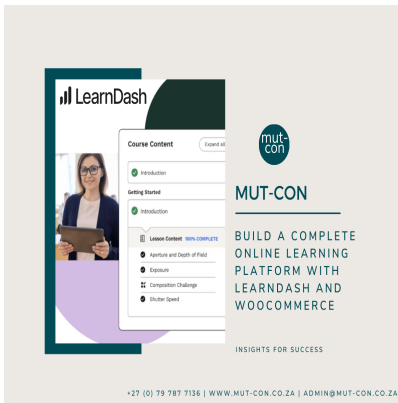




Build a complete online learning platform with LearnDash and WooCommerce: A LearnDash Review.

Description

Build a complete online learning platform with LearnDash and WooCommerce: A LearnDash Review.

Are you looking for an easy-to-use learning management system (LMS) to quickly build a complete online learning solution to offer your courses?

[LearnDash](#) combined with WooCommerce is the perfect answer for you.

In this post, we'll be looking at the self-hosted plugin for WordPress, but LearnDash does offer a cloud version and maybe we'll touch on that one in the future.

Currently, Mut-Con is a LearnDash partner and we accrue some benefits from selling LearnDash licences, but this has not biased our opinion of the plugin.

We have been users of the LearnDash plugin for a very long time, having used it to build the [Mut-Con Academy](#), and we have been using LearnDash as an LMS for our clients' learning websites long before LearnDash was part of the [Mut-Con partner ecosystem](#) and all we have gotten are [positive reviews](#).

1. LearnDash Introduction

LearnDash is the only solution you need to create an online learning system to start creating and distributing online learning content.

Built on WordPress, the world's most popular content management system, LearnDash is an easy-to-use solution that brings advanced features that will help you build a very simple or the most complex learning platform.

The plugin is very comprehensive and most of the functionality you will need to build your online learning system comes pre-packaged.

You can, however, enhance this functionality with other plugins.

We have been using LearnDash as an online learning solution for all our clients, including the [Mut-Con academy](#), and we know it's what you need to get started.

2. LearnDash Overview

At its core, LearnDash is a learning management system, meaning it's built to help you create and distribute online learning content.

LearnDash is great at these 2 aspects. Its components, courses, lessons, topics, quizzes, certificates and assignments make up the complete anatomy of a great online learning program.

LearnDash is not only great for creating your content but for managing your students as well. Unlike an in-person class, once created, LearnDash content can be accessed by your students from the start to getting their certification with little to no intervention from you.

This is great for businesses whose primary business is not the courses themselves.

It leaves you with more time to focus on the core of your business without denying your customers a great resource that an academy can be.

We at Mut-Con can testify to this.

3. Installation and Setting up LearnDash

This lesson section assumes you have a working understanding of WordPress and Plugins. If not, then [this article from HubSpot](#) is a great place to start.

To install LearnDash, you first need to [purchase and download it from the LearnDash website](#).

Once you have your copy of LearnDash, there are 2 ways to install LearnDash.

First, you can go to Plugins, click Add New, click Upload Plugin, and choose your zipped plugin folder called `sfwd-lms` where you saved it on your computer when you downloaded it.

When the upload completes, you can activate your plugins.

Secondly, you can unzip your folder and use an FTP client like FileZilla to add the folder `sfwd-lms` to your plugins folder.

Once done, go to Installed Plugins, locate LearnDash LMS and activate it.

Next, you will want to go to LearnDash > Setting > LMS Licence and add the licence that came with your purchase.

You are ready to start using LearnDash.

4. User Interface and User Experience

For such a robust plugin designed to help you achieve so much, LearnDash is incredibly easy to use.

Once you have an understanding of the flow of LearnDash and how courses are created, [creating a LearnDash Course](#) is a breeze.

You will love how different elements of your course creation can be managed from different modules, reducing the need for you to navigate between different modules to achieve this.

You can, for example, create lessons, topics and quizzes right from the course builder without having to navigate to lessons, topics or quizzes.

The course creation process itself is drag and drop and all the course elements can be created using a WYSIWYG interface that eliminates the need for any coding.

However, for advanced functionality, you always have the option to add code to various areas for added functionality and even a beginner developer should find it very easy to use this.

The overall LearnDash interface is very intuitive and would prove very easy for even beginner WordPress users to come to terms with.

The plugin has great navigation with each element given a nav link and intuitively named for you to understand where it takes you.

With an outline of your course structure and all the resources you need to build your course, [getting your first LearnDash course online](#) should be about a day's work.

Should you come across any challenges, LearnDash offers a multitude of resources to guide you through the ins and outs of course creation.

5. Key Features and Functionality in LearnDash

LearnDash is built on various elements you need to build your online learning content.

To better understand your course, think of it as a book.

The lessons would then be chapters, while topics are sections of the chapter.

Quizzes and assignments would then be questions used to evaluate your comprehension of each chapter section or each chapter.

Remember that each element will have global settings as well as specific settings. Be sure to set your global settings and then override them with specific settings where necessary.

5.1 Courses

[Courses](#) hold all the elements including lessons, topics, quizzes, assignments, and certifications in LearnDash.

They are the singular collection of learning experiences you wish a learner to go through.

As such, lessons should be a logical collection of materials, resources and the elements of a single topic in your curriculum.

The extent to which you break down a course will depend entirely on you.

You could, for example, have a course on digital marketing, social media marketing, Facebook Marketing or just Facebook paid advertising without organic strategies.

These are different levels of breaking down topics related to each other and as such would make a logical structure of a course.

The resulting course should not be too long, to ensure comprehension of core concepts, but not too short as to minimise the value gained by your learners.

There is no limit to the number of courses you can have in LearnDash, so break them down well.

5.2 Lessons

[Lessons](#) contain the actual course content and are the container that will hold elements like topics, resources, quizzes, and assignments.

A course can be created from one lesson or more, so make sure to break down your course into the most logical sections and these will make up your lessons.

You can add text, videos, images, audio files, download links and many other elements to your lessons (and topics).

5.3 Topics

[Topics](#) are created to add hierarchy to lessons and split them up into digestible sections.

This is important for lessons that are either large or consist of distinct learning areas for the learner.

You can measure the comprehension of your students for each lesson with a topic quiz.

While topics are quite similar to lessons, they are not the same, so be sure to understand the difference between the 2 so you can better understand what to use where.

For example, you can have a course consisting of lessons only, but not courses only.

So if your course consists of singular sections, then you will need to create lessons, not topics.

More importantly, though, lessons exist above topics in the course hierarchy, so topics break down lessons, while lessons break down the course.

5.4 Quizzes

[Quizzes](#) are questions that can be put at the end of topics and lessons to measure the comprehension of your students.

Quizzes can be made a prerequisite for completing a lesson or topic and moving on, making them required to complete a course.

Quizzes are hosted in LearnDash and as such offer quite a robust means of creating them.

5.5 Assignments

[Assignments](#) provide a comprehensive way to check in on the comprehension and progress of your students.

They can be uploaded to any lesson or topic and can be made to be a prerequisite for the completion of that lesson or topic.

If that lesson is required to complete the course, then assignments can be required to complete a course.

Assignments differ from quizzes in that they are designed for file uploads, as opposed to the various question types that quizzes offer.

5.6 Certifications

Certifications are a great way for your students to prove their competencies.

You can use certifications to recognize a student for competence in a quiz (therefore a lesson or topic), or for competence in your course as a whole.

The certificates you award can be designed to your specifications, from very official professionally designed certificates to anything that demonstrates that you recognize a learner for completing a topic, lesson, or quiz.

5.7 Settings

Your [settings](#) are where you will control your LearnDash plugin and how your learning content works.

You have settings that are native to LearnDash such as templates, colour control, the logo to use, pagination, admin settings, and slug settings.

Also, Some plugins that add functionality to LearnDash will add their settings here although some will create their own menu link.

Under the support tab in settings, you will find a summary of your entire LearnDash installation.

You can also use your settings tab to manage your LearnDash and LearnDash extensions licencing.

6. LearnDash is Optimised for Performance and Speed

Because of the functionality it brings to the table, LearnDash is a resource-heavy plugin.

This is expected of most learning management systems and is not a bad indictment of how LearnDash itself is built.

Considering that WooCommerce itself is on the heavier end of the plugin spectrum, the two create a power couple of resource consumption.

Users on budget hosting can expect to see a noticeable dip in website performance once LearnDash is installed.

You could also notice your website constantly run out of resources particularly if you are getting a lot of site traffic.

Good hosting, even if it's shared hosting is definitely a must.

However, a lot of issues regarding speed, performance and server resources that can arise from installing LearnDash can be managed using some website development best practices.

Firstly, make sure to use a theme that is compatible with LearnDash and is built for speed as well.

Next, you will need to use a caching plugin like LiteSpeed cache to optimise the performance of your WordPress and LearnDash installation.

It's also a good idea to minimize the number of plugins on your site to ones you will absolutely need.

Courses can be filled with videos, images and files and these can affect performance.

Use the latest formats for your images like webp, save them at optimal dimensions and use a tool like [TinyPNG](#) to optimise their size.

It's also wise to externally host your videos and files.

All in all, LearnDash is optimised for performance and speed, and by observing some web development best practices, your resulting site will definitely be fast as well.

7. Compatibility and Support

LearnDash is developed and maintained by the amazing team at [StellarWP](#) who are responsible for amazing WordPress plugins such as [Restrict Content Pro](#), [GiveWP](#), [The Events Calendar Pro](#), [KadenceWP](#), and more.

StellarWP is itself a brand of Liquid Web a premium hosting company, so LearnDash is built with pedigree.

The plugin is built to be compatible with a lot of themes and plugins.

The plugin is also meticulously maintained to keep it compatible with the latest version of WordPress and the prevailing PHP version at any given time.

As such, you shouldn't expect LearnDash to be backwards compatible with previous versions of WordPress themes, or other plugins you have installed.

This is most definitely a good thing as themes, plugins, WordPress and the PHP language are updated for important security and other reasons and you should keep them and LearnDash itself at the latest version at all times.

Where you find yourself with a plugin that isn't getting regular updates that has begun to conflict with LearnDash, it's wise to remove the offending plugin.

Your LearnDash will receive regular updates in pace with developments in the WordPress ecosystem as a whole and this should keep it up to date with all the other elements installed on your website.

LearnDash boasts an incredible support system.

Should you come across any conflicts, you can reach out to the LearnDash team directly or reach out to the wider LearnDash community including over 25,000 professionals on [Facebook](#) alone and you will get support to resolve these issues.

You can also reach out to a LearnDash expert to help you diagnose and resolve any conflicts.

All in all, LearnDash has pretty great compatibility out of the gate, but should you have any challenges, you can definitely get issues resolved.

8. Pricing and Value for Money

LearnDash is a paid plugin. At \$199/year for a single site licence, LearnDash is one of the pricier plugins you can get for your WordPress website and is the priciest of the most popular learning management systems.

The lack of a free trial or free version of the plugin only makes this price even more noticeable.

However, what makes LearnDash great is that the price includes everything you need to start creating and selling your courses online.

While LearnDash has extensions like [Pro-Panel](#), [Notes](#), and [Gradebook](#), these are not necessary for getting started.

Moreover, these extensions can be replaced with free options that perform a great job, for example, ProPanel with LearnDash reports by WinLabs.

All in all, learning management systems are not exactly cheap, not the good ones at least.

While LearnDash is on the pricier end of the spectrum, even the cheaper alternatives worth considering come in at \$170.00 a year, a slight price saving.

Considering what LearnDash brings to the table though, being in our eyes the most comprehensive and complete solution for entrepreneurs looking for a learning management system, the price is a worthwhile investment.

9. Pros and Cons of LearnDash

Let's explore the advantages and disadvantages of setting up your online learning website using Learn Dash.

While LearnDash admittedly has a few limitations, the pros definitely outweigh the cons, making it a worthwhile investment.

We have looked at it in relation to all the [other LMS plugins](#) in the WordPress ecosystem such as MemberPress Courses, Thrive Apprentice, Courses for MemberMouse, and LifterLMS, as well as other options for building an LMS system and we'd still advise going with LearnDash.

9.1 Advantages Of LearnDash

- For a plugin that can create a very complex online learning system, LearnDash is quite easy to use, and you will most likely be able to use it yourself with any experience using learning management systems and with minimum support from your developer.
- LearnDash is compatible with a multitude of plugins that allow you to extend the functionality of your website.
- LearnDash has an incredible knowledge base consisting of blogs, videos and academies from its creators and its extensive partner network.
- LearnDash has a great support network which includes its creators, partners like Mut-Con and a network of entrepreneurs who use LearnDash in their business to give you insights on everything from technical questions to tips and tricks for making the best of your LearnDash.
- As the most used learning management system on the most used content management system, LearnDash creators are not short on diagnostic data and feedback to continuously optimise

LearnDash and ensure the best performance.

9.2 Disadvantages Of LearnDash

- LearnDash is on the pricier end of the spectrum. The plugin is the priciest of all the LMS plugins we have worked with.
- LearnDash is strictly an LMS plugin and as such will provide the most value if your primary goal is an LMS. Other options such as MemberPress Courses and Courses for MemberMouse are built as add-ons on membership plugins, allowing you to build LMS functionality into broader membership websites.
- LearnDash offers no free or trial version, so you will have to go all in from the onset without making sure it meets your needs.

10. Plugins to Enhance your LearnDash

LearnDash is indeed a complete solution for building an online learning system and while it might pack everything you need to create and sell online learning content, you may in time want to extend its functionality and this may require additional plugins.

Some of these add essential functionality to the setup such as payment processing, while some enhance the user experience with added functionality such as better account management.

Some are meant to make your development and management tasks easier, for example, adding advanced reporting and drag-and-drop builders.

This list is by no means exhaustive but lists some of the plugins that have helped our clients reach their goals for their online learning platforms.

10.1 Page Builder

We've come a long way from WordPress being just a content management system (CMS).

Today, WordPress is more than just a blogging platform but the foremost resource for [creating an online presence for your business](#).

The websites that can be [built with WordPress](#), including online learning systems are truly stunning.

Part of this revolution from simple blogs to works of art has been thanks to page builders.

Page builders like [Elementor](#), Beaver, [KadenceWP](#), Divi, WP Bakery, Breakdance, and more have made it easier for anyone to build beautiful pages and websites on WordPress.

At Mut-Con we always take advantage of [Elementor's](#) features and themes like Phlox to build beautiful online learning platforms for our clients.

We can use Elementor to build attractive landing pages with effective calls to action that get clients to sign up for courses.

The best part is because of Elementor's ease of use, we can usually hand over [page editing and creation](#) duties to our clients with minimal training.

10.2 LearnDash Reports by WinLabs

[LearnDash Reports](#) is a great tool to enhance the reporting on your LMS.

The plugin is designed to enhance the data you get from your LearnDash setup and allows you to make data-driven decisions to improve the learning experience of your clients.

The plugin's biggest advantage is its dashboard which shows you essential data about your earnings, your courses and students.

With this data, you can evaluate and optimise course performance in terms of revenue and completion rates.

You can also remove the bottlenecks that lower the rate at which students complete your courses by looking at course completion, quizzes and in-depth course progress.

10.3 WooCommerce

[WooCommerce](#) is arguably the best [e-commerce](#) engine for your WordPress website.

For online course creators looking to sell their courses, there is no better option to add the e-commerce end of the function than WooCommerce.

LearnDash itself has great support for WooCommerce with a lot of resources to help you use WooCommerce to achieve various goals with LearnDash.

10.4 Payment Integration

[Free learning resources](#) are quite common on the internet nowadays but most entrepreneurs are likely going to want payment for their course content.

A payment integration that works with WooCommerce like [Paystack](#) will help you receive revenue for your course content.

The plugin you chose for this purpose will depend on your location as many can be restricted by currencies.

PayStack, for example, currently accepts payments from South Africa (Rands), Nigeria (Naira), Ghana (Cedi), and Kenya (Shilling), with more on the way.

As such, you will want to use it if you are in these locations.

Whatever integration you go for, be sure to choose one that works well with WooCommerce, has affordable charges, accepts a wide range of payment methods, has great support, gives easy access to your funds and has affordable transaction costs.

10.5 Subscription Plugin

Sometimes you may want to give your clients constant access to your content as opposed to a once-off payment.

This is especially valuable with course content that is continuously changing or where periodic recertification is required.

In this instance, you may consider using a subscription plugin like [YITH WooCommerce Subscription](#).

This will allow your registered clients to be billed recurringly for their access to the platform while retaining access to the course content they need anytime.

A good plugin automates this process, sending out important reminders such as subscription reminders and invoices, freeing up your time to focus on other areas of your business.

10.6 Membership Plugin

Online learning platforms are in many ways membership websites and as such can benefit greatly from a membership plugin to enhance the experience of the members.

There are quite a few [membership plugins for WordPress](#), free and paid, but at their core, their function is to help improve the user experience of your site's members allowing you to add additional functionality such as user-friendly login and account management options.

A lot of this functionality comes in handy for an online learning platform.

Some plugins may have functionality that duplicates what's already achieved by LearnDash, usually coming at the cost of additional extensions, so it's best to get started with one which offers a free version such as MemberPress, explore the full functionality it offers and only spring for any additional extensions once you are sure you need these functions and you are not already getting this functionality from LearnDash.

10.7 Video Hosting Service

Videos, because of their size should generally be used sparingly or avoided entirely in web development.

This is because they can significantly slow down a website, use up valuable server resources and generally bring down the user experience.

Unfortunately for entrepreneurs looking to build a learning management system, it's unlikely they will be able to avoid including videos.

In fact, videos will be a big part of the resulting platform. This is because instructional videos are part of the course in learning content.

So unless you can afford premium or self-hosted servers, you will need to manage the impact of these videos on your platform.

The answer is to [externally host your videos](#) on a resource like Wistia, Loom, Dailymotion, Vimeo or the ever-popular YouTube.

The choice you make will depend on several factors including price, video size, additional features, and the resources you are already using in your business.

10.8 Speed Optimization Plugin

Site speed is essential for a good user experience on your website.

While LearnDash is optimised for speed and performance out of the box, giving it a little assistance from a site speed plugin won't hurt.

It's also important to choose fast hosting designed for fast-loading websites.

There are a lot of free and paid plugins to help speed up your site like LiteSpeed Cache, WP Fastest Cache and WP Rocket.

The choice you make will boil down to the recommendations of your hosting company, your theme writer, and ultimately the web developer working on your website speed optimization or overall [website development](#).

11. Conclusion

Online learning continues to grow and is increasingly allowing entrepreneurs to go into business by offering learning solutions or fortifying their core offerings with some great online learning options.

Just as traditional WordPress made it easy for businesses to build websites, WooCommerce made it easy to expand WordPress to sell online, LearnDash has made it easy to expand your website into a learning solution.

The ease of use makes it so that almost anyone can get started offering courses online without much need for an external consultant.

The cost of LearnDash is a bit steep, especially for a platform like WordPress where we are used to getting a lot of free stuff, but for what the plugin offers, LearnDash is still value for money.

While cheaper options for building your LMS exist in the WordPress ecosystem, we would still advise you to go with LearnDash.

The investment you would have to make to bring the same functionality into these cheaper options as LearnDash would pretty much wipe out that price advantage.

Again, this was a guide to LearnDash as a self-hosted plugin in WordPress, and a hosted cloud version is available.

If you are interested in a guide for this, just let us know and we'll put one out.

In the meantime, do share your love for LearnDash and what you have achieved with it and if you have found a worthwhile alternative, we'd love to know about that as well.

This is a post that grows with our experiences, so revisit it often to get new insights on using LearnDash as your learning management system.

Should you need any help setting up your LMS, Mut-Con is the partner you need, just [contact us](#).

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