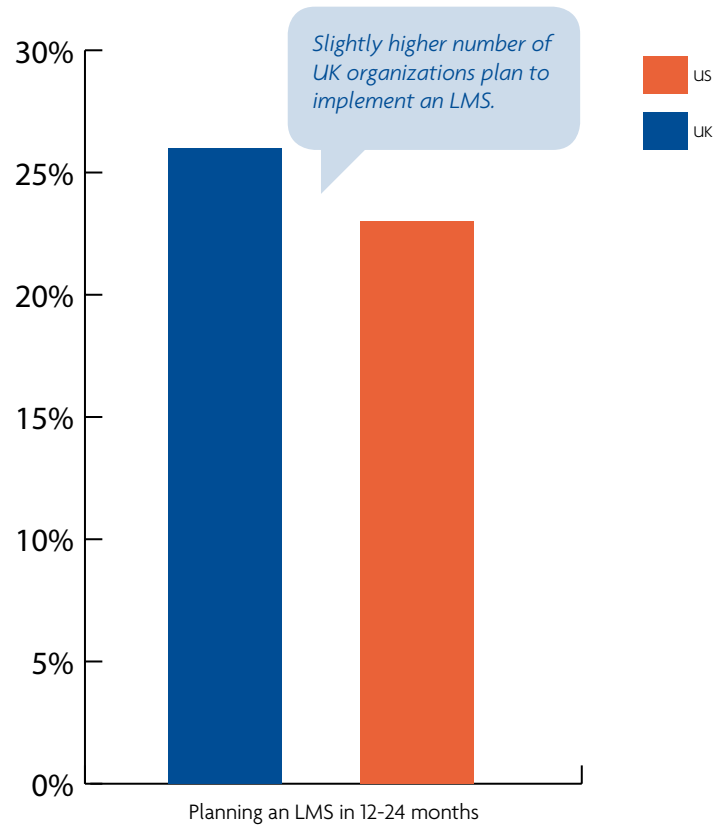
## Q5: Is your organization planning to implement an LMS?

Organizations not currently using an LMS were asked if they had plans to implement one in the next 12-24 months.

### Results

Findings showed that more than a quarter of organizations plan to, or have already begun the implementation process.

When we compare this result by country we found that 23% of organizations in the United States are planning to implement an LMS compared to a slightly higher 25% in the UK. A large number of organizations have no plans to use a Learning Management System.



### Our Take

*WBT believes that as training budgets continue to be reduced, organizations will look for faster, cheaper and better ways of delivering and managing training. With the correct implementation and execution, e-Learning offers a number of benefits not only for the association and professional body,*

*but also for its members. Having the ability to offer members and potential members a high value service to meet their professional development needs is critical in today's market and not only impacts on member retention but also, and very importantly, offers additional revenue stream.*



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