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CMS Notes

What surprised you?

I was hoping to find a free hosted solution through the search and was disappointed that all the open source matches had to be installed on my school servers or could only be hosted for a fee. I was also expecting to find more matches for the features I selected, but think I had too many "requirements." I actually went back and redid my search with fewer options to see what else would be recommended. Sakai was mentioned and Olat, but again, they were pay-to-host.

I actually didn't find what I was looking for using this tool and that surprised me. I thought one of the options would fit my needs.

What didn't surprise you?

The CMS choices seemed to be very close in features and it made me realize that really any tool could be used effectively. The open source choices were similar to the paid choices also. I have found lots of great free resources for teachers and I think open source is definitely a rival for the commercial companies.

Which CMS are you going to use for this course? why?

I wasn't happy with my choices and began thinking about the LMS alternatives that I found in the article I posted earlier. I went back to an article I found through my CMS search on a great blog I found called [EmergingEdTech.com](#). The site described [EctoLearning](#) which is a free hosted LMS, something like I was looking for. I registered and noticed it looks a lot like Moodle, but still felt it wasn't as engaging looking as I would like. I decided to do a Google search for free LMSs and found this article:

<http://c4lpt.co.uk/Directory/Tools/instructional.html>

Looking back over the lab directions, this link was given to us, but I missed it. It was SO helpful. All of the free systems are marked with a yellow "free" star, so I just focused on those. I found that Blackboard has a free site called [CourseSites](#) where teachers can create up to five free courses. I finally found a site called [Schoology](#) that I realized I had bookmarked last year. I didn't know about online courses then and didn't pay much attention to it. This year I had used [Edmodo](#) with my kids and I realized that Schoology seems to combine the best features of Edmodo (social networking) with a course management system. After registering for a free account, I found it VERY easy to navigate and use. It looks like Facebook (which Edmodo does also) and think it would be very engaging for my students.

Why is this CMS a good match for your course and curriculum?

It has all the important CMS features (discussion boards, testing functions, calendars, dropboxes, group functionality, etc.) and looks a lot like Edmodo, which I LOVED using with my classes this year. Students could still message me directly and there is the ability for me to get text notifications. There is also an iPod (iPad) app and an upcoming Android app. This mobile functionality will be very useful for students I think.

The site also has added some Google Docs integration which is something I feel my school will find useful. I believe we will be moving towards Google Apps for Education to solve our student organization and storage issues and a strong integration in an LMS is great.

The site also has the ability for parents to have access to student calendars and course information. For middle schoolers, this is important as they are still learning time management and organizational skills and need parents to be aware of what's going on in their classes.

What additional tools/functionality might you need beyond the features available in the CMS you have chosen?

I can't see any features yet I will need. I expect to embed content from other websites in my course pages.

What support do you need to be successful with this endeavor?

I will talk to the school technology director about perhaps looking at a premium account. I want access to some higher admin features and I CAN designate myself as admin (since no one else in my school uses this site yet), but then I would be responsible for creating all new user accounts (individual teachers could no longer create for themselves). I would rather NOT do that, but if we opted for a premium school account, the technology director could designate multiple admins so we could have several people helping to manage the site. I could definitely see this as something our entire middle school faculty could use. They don't necessarily have to create online courses. They could just use it to post their class resources, host discussions, receive homework, and post to class calendars. It's very flexible.