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A Guide to Selecting The Right Fire Service Training Management System

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In-person learning will always be a part of fire service and EMS training. There are simply too many skills that require physical interaction—everything from CPR training to forcible entry exams—to realistically think otherwise. But there's also room for improvement in the way fire departments and their overseeing organizations deliver other categories of content—concepts that can be effectively taught and reinforced through online learning. A successful blended training program is most effective when leveraging a training management system (TMS) that was built for public safety operations.

More than just your standard LMS or training module in another system, a TMS is sophisticated software that offers a broader scope of functionality for comprehensive training management, including planning and scheduling, compliance tracking, certification management, advanced analysis and reporting, and more.

In this guide, you will learn what a TMS should offer and the questions to ask to ensure you select the training management system that's right for you.

What Should A Training Management System Do?

While online training often goes hand-in-hand with a training management system, it isn't the only type of training that benefits from this technology. Utilized properly, a TMS can:

- Deliver online learning content with just a few clicks
- Supplement and support training done in-person
- Support scheduling efforts for in-person training
- Track and document both in-person and online training
- Eliminate paper-based training processes and filing cabinets
- Streamline ISO audits and/or other organizational reviews
- Simplify meeting certification, recertification, and continuing education requirements
- Mitigate risk by ensuring training is well documented and records are available quickly

Simplified content management

Whether you utilize online training content offered by your TMS provider, purchase content from another third party, or import your own training into your TMS, a training management system makes it easy to manage, edit, and control the training new recruits and personnel receive.

Over time, best practices and technology evolve, and you may want to add new features to a course. Online courses make it simple to edit or incorporate new content to meet new standards or best practices.

Streamlined Delivery

A TMS improves every aspect of training delivery by removing or reducing time-consuming administrative tasks. Once assigned, online courses can be completed whenever time allows, which is particularly important for your volunteer and part-time personnel who have limited training availability. Courses can be assigned individually or grouped together based on recertification requirements and assigned in a few clicks.

By taking advantage of these benefits, your agency can make the most of the time and resources you have, mitigating the impacts of staffing shortages and other challenges faced by today's fire and EMS agencies.

Tracking Progress Should be Quick and Easy

With a TMS, training progress is easy to track, both on an individual level and across the agency. Trainees and supervisors can quickly see what has or has not been completed and critical due dates for continuing education or recertifications are never a surprise.

Administrators can utilize customizable reporting to check progress, quickly share with overseeing entities, and even simplify responding to ISO and OSHA audits.

What To Consider When Selecting A TMS

Once the choice has been made to implement a training management system, the next hurdle is choosing the one that's right for you. While there are many generic training management systems out there, a solution purpose-built for the fire service will be best suited to meet your needs. However, even when focusing only on those training management systems made with firefighters and EMS providers in mind, there are a variety of options.

Here are the questions to ask to ensure you pick the TMS that's right for your agency:

1.

Does the TMS offer the functionality you need?

Every fire service training management system offers different features and tools. What you need depends on how you plan to utilize the system and for what. When researching a system, key functionality to consider includes:

- Course authoring tools

- Access to quality firefighter, EMS, OSHA, and HR online courses

- Test building and a test bank

- A file repository

- Access to community resources

- Customizable credentials and learning tracks

- Policy distribution and acknowledgement

- Reporting and dashboards

- Pre-built training trackers for ISO, required EMS and fire continuing education, agency-specific training, etc.

- Maintaining and exporting records

- Auto-reporting of CEUs and recertification hours

- Customer support availability

- Manage in-person events and online registration

- Mobile-friendly support for anytime, anywhere learning

To learn more about functionality and features to consider when selecting the right TMS for your agency, download our checklist of essential functionality of fire service training management systems.

2.

How much will you rely on the vendor's courses?

Not all vendors offer pre-made course content, and the content may or may not meet the minimum training standards in your state. If you will be heavily relying on the course content provided by your TMS provider, it's important to select the one that will fulfill your training needs.

- Is the training accredited?

- Is it pre-approved by your state to meet training requirements?

- If it isn't pre-approved, will your state still accept the training for credit?

3.

Does the system meet your reporting needs?

Your state may require training records be routinely submitted to state certifying bodies. Training records could also be subject to audits or review, whether periodically or as requested.

Regardless of your specific situation, the TMS that streamlines these processes—by automatically fulfilling these reporting requirements with built-in tools or by making it easy to import/export data in the correct format for submission—will be the best choice for your situation.

4.

Does the TMS meet your technology specifications?

This question is often best answered by your IT department, but it should still be considered early in the selection process. Specific questions to ask include:

- Does it meet your IT security standards?

- Does it have an application programming interface (API)?

- Will it support the number of users you will need?

- Is the vendor advancing their technology to meet evolving needs?

- How easy is it to set up and use?

5.

Does it meet your goals for cost and implementation?

When selecting the TMS right for you, one of the questions that's often expected to be a major deciding factor is price. However, TMS solutions offered as-a-service (SaaS) are scalable to suit any agency, including agencies with limited budgets. When researching a TMS, determine the pricing model used by the vendor.

Another important factor to consider is implementation. If a solution is inexpensive but takes a long time to get up and running, the longer time to value might offset the lower initial cost.

6.

What else does the vendor offer?

Today, there are a variety of technology solutions available to support fire and EMS operations. If you are in the market for more than just a TMS, it's a good idea to review the vendor's entire portfolio and see what else may be worthwhile.

- Do they offer a live skills evaluation solution, and does it integrate with the TMS?

- Do they offer scheduling, asset management, or exposure tracking solutions?

- Can you bundle solutions and reduce overall costs?

- Does the TMS integrate with state standards and training systems?

Selecting The Right TMS Is Worth Your Time

There are many factors to consider when choosing a software solution for your agency. The importance of getting it right means an investment of research, comparison, and evaluation. Make your job easier by narrowing down the possibilities and finding a training solution that:

- Reduces administrative time spent on training management

- Supports your specific training needs

- Is built specifically for the fire service

- Meets your technology specifications

Optimizing your training program while ensuring it is also secure and meets the unique needs of fire and EMS is a tall order, but the right tools to support your efforts are out there.

Vector Solutions' suite of industry-leading software solutions for fire and EMS agencies includes training management systems, online training courses, live skill evaluations, truck checks and PPE/asset management, shift scheduling, critical incident and exposure tracking, academy automation, and auto-reporting to state standards and training systems.

Contact us today to learn how Vector Solutions can help you meet your training needs

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Technology to
TRAIN | PREPARE | RETAIN
Your People