John Edmiston's Brief Survey of E-Learning Platforms

For what it is worth here are my conclusions so far about my recent brief survey of free / low-cost E-Learning Platforms:

CRITERIA

1. Sustainability. I got caught a few years back when the excellent LMS, Interact, which was maintained by a lone NZ developer was no longer supported. So looking for a large pool of developers and reliable support community which will be around in five years time at least.
2. Security – not easily hacked, and is quick to detect and to patch any *vulnerabilities*.
3. Compatibility - Can run on my Centos 6 Linux server with SELinux enforced and LAMP stack.
4. Simplicity of Maintenance – is easy for me to maintain, upgrade etc.
5. Multiple Courses and Administrators Allowed – is suitable for an institution not just a single instructor and can cope with the possibility of 50+ courses if all AIBI and Cybermissions and Harvestime modules are put into it.
6. Scalability – is not too processor hungry and can support multiple simultaneous users.
7. Usability – students can use it with a reasonable amount of ease. It is highly convenient if students can use a Google or FB log-in on the LMS
8. Mobility – can run on mobile platforms or has a mobile or responsive CSS version
9. Fully Featured – gradebook, video, audio, messaging, forums etc. all included.
10. Global – UTF-8 compatible, multi-lingual, used widely around the world
11. Affordability – free or low-cost, preferably open-source, no legal issues
12. Payment Gateway – students can easily pay using PayPal or similar mechanism

SERVER BASED

BuddyPress Courseware plug in for WordPress: installed on my server but am having some glitches and while it is not too bad I have reservations about its long-term sustainability e.g. will the plug-in still be updated in five years time, how large is the developer community, and WordPress security is somewhat of a concern.

Canvas: the open-source version was impossible to install, and is processor-heavy and way too complex for me to maintain. The online version is uber-expensive ((5K just to set up and 5K per year)

LAMS: Learning Activity Management System: http://wiki.lamsfoundation.org/display/lamsdocs/Home a strong contender, runs on smaller devices. Can log-in with FB, Twitter, Google or Yahoo accounts, this is a very strong point. Can be a plug-in within Moodle so this is very good. http://wiki.lamsfoundation.org/display/lamsdocs/Integrations

Moodle: vastly improved from before and installed easily on my server even under SE_Linux enforced

ONLINE SOLUTIONS

CourseSites: blackboard free version K-12 and college, for individual instructors and students only, a "teaser" product to get you in to purchase the whole thing for your institution. Both Edmodo and Schoology also adopt this strategy.

Edmodo: free, very easy to set up an account online with them but have not got any further. Very much a K-12 solution

Google/Pearson OpenClass: since I have a Google Apps account I was easily able to set this up within ten minutes and its powerfully integrated into Google products.

Schoology: same as Edmodo and Course-Sites, easy to set up an account, K-12 solution

Conclusion

If I go with a server based product it will be Moodle with LAMS as a plug-in and I will do a video tutorial for new users so they do not get lost.

If I go with an online solution it will be Google/Pearson OpenClass, impressively powerful and will be around for a long time, free and backed by two major players who care about security and sustainability.