

BUYER'S GUIDE:

Getting Your Training into the Cloud

How to choose the right Virtual Instructor Led Training solution



It's happened – the world is in the cloud. If you direct or manage training programs for your organization, the pressure is on.

This guide presents helpful criteria and checklists that are used by successful training organizations to build their cloud strategies and select the right cloud-based lab vendor.

Virtual Training can make or break you

If you run training programs, you know what's going on. Over the last few years, you've watched virtualization make its way into your organization via the cloud. More and more often, you're asked to add Virtual Instructor-Led Training (VILT) to your offerings.

Where do you begin? How do you get your Training into the Cloud -- and not under it?

If you are transitioning from on-premise environments or mixed virtual and physical classrooms to fully virtualized cloud-based training labs, relax, you are not alone.

Cloud-based virtual labs are already here, bringing exciting new capabilities and technologies to your classrooms - together with lots of new expectations from your instructors and students. Even if high expectations are not enough pressure, you also need to ensure that your chosen solution:

- Consistently offers the highest level of user experience for both instructors and students
- Takes minimal time and resources to maintain and manage, even as demands skyrocket
- Easily integrates with other training productivity tools, in the cloud or on-premise
- Keeps you steps ahead of demands from your internal and external users today and also lets you easily scale in the future

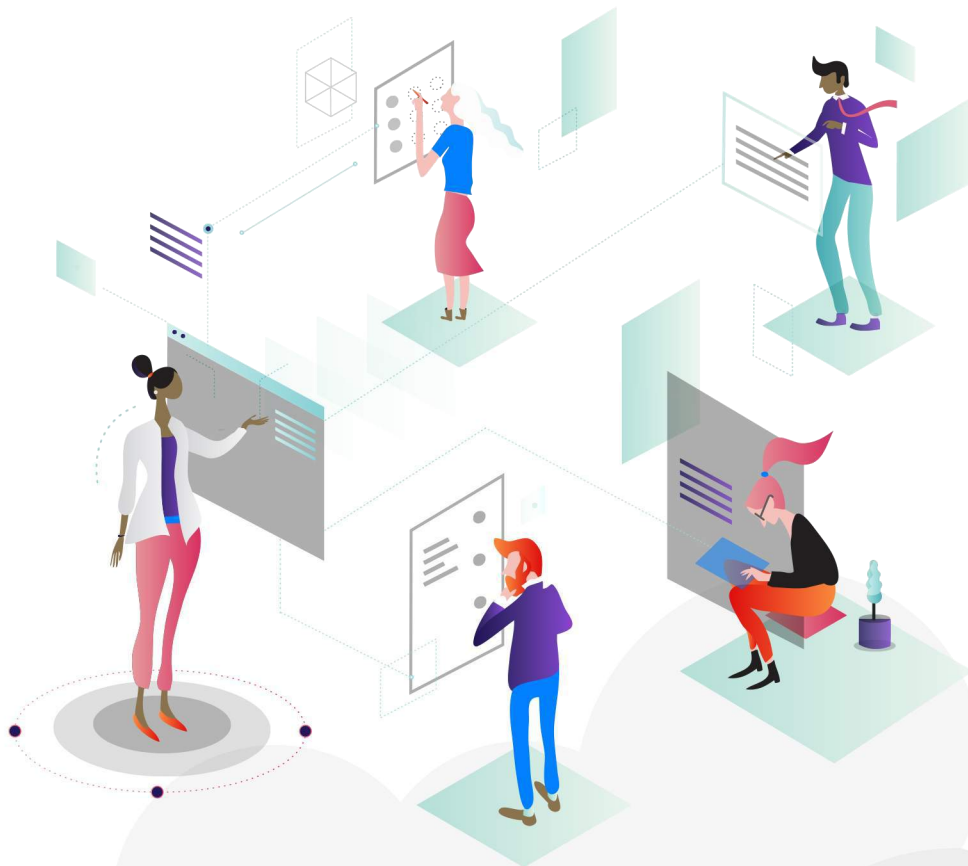


Here's how some of the world's leading training organizations are doing it.

Look for a complete, single platform training solution

Screen sharing, video conferencing and webinar applications are great ways to connect online. And virtualization and infrastructure solutions (IaaS) can deliver servers anywhere in the world in just a few minutes. So let's think... all you've got to do now is add a learning management system (LMS), and you've got a complete training center, right?

Think again! This type of patchwork approach requires administrators and trainers to learn and maintain multiple systems. And it makes performing even simple adjustments (such as right-sizing hardware for class attendance) unnecessarily complex. What's more, you lose the efficiency offered by a full-stack solution – where all the elements of your system can work together seamlessly.



Create an outstanding experience for instructors and students

Today, your *virtual classroom* should provide the same instructor-student experience as the best physical classroom. Your vendor should provide instructors with the ability to interact 'live' with students and instantly assist them, both before the class begins and while it is in progress. An ideal classroom solution will also:

- Automatically send students login credentials for their labs when they register for the course
- Provide a simple way for students to check that they are set up correctly prior to the start of the course
- Allow instructors to monitor students "over-the-shoulder" and provide real-time support as students work in their hands-on virtual labs
- Provide the opportunity for students to chat with the instructor and/or each other during the class
- Enable the instructor to broadcast their environment or that of a specific student to serve as an example for all the class to see

Look for full interoperability

The cloud is designed for interoperability. To fully leverage this great advantage means that no matter how impressive your virtual training solution, it must also be able to easily interact with other productivity tools to manage training delivery. Ensure that your vendor's solution gives you and your team a direct way to benefit from cloud efficiency and automation, and also allows you to easily grow/scale out your training in the future.

Your virtual training lab solution should easily fit together with your ecosystem and work with your existing software, for example your current LMS. Be sure to look for a REST API and/or other robust methods for integrating your training tools and data with your other tools and systems.



Buy a solution that is built as a true SaaS model

Training professionals who have successfully made the transition to virtual labs emphasize the advantages of a completely cloud-based solution, providing the ability to build and deploy training labs with nothing more than a web browser and an internet connection. Make sure that your training solution will be 100% supported on the cloud, especially if your organization's solution uses complex architectures or complicated networking.

Avoid the need to re-architect or re-program

Moving your training environment to the cloud need not require heavy investment from your internal IT resources (for example, redesigning your configuration). For maximum benefit, ensure that your vendor:

- Offers the ability to import your existing virtual machines to their platform via a fast, user-friendly process
- Allows your virtual labs to work on the cloud exactly as they do on-premise



Easily automate training lab creation and management

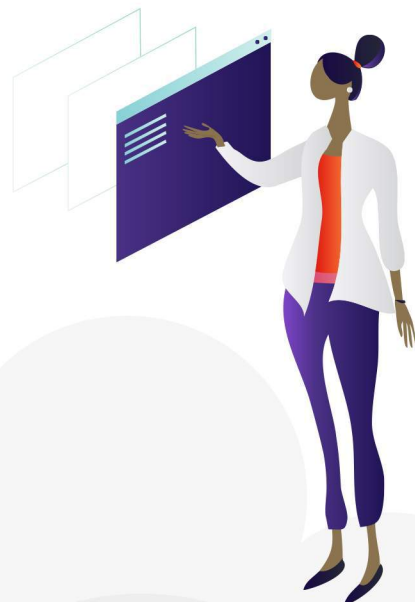
Any chosen solution should make it simple to build and support a 'real-world' lab environment with minimal need for intervention by IT.

Your vendor should be able to supply best-practice, deployment-ready templates for virtual machines and/or complete environments. Ensure that these templates are completely customizable (and include licenses) so you can accurately create the training environments you require. And remember that real-world environments include much more than software and virtual machines. Often, they need complex networking, routers, firewalls, bridges, WAN simulators, and security appliances. Ensure that your cloud vendor supports complex set-ups and makes it easy to include these features in your labs.

Ensure complete compatibility with industry standards

Insist that your vendor's solution be fully compatible with IaaS and virtualization standards (for example, VMware ESXi) and that it also supports Docker and container management capabilities for maximum flexibility.

Be especially cautious about working with a vendor that requires compatibility with non-standard hypervisors, re-architecting your labs, or physical/on-premise solutions. This type of resource investment on your part can get you locked into their platform – essentially limiting your options and your freedom to scale in the future.



Demand automated and customizable features that grow your ROI

Transitioning to the cloud can bring true economic benefits to training providers, including reduced infrastructure and data center investment, minimized IT resource requirements, conversion from CapEx to OpEx, real-time management of costs, and more.

To be able to take full advantage of cloud economics, ensure that your lab vendor offers:

- Easy, automatic provisioning, de-provisioning, and management of all your IT lab environments
- Resource-conserving features such as auto-sensing and suspension of idle environments and the ability to define policies for environment lifetime, maximum resource usage, etc.
- The ability to manage your ROI based on on-demand reporting and detailed real-time usage metrics
- The scalability you need to expand your global presence in the future. Are you confident that your vendor will be able to deliver high-level performance for all your classes at peak load, anywhere in the world?
- All software licensing included. You don't want to be surprised by unexpected costs.

Have no doubts about vendor support


Last but certainly not least, look carefully at your vendor's technical support offering. On-boarding to a VILT solution can bring with it technical questions about implementation, so you'll need expertise from your vendor along the way. Check that your vendor has built-in processes to assist you, along with a clear record of success in supporting training organizations.



Virtual Training Labs Buyer Checklist

We've consulted with some of the world's leading training organizations to create the following 'shopping list' for you. Make sure your chosen virtual training lab solution ticks off as many of the boxes in each area as possible.


Comprehensive Training Experience

- ☐ Does the solution include a comprehensive feature-set that allows me to closely replicate an in-classroom user experience?
 - ☐ Will I be able to create and manage virtual classrooms without (or with minimal assistance from) my IT team or the vendor's support team?
 - ☐ Will students be able to access their labs without installing plug-ins?
 - ☐ Will I be able to easily customize views and class content for my students' training experience?
 - ☐ Does the platform simulate an over-the-shoulder student-teacher interaction?
 - ☐ Does the solution include a robust and up-to-date REST API for easy integration with my other systems and tools?
 - ☐ Do students have the opportunity to chat with the instructor and/or each other during the class?
 - ☐ Can the instructor broadcast their environment or that of a specific student's as an example to the entire class?
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Transparent Architecture

- ☐ Will I be able to easily import my on-premise solution to the cloud?
 - ☐ Will the platform allow me to build and deploy labs fully on-cloud?
 - ☐ Will my labs work on-cloud exactly as they do on-premise?
 - ☐ Will I have access to a variety of best-practice, deployment-ready templates for VMs and full environments, all fully licensed?
 - ☐ Does the solution support complex networking scenarios?
 - ☐ Is the solution completely compatible with ESXi and does it support other industry-standard technologies?
 - ☐ Does the vendor offer a 100% SaaS-based solution that supports real-world labs?
 - ☐ Will I be able to move to the platform without re-architecting my current labs?
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Economics and ROI

- ☐ Is billing simple and straightforward (e.g., based only on infrastructure usage and class time) or is there a risk that I will be unpleasantly surprised at the end of each month?
 - ☐ Does the vendor's pricing structure include software licensing?
 - ☐ Will unused machines/environments hibernate automatically, so that I don't accrue needless charges?
 - ☐ Can environments be scheduled to delete automatically?
 - ☐ Is reporting available to give me visibility into classroom, student, and infrastructure usage?
 - ☐ Can I access the tools and data to manage my costs and ROI in real time?
 - ☐ Does the solution provide resource-conserving features, such as auto-sensing of idle environments, custom policy definitions for lifetime, resource usage, etc.?
 - ☐ Can I deliver high-level performance for all my classes at peak load, anywhere in the world?
 - ☐ Will the solution support unlimited scalability?
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About CloudShare

As the leading supplier of virtual IT environments in the cloud, CloudShare provides its clients with specialized solutions designed to meet a wide variety of business needs – including lab environments for virtual training, development and testing, and sales demos and POCs. All CloudShare environments are completely customizable and offer on-demand access to infrastructure resources such as servers, storage, networks, and software.

Moving to the cloud?

We've got you covered! To learn more about how CloudShare's advanced training lab solutions can benefit your business, visit us at www.cloudshare.com.

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