



HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT DEPLOYMENT MODEL FOR YOUR LEARNING MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

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WHITE PAPER

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When choosing a learning management system (LMS), your deployment model — how your system is deployed so your end users can access and use it — isn't just a technical decision, it's a business decision.

Whether you choose to go with a software-as-a-service (SaaS) model, an on-premise model, or something in between, you're not just deciding on price points or features — you'll also need to consider where the application is hosted, versioning, upgrade cycles, and more.

Typically, LMSs are solely available as SaaS solutions, with a select few vendors also providing on-premise options. In contrast, SumTotal offers all of the following deployment models:

- SaaS
- SaaS extended
- Hosted
- On-premise

It's critical to know the pros and cons of each deployment model, determine your business needs, and understand how your LMS provider can deploy your solution.

In this white paper, we'll dive into each deployment model to help you understand its features and requirements. Then, we'll discuss how you can make the right decision for your organization's learning program.

SAAS

SaaS is a software licensing model that allows organizations to access software on a subscription basis via external vendor-hosted servers. It gives you access to software via a web browser or mobile device, rather than requiring you to install software onto individual machines or an on-premise server.

WHO SHOULD USE THE SAAS MODEL?

The flexibility, scalability, and cost-effectiveness of a SaaS deployment make SaaS ideal for companies of all sizes because it's relatively easy to grow or reduce your usage as your organization changes. Most industries have adopted SaaS solutions across their organizations.

"Selecting a new learning management system should not only meet your business requirements, but also your technical requirements and preferred model of hosting. Don't let your selected vendor force you into a decision that disrupts your preferred technology and deployment models."

— CRAIG FEARON,
VP OF PRODUCT, SUMTOTAL

SaaS is likely the right model for you if you don't require control over the timing of your LMS's upgrades, nor validation or an extensive testing period for patches or new versions. With a SaaS model, you'll always be on the latest version, and you'll never worry about downtime due to upgrades.

SaaS is also a good choice if you don't require full control over the environment in which your data is retained. Most SaaS vendors will have multiple customers in a single database — so while the potential for data to commingle is low, it's possible.

If you need your own server for security purposes, most SaaS models currently on the market won't be the right choice. However, SumTotal's SaaS model offers a dedicated database for each server.

BENEFITS OF A SAAS MODEL

- Published upgrade schedule for new versions and patches
- Always on the latest version, with new features and fixes incorporated
- Priced lowest out of all deployment models
- Scheduled maintenance periods for patches
- No hardware needed
- No additional professional services costs for future upgrades
- Fastest and most rapid deployment
- Disaster recovery and backup handled by the vendor

DRAWBACKS OF A SAAS MODEL

- No control over upgrade cycles
- Heavily regulated industries may need more testing and validation time than SaaS can offer
- More frequent updates mean that users need to periodically learn about new features or adapt to a new user experience (UX)

SAAS EXTENDED

A SaaS extended model is deployed in the same way as a SaaS model, but offers a longer testing cycle for new releases.

WHO SHOULD USE THE SAAS EXTENDED MODEL?

If your business is in a more regulated industry that requires software solutions to be carefully tested and changes documented — or if you simply want a slower rate of change for your end users — the SaaS Extended model may be the right solution for you.

While you can't indefinitely defer upgrades with this model, you'll get more time than usual to test upgrades prior to production deployment. That said, keep in mind that although you'll be able to ensure the upgrades are fully documented and validated, you won't be on the latest release of what your LMS solution has to offer in terms of upgraded/new features or UX.

If being slightly behind on upgrades won't hinder your business requirements and the additional testing time is critical, this deployment model could be the right choice.

BENEFITS OF A SAAS EXTENDED MODEL

- Published upgrade schedule for new versions and patches
- Current version, but not latest release
- More time allowed for detailed testing and installation qualification (IQ) validation
- Scheduled maintenance periods for patches
- No hardware needed
- No additional professional services costs for future upgrades
- Fast deployment
- Disaster recovery and backup handled by the vendor

DRAWBACKS OF A SAAS EXTENDED MODEL

- Higher cost than pure SaaS
- Not always on the most current version
- Users may need time to get used to new features or UX

PRIVATE CLOUD/HOSTED

A private cloud — or hosted — deployment model gives you the same ease of setup as a SaaS solution, but lets you upgrade on your schedule.

WHO SHOULD USE THE PRIVATE CLOUD MODEL?

This model is ideal for organizations that need more control over their solution's environment and upgrade schedule, and are willing to pay more for professional services, dedicated servers, and upgrade services.

Businesses operating in heavily regulated industries may need to consider a private cloud deployment model for their LMS. This model gives you as much control over a vendor-hosted option as possible, including allowing you to manage and defer most major upgrade cycles. You'll get more time for testing and can control the pace at which new UX is deployed, although there may be restrictions regarding how many versions you can be behind the current release.

BENEFITS OF A PRIVATE CLOUD/HOSTED MODEL

- Maximum level of control for a vendor-hosted deployment model
- Minimal disruption, cost, and effort due to fewer upgrades
- Major upgrades are deployed on your schedule (some restrictions may apply)
- You define the testing time frame
- Scheduled maintenance periods for patches
- No hardware or onsite deployment needed
- Disaster recovery and backup handled by the vendor

DRAWBACKS OF A PRIVATE CLOUD/HOSTED MODEL

- Higher cost than SaaS models due to additional fees for hosting, professional services, and upgrade services
- Not always on the most current version

ON-PREMISE

An on-premise deployment model means your LMS will be installed on company-issued servers that you own and operate independently of your LMS vendor.

Although on-premise software is less common today, businesses in industries with strict regulations — including public-sector companies and organizations in sensitive areas such as biological research or nuclear energy — often prefer the security and control that it offers.

WHO SHOULD USE THE ON-PREMISE MODEL?

Regulated industries such as energy, defense, and research may benefit most from an on-premise deployment, as this model will allow them full control over their LMS and ensure that stringent data security standards are being followed. Where security and documentation are the most critical decision point, time to deployment isn't necessarily a priority.

Companies with in-house IT departments and the staff to manage the full software lifecycle of installation and ongoing upgrades will be well-suited to an on-premise deployment.

"On-premise applications are not an extinct species. There are still a large number of organizations that – for a variety of reasons – require an on-premise deployment."

— CRAIG FEARON,
VP OF PRODUCT, SUMTOTAL

BENEFITS OF AN ON-PREMISE MODEL

- Complete control over the data and applications within your environment
- Less disruption and minimal change for end users
- Major upgrades and patches are deployed on your schedule
- You define the testing time frame
- Full control over access

DRAWBACKS OF AN ON-PREMISE MODEL

- Generally the highest cost model due to license fees, annual maintenance fees, professional services, servers and infrastructure costs, IT staffing costs, and upgrade services
- Extended deployment time frame
- You may end up several versions behind the current release, so users won't have access to the latest features

HOW TO CHOOSE THE BEST DEPLOYMENT MODEL FOR YOUR BUSINESS

There's no single "best" deployment model for an LMS — the right model for you will depend on your business needs and the tradeoffs you're willing to make. For instance, a SaaS model will be a faster deployment, but you won't have the same control over the timing of upgrades that you'd get with a hosted or on-premise model.

Here are some questions you should ask yourself and your team as you decide which deployment model is best for your learning program:

"Make a technical and hosting business decision that is right for your business. Not what is right for your vendor."

— CRAIG FEARON,
VP OF PRODUCT, SUMTOTAL

- **Do you need to get up and running quickly?** If your biggest priority is to get your learning program off the ground sooner rather than later, a SaaS deployment is your best bet. With SaaS, you can start onboarding users shortly after your subscription begins.
- **Are you in a heavily regulated industry?** Industries such as pharmaceuticals, energy, financial services, and government are often subject to strict data security regulations. Companies in such industries may prefer a hosted or on-premise solution over a SaaS model since these allow more time for testing and documentation before upgrading.
- **Do you want to expose your users to as little change as possible?** If so, hosted or on-premise models are best. A company with a high headcount of low-skilled workers — or even high-skilled workers who don't care for change — may benefit most from these models, as users won't need retraining on new features as often.
- **Do you need more time for validation?** A SaaS or SaaS extended model gives you little time for testing and validation, which may not be suitable for a company in a regulated industry where documentation is critical. If you need more time, a hosted or on-premise solution will be more appropriate.
- **Do you need or want to access the latest features as soon as they're available?** A SaaS model will keep you fully up to date on your LMS' newest features and UX.
- **Do you have the in-house IT staff to manage a deployment?** An on-premise deployment only makes sense if you have the in-house tech experts to manage it. If you don't already have the resources in place and you don't want to hire a new team, a hosted or SaaS model would better suit your needs.

CONCLUSION:

As you compare your LMS options, look beyond features and UX to the deployment models that each vendor offers. If you don't see a wide array of deployment models, you may be forced into making a business decision that doesn't meet the needs of your organization.

Ultimately, making an informed choice of deployment model is about understanding the regulatory environment you're operating within, the level of control you need over upgrade cycles, and how quickly you want to deploy your solution and get ongoing upgrades. In other words, there's no single best option for everyone. Use this guide to help you understand the trade-offs associated with each deployment model — and, ultimately, to make the right choice for your organization.

SumTotal offers each of these deployment models, so we can work with you on finding what's best for your business. If you've read this guide and want to know more about the right choice for your organization, please [reach out](#) and we'll be happy to help.

ABOUT SUMTOTAL

SumTotal provides a unified, comprehensive Learning and Talent Development suite that delivers measurable impact across the entire employee lifecycle. With SumTotal, organizations can build a culture of learning that is critical to growth, success, and business sustainability. SumTotal's award-winning technology provides talent acquisition, onboarding, learning management, and talent management solutions across some of the most innovative, complex and highly regulated industries, including technology, airlines, financial services, healthcare, manufacturing, and pharmaceuticals.

Skillsoft and SumTotal are partners to thousands of leading global organizations, including many Fortune 500 companies. The company features three award-winning systems that support learning, performance, and success: Skillsoft learning content, the Percipio intelligent learning experience platform, and the SumTotal suite for Talent Development, which offers measurable impact across the entire employee lifecycle.

Learn more at sumtotalsystems.com.



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