



## WHERE'S THE PRICE TAG?

Peter Gray delves into the thorny question of why learning technology suppliers seem so reluctant to provide up-front prices.

**M**any organisations are daunted by the prospect of entering the world of learning technology to find people development solutions. Solution providers seem reluctant to hang a price tag on their services and offerings early in the sales cycle – why is this?

It's an interesting exercise to spend some time leafing through the brochures and colourful marketing collateral of some LMS providers currently peddling their wares in the UK learning market. As hard

as I've tried to find an advertised price – I've failed.

You can pick 'n' mix what suits you best from the strap line: whether it be 'easiest', 'most cost effective', 'most innovative', 'effective and engaging', 'ultimate' etc. But whatever attracts your attention; it certainly won't be the price tag. Not a hint – anywhere.

The only way to understand just how many noughts you may have to add to a given number, in order to implement your

learning strategy, is by first engaging with the supplier and getting the shock later. It really shouldn't be like this.

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We didn't invent the mobile phone – we simply found ways to deliver content and learning via mobile devices. Neither did

learning technologists invent the 'eShop'. We simply adapted its principles to provide highly complex course booking systems capable of allowing organisations to offer huge numbers of products (courses) to their buyers (staff members) – all requested and approved by line managers. For 'order history' read 'courses you have attended'.

So, as technology-driven learning solution providers we have to understand technology and how best to adapt it to address learning and organisational change. We should always strive to understand clearly the business challenge and deploy a learning technology solution to address this challenge *and* earn its ROI. So, if we're prepared to speak of return on investment (and we should be), why are we so reluctant to talk about the RLI – the required level of investment?

In general terms we know how much it costs to build an LMS or in TWM's case, a learning portal or corporate academy, because when we're asked, we spend time explaining in intricate detail what makes up the price. So why can't we offer this up at the point of interest as opposed to the point of sale?

Experience tells us that the reluctance to offer a fixed price is inextricably linked to the wide range of 'unknowns' that are present when first discussing a learning solution. As technology providers, we need answers to a massively diverse range of questions before we can propose a solution. Subsequently, there is all too

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often a scope process, which further adds to the mix of unanswered questions – virtually all of which have a financial impact.

Bespoke learning solutions will always come with complex costing models.

But is the same true of the less bespoke learning solution? Are we entering a phase in learning solution development where there is an opportunity to simplify our offerings, and in doing so, widen our market perspective?

That is to simplify in the sense that, as bespoke providers we've reached a point where some of what we've learnt and developed for the aforementioned complex solutions can now be 'stripped back' and packaged for a market which may have felt itself a little left out of the learning technology arena – small organisations.

Can we adapt the bespoke offerings built for big organisations and make the technology available at a fraction of the cost to smaller players (and big organisations too)? While we're at it,

instead of talking about a 'fraction of the cost', can we put a fixed price ticket on the product as well?

Supply adapted solutions at affordable prices? Yes we can! Many SMEs that have not yet invested in L&D technology recognise that such solutions are probably their only option, when it comes to supporting change in growing organisations. Surely the way forward is for the learning technology industry to tempt this new and relatively untapped customer base with clear prices and immediate benefits.

The price tag at The Working Manager, for example, is £7,500 plus VAT (yes, a fixed priced at last!) This buys a newly launched Performance Pathway Builder. It's fair to say that even a couple of years ago, such capabilities and functionality, would realistically only have been viable for large organisations with thousands of users. This pared back version of the TWM D2 platform continues to offer massive capability to large organisations. But it also now offers an entry level to much smaller ones.

Years of experience and understanding about employee engagement has been deployed to develop flexible functionality including: on-boarding, qualifications and certification, sales development, technical training, career development, and compliance. By adapting 'high level and complex solutions' and demystifying the associated costs, entry level learning portals can now be established for less than £10,000.

In the next year or two, a whole new plethora of technological advances will be available to the industry. As always, we will embrace them and deliver advice to big-player clients.

As we advance forward technologically, all of us in the industry should strive harder to maximise our expertise for the benefit of new and smaller organisations. And reveal the price up-front!



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