

Some criteria to consider when looking at a 3rd party Plugin

Introduction

There are many great 3rd party plugins available for Moodle. However, it is important to assess the suitability and reliability of the plugin before adopting it.

This list is not exhaustive as there may be more or less questions depending on the individual installation and organisation.

Some hosting providers may have already have audited the plugin -so it would be good to understand which aspects have been audited. As although something may be technically okay the suitability and cost implications may be something to make you think.

So these are some of the criteria that one could use to evaluate a 3rd party Moodle plugin.

Some initial questions

- What is the purpose of the plugin?
- Is there nothing in the installation which can deliver this feature already?
- Is this the best solution for this requirement?

Is it easy to install?

- Is the source managed on svn/github
- Is the zip available to download into the correct folder name or does it need exploring to change
- Is it just a drop in and use notifications or is it more complex / require patches manual intervention

Is the documentation good?

- Has it got a Moodle Docs page
- Has it got good readme.txt
- Has it got good help files & instructions

Is it easy for teacher to use?

- For the most common use case is it logical in usage?
- Are the instructions for use correct and usable?

Is it easy for student to use?

- For the most common use case is it logical in usage?
- Are the instructions for use correct and usable?

Does it do what it says?

- Are the instructions for use correct and usable?
- Does it provide the functionality as described in a good sensible way, is it a "full feature" or an interim solution.

Features

- Does it have a roadmap of potential improvements /changes?
- Will it work on Mobile theme and on Web?

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Feedback

- Are there any comments from users on the plugin site?
- Are there any reviews of the module?
- Are there any discussions on it in the forums?

Author Background (experience/reliability check)

- Are they active in Moodle community for a good period of time?
- Do they respond well to queries on bugs etc.?
- Do they work for an established Moodle development team (Moodle partner, the OU, or HQ for example)?

Financial

A plugin is for life and not just for installation! The costs of having a plugin installed are ongoing, through increased resources for usage, increased costs for testing upgrades, patches and potentially having to maintain it if the author goes away.

- Is there a cost implication to adoption of the plugin regarding licence?
- What is the cost implication of the extra resources to use the plugin if any?
- Is there commercial support contract available for the plugin to ensure patches for upgrades and security fixes?
- If the plugin stops being upgraded in the future, what would the annual cost of maintaining the plugin in-house be?
- Whose budget is the cost being covered by?
- Has a budget been assigned not only for installation but for coming years as well?
- Is the cost justified by the requirement?

Technical (some example points only – not to be taken as a full list)

There are guidelines for Moodle development which are often followed by plugins. This lists some of the technical checks that one may want to include.

- Does it work properly with the different database types?
- Is the mod being updated regularly with new Moodle versions?
- Does the module follow good Moodle coding standards?
- Does it properly use language files or has it got hardcoded text?
- Does it properly follow accessibility guidelines?
- Does it properly follow css and theming approaches?
- Does it conflict with anything else naming wise?
- Does author regularly bug fix?
- Does it impact performance of Moodle in normal or high traffic usage?
- What resources will it require to be used?
- Does backup/restore work?
- Has it got unit tests?

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