

DESIGN THE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT



Integrated versus modular online content

What are the tradeoffs when choosing among the various strategies for online content? Use this worksheet to evaluate four common strategies that many schools use. Which fits your environment and circumstances best?

To complete this exercise, work through these three steps for each strategy:

1. Read the description.
2. Visit a link or two to view examples of the online environment.
3. Evaluate the benefits and drawbacks, given your circumstances.

Strategy #1: Do it Yourself (DIY)— Build Your Own

Description	Many blended programs decide to build their own online content. They believe the functionality and performance of outside content is not good enough—or if it is, it's too expensive. As a result, they decide to use their own teachers to develop online content, lectures, or even their own full online courses.
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Go to http://school.demo.moodle.net/ to browse through sample DIY courses that teachers created on the Moodle platform.- Go to http://teachingexcellence.mit.edu/ and search for "Walter Lewin" to view a sample online lecture from famous MIT physicist Walter Lewin.
Benefits of DIY— Build Your Own	
Drawbacks of DIY— Build Your Own	

Strategy #2: Use One Outside Provider

Description	The majority of blended programs are likely to use one outside course provider per course or subject. These schools neither want to make the content themselves, nor deal with the hassle of contracting with more than one outside provider per course or subject.
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Browse through the course catalogs of a few major online course providers, such as those of Apex Learning, Florida Virtual School, Pearson GradPoint, Edgenuity, or Michigan Virtual School.- Visit a few supplemental online content providers, such as DreamBox Learning, ST Math, Reasoning Mind, Study Island, Read 180, or Achieve 3000.
Benefits of Using One Outside Provider	
Drawbacks of Using One Outside Provider	

Strategy #3: Combine Multiple Providers

Description	Some schools decide that they do not want to develop their own content, but they need a more flexible solution than relying on a single provider for an entire course or subject. They decide to patch together a variety of mostly proprietary programs into a unified platform.
Examples	For a time, Acton Academy's middle school used Live Binder to organize several online content options within one unified platform. View this platform at http://www.livebinders.com/play/play?id=627135 .
Benefits of Using Multiple Providers	
Drawbacks of Using Multiple Providers	

Strategy #4: Use a Facilitated Network

Description	Facilitated networks are platforms that facilitate the development, sharing, and curating of user-generated content in modular bites. They make it simple for users to offer online instruction and tutorials to others.
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Test your skill at solving a few practice problems on the Khan Academy platform.- Check out a few playlists on the Activate Instruction platform.
Benefits of Using a Facilitated Network	
Drawbacks of Using a Facilitated Network	

Other Considerations

Answer the following questions to hone in on the type of content that fits your situation the best.

1. What software subscriptions and web-based services do you already have available to use for your blended program?
2. How many hours of content do you need—enough for the entire course or only a few hours to supplement other sources of instruction?
3. What is your budget? What can you afford?
4. What do you want the student experience to be? Do you want students to be able to see their metrics and get real-time feedback? Do you want them to be able to choose among different pathways? How engaging does the content need to be?
5. Do you want software that slows down, speeds up, and optimizes the path based on the performance of each student? Or do you need software that puts teachers in control to select which modules to assign? Or something that allows for a little of both?

6. Do you need the software to provide actionable data for teachers? Do you need it to help seamlessly connect the online and offline learning?
7. How much evidence do you need that the online content has worked for other students? What efficacy research do you require?
8. Do you need the software to be cloud-based to allow students to work from anywhere?
9. Does the software need to be compatible with specific devices or learning management systems?
10. What are your requirements for alignment with state or Common Core standards?
11. How easy do you need the software to be in terms of provisioning new users with usernames and passwords? Does it need to connect directly to your student information system?
12. Do you require a single sign on process?