

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT ELEARNING AUTHORING TOOL

12 Things to Consider

Every day, the iSpring Support Desk is contacted by dozens of eLearning developers searching for the right authoring tool. In this guide, we share the answers to their most frequent questions. It covers all the essential details you should discuss with potential vendors to choose the right authoring tool for your specific eLearning needs.

You can read the entire guide to get comprehensive insights into choosing eLearning course creation software or go straight to the checklist.

- 01. Your eLearning goals and needs**
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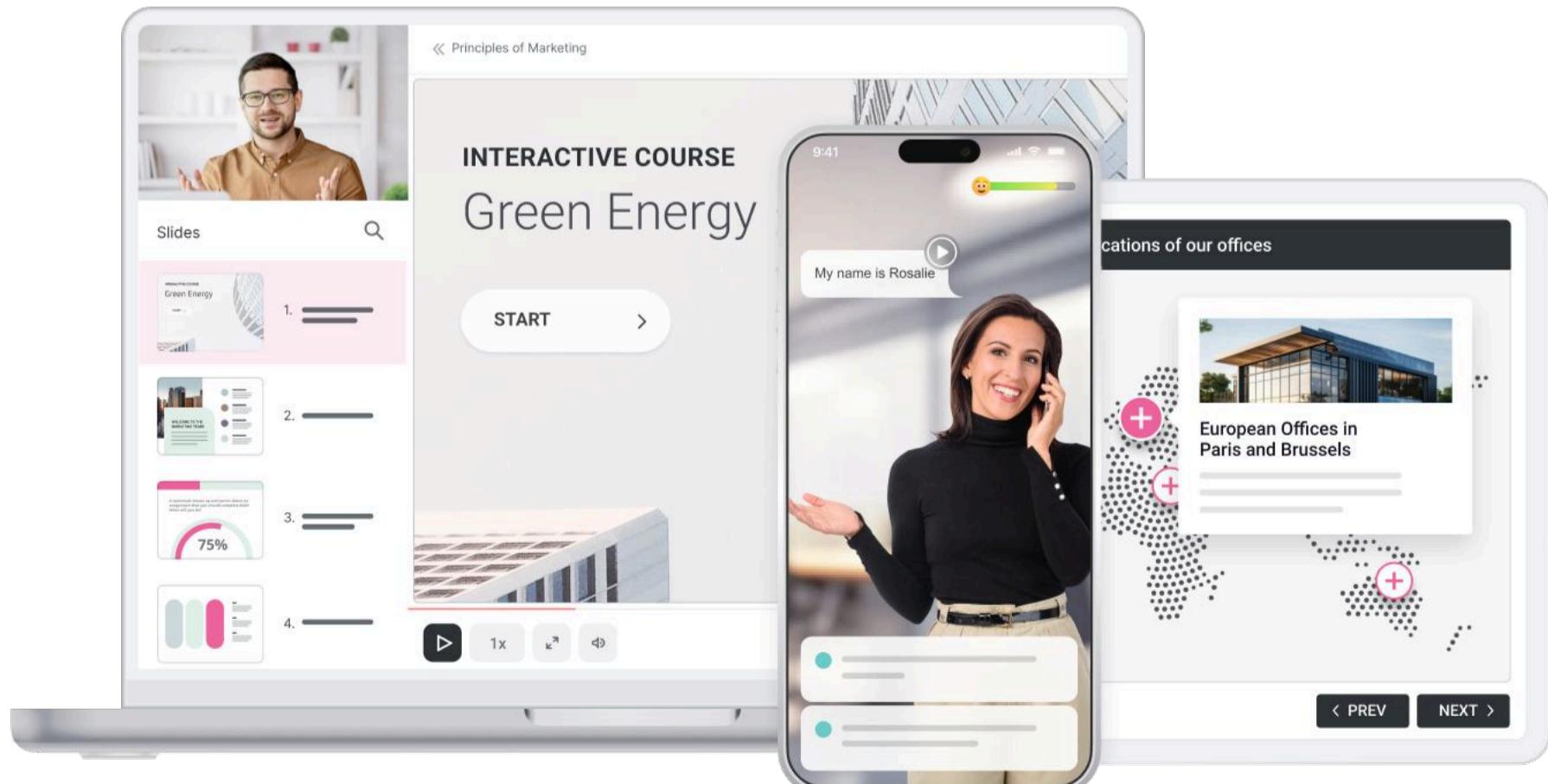
Checklist for Choosing the Right Authoring Tool

What is an authoring tool, and why might you need one?

An authoring tool is software that allows you to create digital learning content, such as courses, video lectures, or interactive learning experiences.

Authoring tools come in handy in a variety of scenarios, from creating learning materials for corporate training and academic programs to building smaller, one-time projects like job aids or tutorials. Once the content is ready, you can upload it to a learning management system (LMS) or distribute it via other means, depending on your needs and learner audiences.

So, how do you pick the right authoring software with so many tools available on the market? Let's dive in and consider 12 factors that will help you make the best decision.



01. Your eLearning goals and needs

Situation: You've decided to start using an authoring tool to create eLearning content. But you don't know where to begin with the selection process.

To make an informed decision, you need to start with a simple yet key question:

“What is the number one eLearning goal an authoring tool will help me solve?”

Do you want to make your courses more engaging? Do you aim to create content faster or streamline the deployment process? Are you in need of a simple tool to build professional presentations quickly?

The answer to this question will help prioritize your requirements and guide your selection.



When you speak with a vendor, let them know what your eLearning goal is right at the beginning and ask them how their software can meet your needs.

Other things to consider before choosing an authoring tool

Once you've determined which goals an authoring tool will help you achieve, it's time to consider other big-picture factors to simplify the process of choosing down the road.



Content strategy



Budget



Scalability needs



Level of Expertise



Compliance requirements

Content strategy

Outline key formats and delivery methods for your eLearning materials. Do you want to create effective assessments for your students? Then look for software with strong quiz-building features. Authors who work with video-based learning will benefit from software that includes an advanced video editor. Or maybe a simple online longread builder is all you need for your projects.

Knowing which capabilities you require for your specific content creation efforts will help you narrow down your choices and avoid overpaying for advanced features you might not need.

Your level of expertise

Select from platforms that match your skill level and provide the necessary support and resources for your eLearning authoring journey.

Beginner course creators may find advanced software overwhelming and spend too much time mastering the tool rather than building content. That's why prioritizing user-friendly interfaces is a good idea for newbies. Proficient course creators, on the other hand, can look for more sophisticated features and customization options.

Budget

Allocate a budget for the authoring tool and any associated costs, such as training, support, and maintenance.

This is an especially important consideration if you're an individual content creator with limited financial resources. You might want to consider free authoring tools or choose software that has special pricing plans for freelancers. They're typically cheaper than corporate plans and have the right set of features you need for smaller-scale projects. You'll find more details on pricing plans in Chapter 12 of this guide.

Compliance requirements

If the eLearning content you create is subject to compliance requirements, make sure the tools you consider adhere to them. These can be data privacy regulations such as [GDPR](#) or [CCPA](#), or accessibility standards like [Section 508](#), which require that all electronic and information technology be accessible to those with disabilities.

Scalability needs

Do you need a solution that can accommodate the future expansion of eLearning content creation? Then consider authoring tools that offer flexible licensing options, robust collaboration features, and scalable infrastructure to support growing demands over time. We'll go into more detail on each of these functionalities further on in the guide.



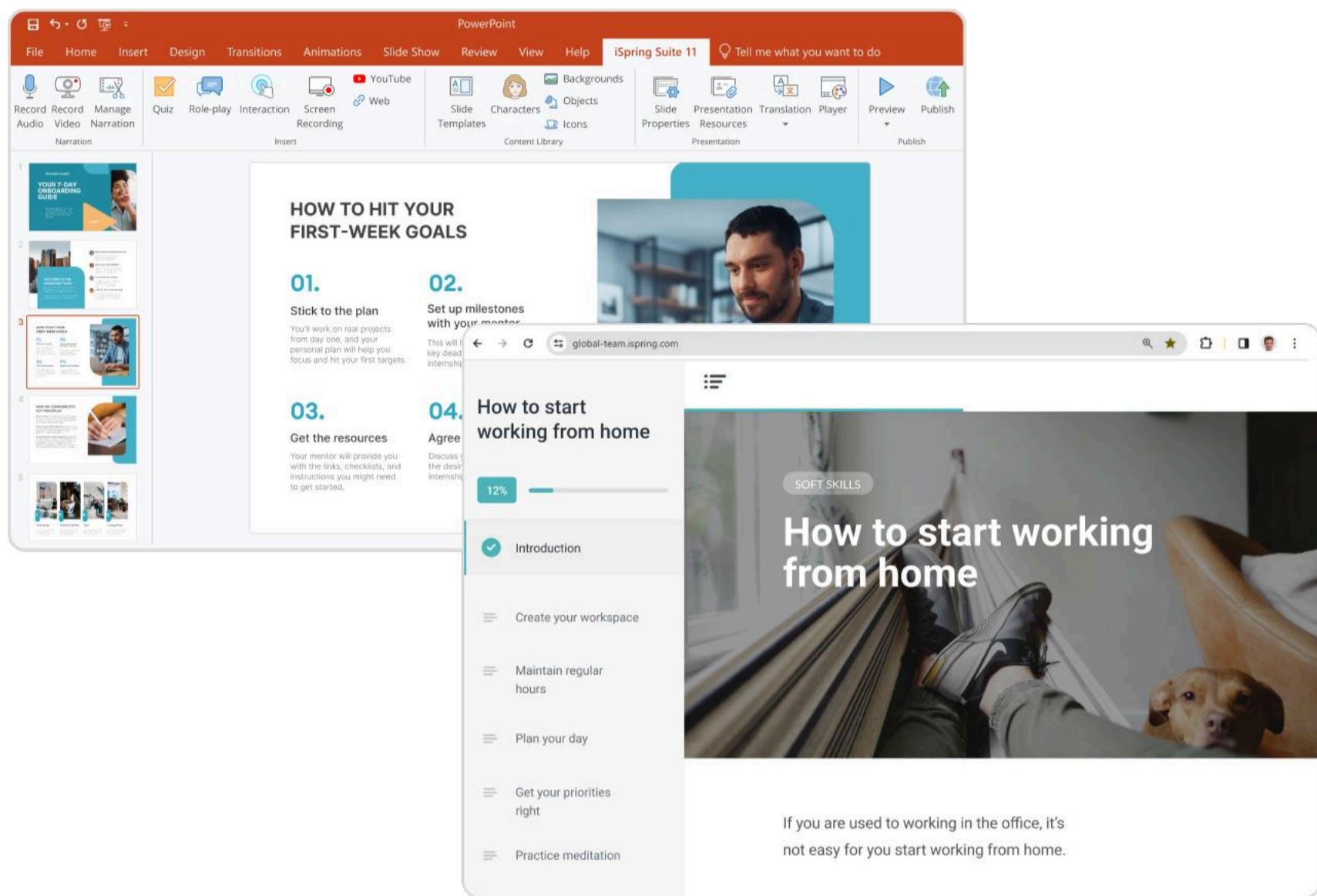
Anna Poli
Senior
Instructional
Designer

Expert insight

The factors above lay the groundwork for your search for the perfect authoring tool. After all, you can find dozens of great authoring tools with advanced features and state-of-the-art UX, but none of it will matter if it fails to meet **your** core eLearning needs and goals. So, take your time with this first exploratory step.

”

02. Desktop vs. cloud-based tools



Situation: You want to decide what will work better for you: a traditional desktop solution or a cloud service.

Desktop and cloud-based solutions have their pros and cons. Desktop authoring tools typically boast more features and can be a better choice for advanced course creators who seek extensive customization. Plus, they offer offline access to projects. On the other hand, cloud-based software is more flexible for remote authoring teams that need to collaborate on content. They also provide scalable storage options and automatic updates.

Let's take a closer look at the differences between cloud-based and desktop authoring tools.

| | Desktop | Cloud-based |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Functionality | Advanced | Varies |
| Productivity | High (requires an up-to-date computer) | High (requires a stable internet connection) |
| Remote access | - | + |
| Offline access | + | - |
| Security | High | Varies |
| Upgrades | May require a reboot | Automatic |
| Online collaboration | - | + |
| Suitable for Mac users | Depends on the software | + |

Both configurations can be optimal, so choose an authoring solution based on your priorities.



Expert insight

If you decide to opt for a cloud service, make sure to consider **security aspects**:

Michael Keller

Senior
eLearning
Officer

- **Ask your company's IT department** if your corporate network security policy allows data to be stored on external servers.
- **Ask the web service vendor** where their servers are located
- and ask your company's legal department if it is appropriate to use them.

03. Learning curve

Situation: You need to develop a number of eLearning courses within a tight time frame. You're looking for an easy-to-use tool that will not require prolonged onboarding.

The eLearning software implementation process has two stages:

| Stage | Process | Duration |
|-------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| Installation and setup | It typically only takes a few minutes to install a tool. However, sometimes expert configuration is needed – especially if your company has high network security requirements | 5 minutes to 3 days |
| Onboarding | The time it takes to master the tool can vary. It depends on how user-friendly the interface is and the quality of available training resources. | 1 day to 1 month |

Ideally, if the tool is intuitive enough, it will have a minimal learning curve, and you won't have to invest time and energy in software training.



Anna Poli
Senior
Instructional
Designer

Expert insight

The best way to find out how user-friendly an authoring tool is and estimate the learning curve is to take advantage of free software trials provided by vendors. A free trial leaves you with no obligations but offers valuable hands-on experience, allowing you to assess the tool's interface, features, and suitability for your specific needs before making a commitment.

Questions to ask a vendor:

- Is any training required to start using the tool?
- How much time does it take to install and set up the program?
- What kind of help from an IT expert (if any) will I need?
- Is there a knowledge base with training resources, free video tutorials, and guides?
- Can I receive individual team training?

Is a “flat” learning curve possible?

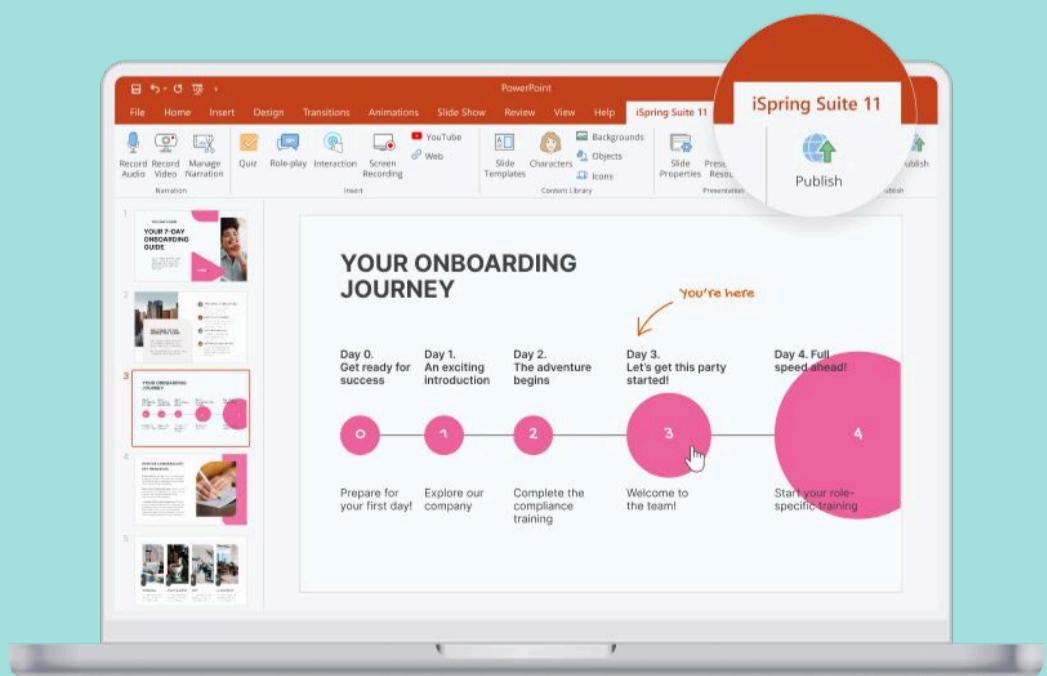
Yes – if you author in a familiar interface.

PowerPoint is one of the most popular and widely used presentation-building tools in the world. With iSpring Suite, you can combine the convenience of a familiar PPT interface with the power of a robust authoring tool.

iSpring Suite works as a PowerPoint add-in – you don't need to install and master a new interface. Just enjoy the added authoring capabilities and turn dull slides into interactive online courses in minutes, even if you have zero authoring experience.

Publish your course to SCORM, AICC, or xAPI and upload it to your LMS with all the PowerPoint animations, effects, and transitions displayed correctly. **Yes, it's that easy!**

Try iSpring Suite for free



04. LMS compatibility

Situation: Before purchasing the tool, you want to make sure that the courses will work in your LMS.

With modern authoring tools, you can create courses that support major eLearning standards: SCORM 1.2, SCORM 2004, AICC, cmi5, and xAPI (Tin Can). This guarantees compatibility with most LMSs.

If your tool doesn't support these standards, it puts limitations on the content that's generated. For example, if you decide to migrate to a new LMS, it may be difficult to move content without losing any functionality or features.

Checking compatibility

What if you suspect that a tool isn't compatible with your LMS? Usually, a vendor provides a list of supported LMSs on their website. Many LMS providers also have a list of recommended authoring tools that are compatible with their LMS and provide all required statistics.

Questions to ask a vendor:

- What publication formats does the tool support?
- Is it possible to test if your tool and my current LMS are compatible?
- What reports are available, and how detailed are they?



iSpring Suite is compatible with any LMS that supports the SCORM, xAPI, and AICC learning standards – that's the absolute majority of LMSs available on the market.

If you want to check whether your learning management software is a perfect match for iSpring Suite courses, use our [compatibility tester](#).

05. Features

Situation: You want to create adaptable, feature-rich learning content to make eLearning more impactful. You're considering the available capabilities of different authoring tools.

Authoring tools offer numerous features to users, so it's easy to get overwhelmed. To simplify navigation, all features can be divided into six main categories:

| Category | Purpose | Features |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| LMS compliance | Publish a course in a web-friendly format and upload it to an LMS to track learners' progress and manage training. | Conversion to major eLearning standards (SCORM, xAPI, AICC, etc.) |
| Video-based learning | Create video lectures, tutorials, screencasts, and other types of video content for learners. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Audio and video narration• Screen recording• Talking-head videos• Built-in video editor• Visual hints |
| Interactivity and gamification | Engage learners with interactive content to make eLearning more effective. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interactive slides• Games• Branching scenarios• Characters Dialogue voiceovers• Role-plays• Award points |
| Course player settings | Manage course structure, playback, and extra resources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Navigation and branching• Player customization• Course preview• White labeling |

| Category | Purpose | Features |
|----------------------|---|---|
| Assessments | Evaluate learners' progress and gather feedback throughout the learning process. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quizzes with various question types• Customizable testing rules• Feedback messages• Automatic collection of quiz results |
| Accessibility | Seamlessly create online courses that users with disabilities can take with ease. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Text-to-speech• Captions• Translation and localization• Section 508 and WCAG 2.1 AA compliant content |



Expert insight

Most vendors provide a hefty list of features on their website, but don't get blindsided by the quantity. If you only need 10 out of 100, why pay for the rest? Reflect on your eLearning needs and goals and assess which features are must-haves for you. That will help you stay on track with the selection process.

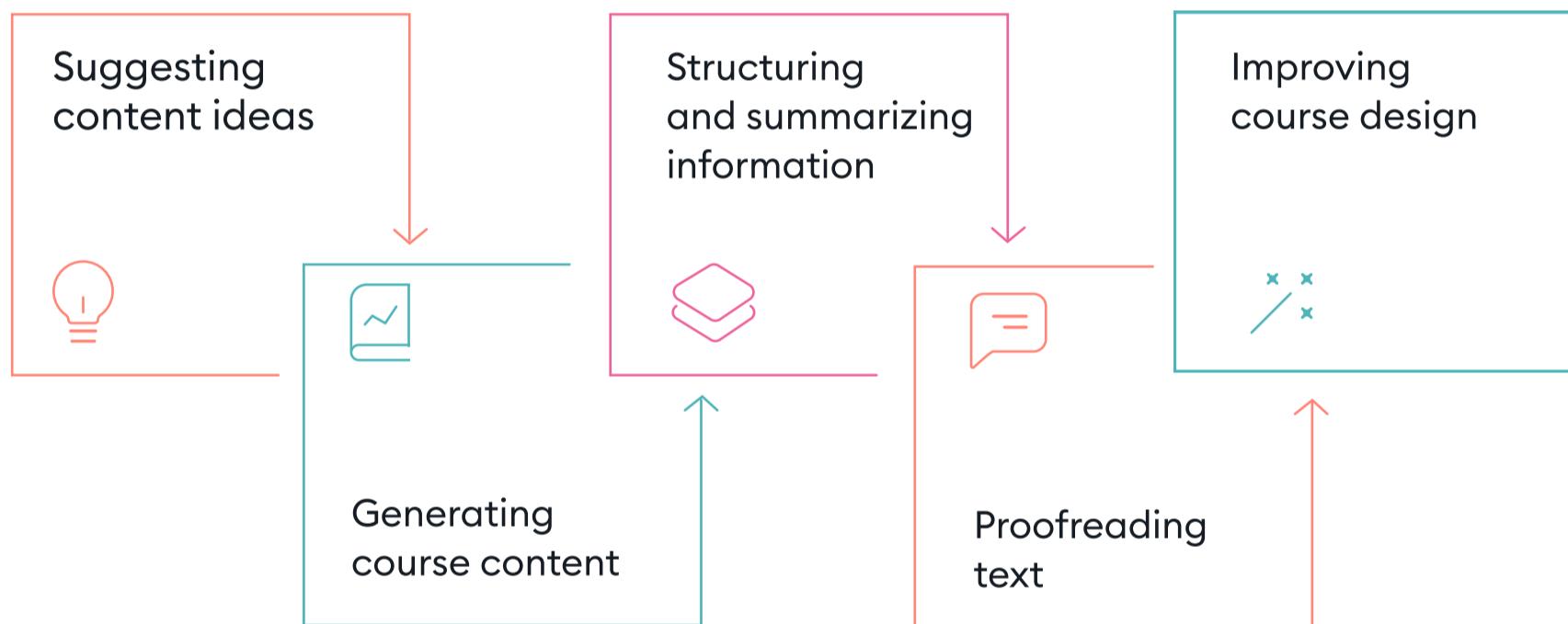
Michael Keller
Senior eLearning Officer



06. AI-assisted authoring

Situation: You want to create online courses faster and consider generative AI to be a solution for automating content creation.

More and more authoring tools implement AI to help users streamline learning content development. Usually, it's present in the form of a chatbot that responds to your prompts and completes various tasks, including:

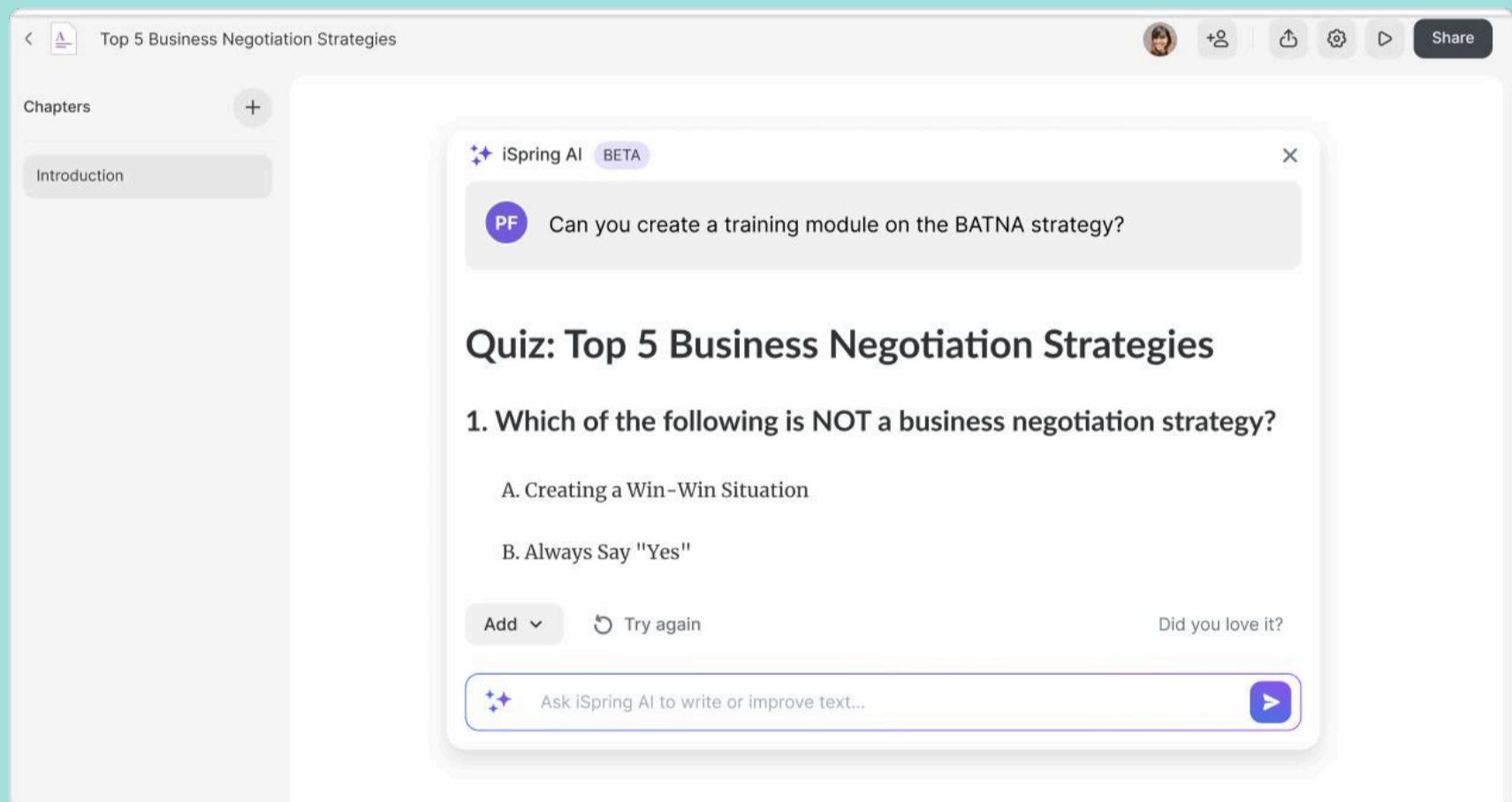


With AI, you can author courses much faster, especially if you need to deliver learning content at scale. AI also makes it easier to personalize materials for individual learners.

Want to feel the power of AI-assisted authoring? Create courses in iSpring Cloud AI.

iSpring Clud AI is a web-based authoring tool with a built-in AI assistant that helps you create learning content quickly and hassle-free. With just two clicks, you can ask iSpring AI to:

- Create a course outline
- Write text for your courses or longreads
- Create quizzes
- Edit your content
- Structure the course
- Create a table, and much more



The screenshot shows the iSpring Cloud AI interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with a file icon, the title 'Top 5 Business Negotiation Strategies', and various sharing and settings icons. On the left, a sidebar titled 'Chapters' shows a single chapter named 'Introduction'. The main content area features an 'iSpring AI' BETA chat window with a purple profile icon and the text 'Can you create a training module on the BATNA strategy?'. Below this, a quiz titled 'Quiz: Top 5 Business Negotiation Strategies' is displayed. The first question is '1. Which of the following is NOT a business negotiation strategy?'. The options are 'A. Creating a Win-Win Situation' and 'B. Always Say "Yes"'. At the bottom of the interface, there are buttons for 'Add', 'Try again', 'Did you love it?', and a text input field 'Ask iSpring AI to write or improve text...' with a blue 'Ask' button.

[Explore iSpring Cloud AI](#)

Questions to ask a vendor:

- Does the tool come with an AI assistant?
- Is AI included in the price of the tool?

07. Content library

Situation: You want to create professional-looking courses but don't have any experience in instructional design.

A content library is a collection of ready-made assets for course creation that typically includes:

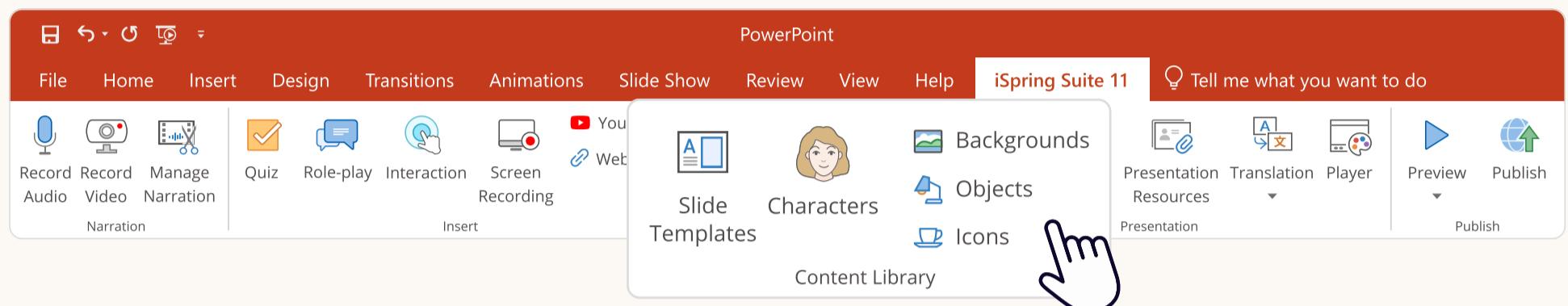
| | |
|--|---|
|  Slide and course templates |  Copyright-free images |
|  Characters and backgrounds |  Objects, icons, and controls |

If you're a non-designer who wants to build captivating, professional-looking courses in short order, go for a tool that provides a content library. With it, **developing e-courses is faster than ever**. Just select the relevant assets and insert them into your course to enrich the content.

Questions to ask a vendor:

- Does the tool provide access to a content library?
- Is it included in the price?
- Are there templates and assets related to my professional area?
- Is it possible to add custom images to the library?

The iSpring Content Library contains **134,000+** ready-made assets to help you build feature-rich courses from the ground up.



Choose from:

2,300+ course templates

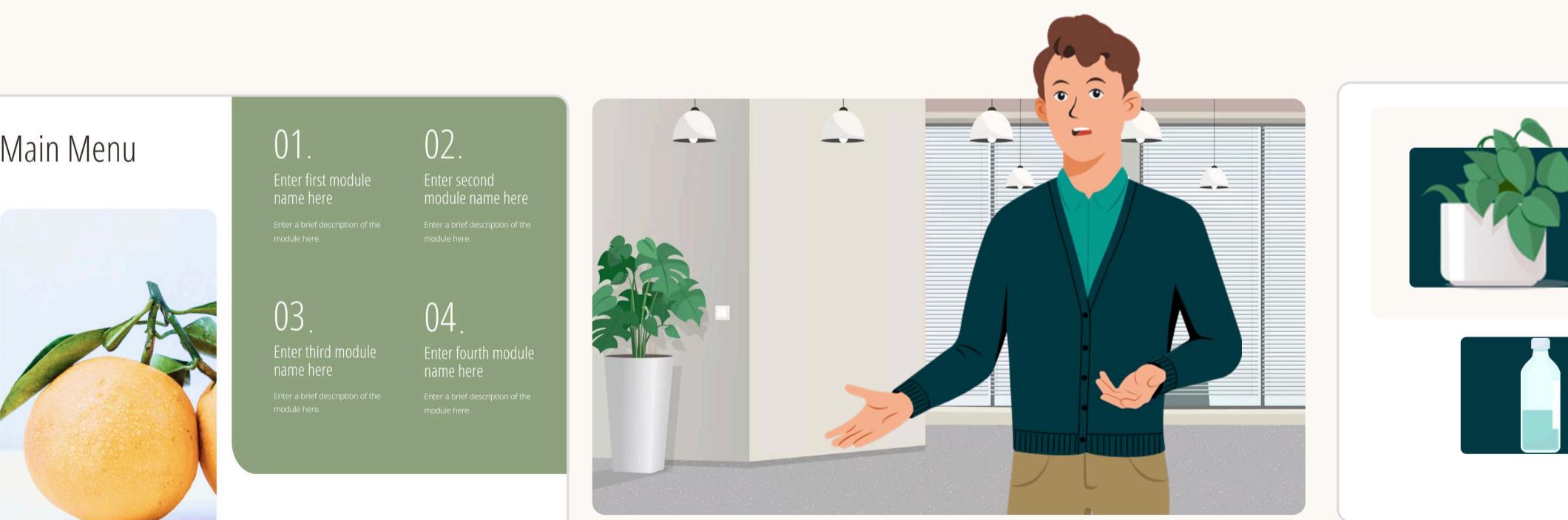
380+ characters

Custom characters for your unique learning scenarios

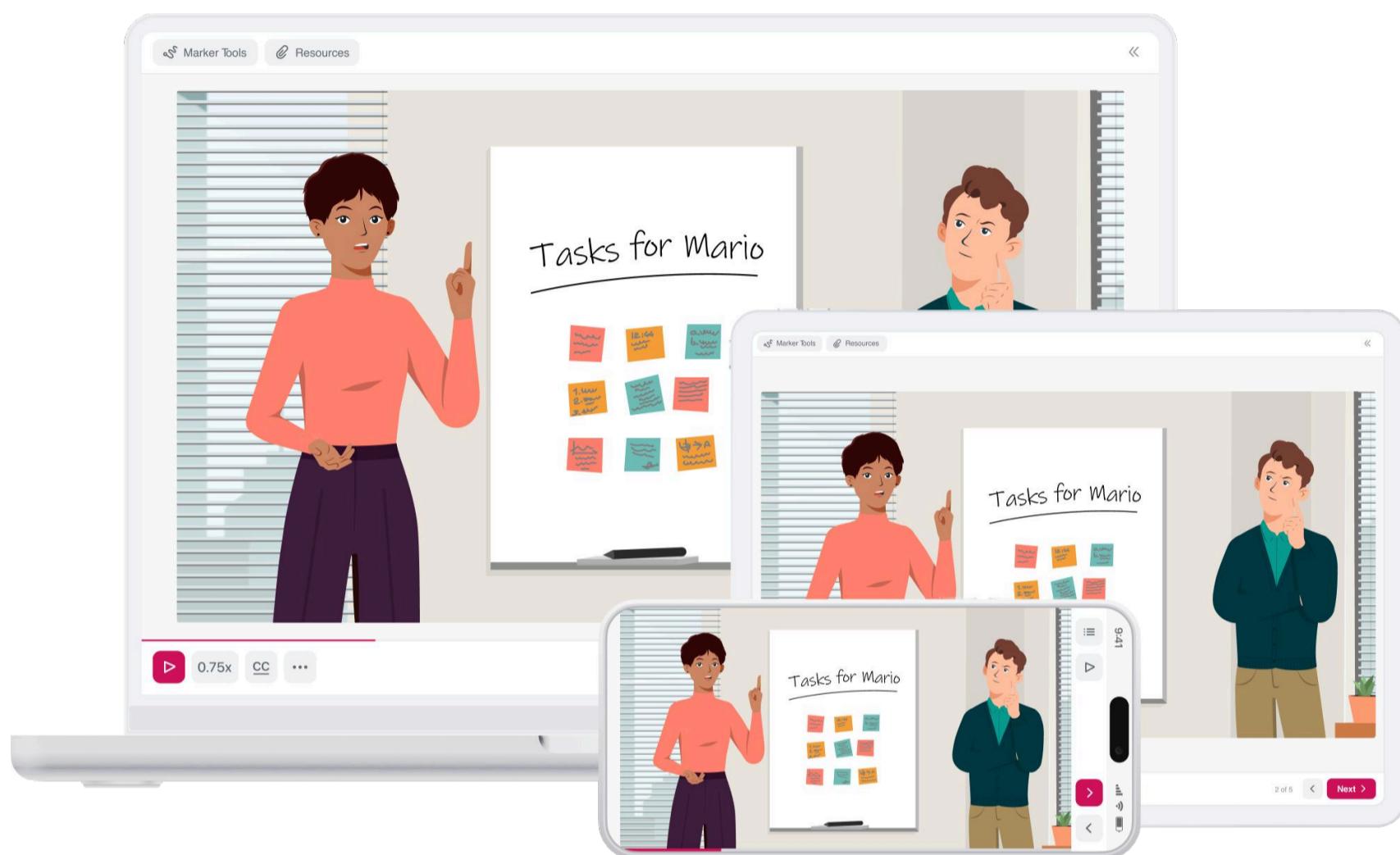
3,500+ 3D locations

**3,600+ icons and UI controls,
and much more**

The content library is constantly updated and expanded, and you can request a new asset by [contacting our sales team](#).



08. Mobile learning



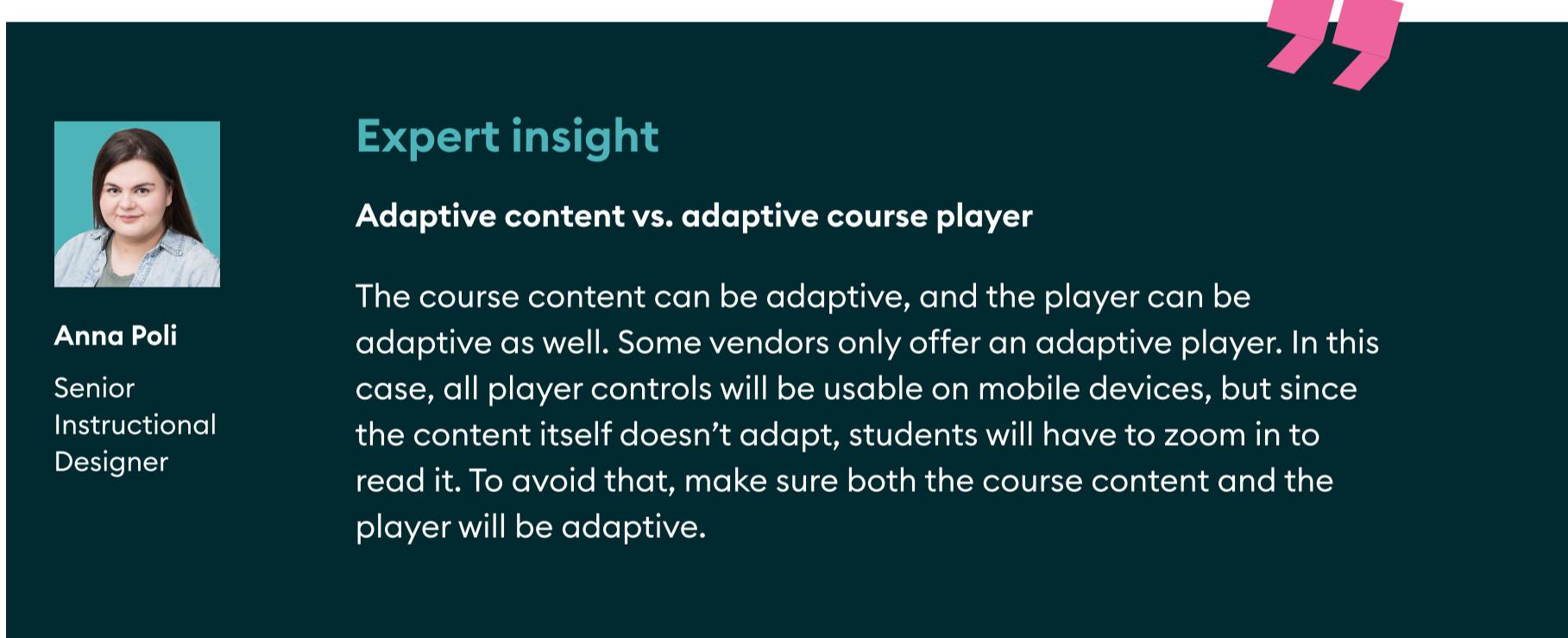
Situation: You want your users to be able to access content on their mobile devices.

In order to work on mobile devices, your interactive e-courses and quizzes must be in HTML5 format.

Mobile-adaptive courses

Adaptive courses can fit any screen to provide a better learning experience on mobile devices. There are two ways to deliver adaptive content:

| Manually | Automatically |
|--|--|
| Create multiple versions of your course for other devices. For every version, you will need to adjust the layout, move and resize player controls, and customize font sizes and other objects. | Create a single version of a course, and it will automatically adapt to all screens. Most modern tools, like iSpring Suite, produce adaptive courses that automatically fit all smartphones and tablets. |



Expert insight

Adaptive content vs. adaptive course player

The course content can be adaptive, and the player can be adaptive as well. Some vendors only offer an adaptive player. In this case, all player controls will be usable on mobile devices, but since the content itself doesn't adapt, students will have to zoom in to read it. To avoid that, make sure both the course content and the player will be adaptive.

Questions to ask a vendor:

- Can learners access courses with their mobile devices?
- Which elements of the e-course will be adaptive: the content, the player, or both?
- Do you have a special mobile app? For which platforms (iOS, Android)?
- Does it allow users to take courses offline?

09. Technical support

Situation: What if you face some technical difficulties while developing your eLearning course? You want to be sure a vendor will provide prompt and competent assistance.

Salespeople might be pleasant and client-oriented prior to making the sale, but it's when a customer faces problems that a company's true colors show. If a company can provide prompt and professional technical support, it saves you, the client, a great deal of time, effort, and headaches.

Ideally, tech support will be available 24/7. On top of that, all essential instructions and guides should be provided on the vendor's website if a client needs off-hours assistance or self-help.



It's always good to have more than one way to contact tech support: by phone, email, and/or live chat. That's why iSpring's tech support team is available around the clock through all these channels. We resolve 83% of all customer support cases within 2 hours.

Install a trial version and contact tech support:

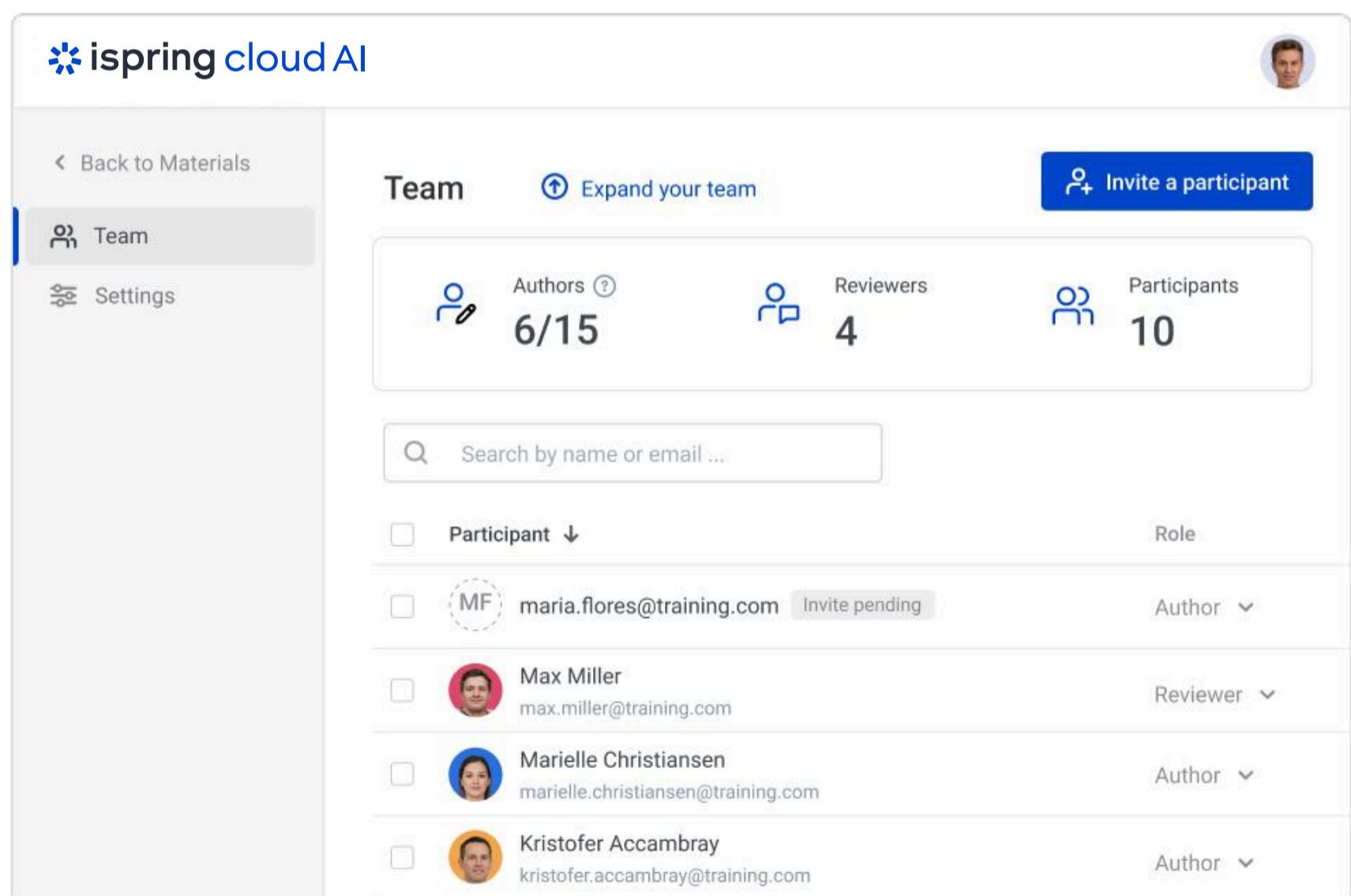
- How fast did you get a response from tech support?
- Did they help you solve the problem?
- How comfortable did you feel talking to the support engineers?

10. Collaboration on courses

Situation: You need to gather feedback from your stakeholders and/or want several authors to work on the same course in real time.

To make collaboration on courses easy and convenient, some vendors provide **cloud services for storage and online content co-creation**. You can share your course via the cloud or create it in a web-based tool and grant editing access to your co-authors, SMEs, and reviewers who can contribute to the course creation process.

Besides, you can use cloud storage to upload other learning materials, like PDF documents, PPT presentations, video and audio, and share them with your colleagues via a link. This is a great option for those who have a lot of learning content, want to keep it in one place, and easily share it with their team.



The screenshot shows the 'Team' section of the ispring cloud AI platform. On the left, there's a sidebar with 'Back to Materials', 'Team' (which is selected and highlighted in blue), and 'Settings'. The main area has a header with the ispring logo and a user profile picture. Below the header, there are three counts: 'Authors 6/15', 'Reviewers 4', and 'Participants 10'. A 'Search by name or email ...' input field is present. A 'Participant' dropdown menu is open, showing a list of team members with their names, emails, and roles (Author or Reviewer). The list includes:

| Participant | Role |
|--|----------|
| MF maria.flores@training.com | Author |
| Max Miller max.miller@training.com | Reviewer |
| Marielle Christiansen marielle.christiansen@training.com | Author |
| Kristofer Accambray kristofer.accambray@training.com | Author |

Questions to ask a vendor:

- Is there any cloud storage available? What are the terms of service?
- What is the storage capacity?
- Does the service allow leaving comments?
- Can several authors work on the development of the course?
- What file formats does the cloud service support?
- Is it possible to share uploaded files via a link?

11. Software updates

Situation: You have decided to purchase a perpetual license, but you worry that the tool might become outdated.

Normally, software updates should be released **at least twice a year**. This means that a company is actively developing the product, fixing bugs, and adding new features. To find out about updates, check out the ‘What’s new’ section of the vendor’s website or browse through their blog posts and press releases.



Michael Keller
Senior
eLearning
Officer

Expert insight

It’s always nice when a vendor listens to their customers. **Find out if and how you can make feature requests.** This is usually possible through a special form or by email. If you already have a feature request, ask if the vendor is planning to implement your feature. Some vendors can also agree to implement custom features.

At iSpring, we do our best to accommodate our clients’ feature requests. Each request is discussed individually, and our product developers find optimal strategies to meet the user’s needs swiftly.



Questions to ask a vendor:

- How often are updates released?
- How do I find out about available updates?
- Is it possible to implement a custom feature? How much would that cost?

12. Pricing models

Situation: You're choosing between several tools, and they all offer different pricing models. You're not sure which model is best suited to your needs.

The most common pricing models for authoring tools are:

| Model | Explanation | Suitable if |
|--|---|---|
| Perpetual license (one-time purchase) | You pay a one-time fee to use the authoring tool indefinitely. This typically includes access to updates and support for a limited period. | You prefer a one-time investment, have long-term eLearning needs, and/or want to have full ownership of the software. |
| Subscription-based | You pay a recurring fee (monthly or annually) to use the authoring tool. This includes updates and support for the duration of the subscription. | You have a one-time project or prefer a more flexible payment structure. |
| Pay-per-use or pay-per-project | You pay only for the features or services you use or for specific projects completed using the authoring tool. | You are a freelance course creator and/or want a cost-effective solution with minimal upfront investment. |
| Freemium | You use basic features for free, with the option to upgrade to a premium version for access to advanced features or additional support. | You are an individual or a small team with a limited budget that requires basic functionality. |
| Enterprise or custom pricing | You pay an agreed upon sum tailored to the specific requirements and scale of your organization. Pricing is negotiated based on factors, such as the number of users, customization needs, and additional services. | You are part of a large organization with complex eLearning needs and unique customization requirements. |

Questions to ask a vendor:

- What pricing options are available?
- Does the price include tech support?
- Are there special pricing options for academic or freelance users?
- Can I upgrade to another plan down the road?

Checklist for Choosing the Right Authoring Tool

Check if an authoring tool meets these basic requirements for eLearning development. If it checks all the relevant boxes, you've found the perfect authoring tool for your needs.

→ Quick start

The tool can meet my eLearning authoring needs and goals.

It's easy to master the tool.

Onboarding support is available and includes free video tutorials and detailed help docs.

The vendor can provide individual training for my team.

★ Software features

The tool has all the features I need for my eLearning projects.

I can launch the tool on my preferred platform (Windows, Mac, or web browser).

The tool generates courses that are compatible with my LMS.

The tool supports universal eLearning standards: SCORM 1.2/2004, xAPI, and AICC.

I can create interactive eLearning content (quizzes, surveys, video lectures, dialogue simulations).

The tool has an AI assistant.

The tool allows for the publishing of fully adaptive courses that play correctly on any screen or device.



Additional services

Special cloud storage is available for storing assets, sharing courses, and gathering feedback.

Several authors can work on the same project at the same time.

The tool includes a content library with templates, characters, locations, objects, backgrounds, and buttons.



Friendly and helpful customer service

A company representative explained what's included in the price.

I can contact technical support via different channels and get a response quickly.

Product updates are released twice a year, or even more frequently.

The vendor can accommodate my organization's scaling needs.



Compliance and security

Using the tool does not violate our corporate security policy.

The tool adheres to data privacy standards.

I can create accessible courses that comply with Section 508.

Still not sure which authoring tool to choose?



Contact iSpring

Call us at **+1 800 640 0868** or drop us a line at support@ispring.com.

We will research your case, suggest a suitable solution, and calculate the cost.

Welcome to the iSpring Community!

Feel free to join and become a valuable part of a community of instructional designers and eLearning professionals who are taking training to the next level with iSpring.

Fast forward to the part of our community you like - just scan the relevant QR code.

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