

INSIDE LOOK AT THE HANDS-ON LAB ENVIRONMENT

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Ever have the need to test a specific VMware product feature or configuration quickly? If so, keep reading and you will learn how you can use the VMware Hands-on Labs environment to do just that.

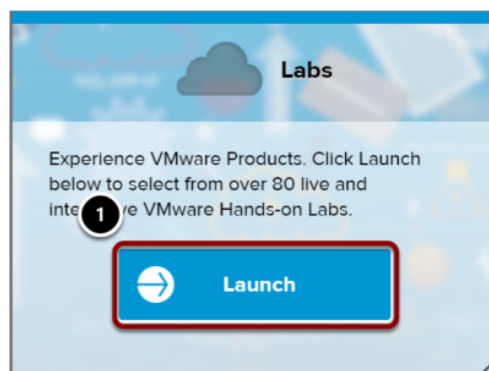
Caution: “The Coffee is Hot” ...

Before I dive into how the HOL environment can be used outside of its intended purpose, I want to be clear that the software environments I am going to show you how to “find” are unsupported nested builds for learning purposes only. These environments are live environments and the HOL team encourages people to test things out within them freely as long as the limitations are clearly understood. Please be aware any work you complete or configurations you change cannot be exported or saved and once an environment is spawned it CANNOT be extended past 9 hours. Now that we know if we take a giant gulp of the fresh, hot coffee... we run the risk of getting burned, let’s get started.

Intended use

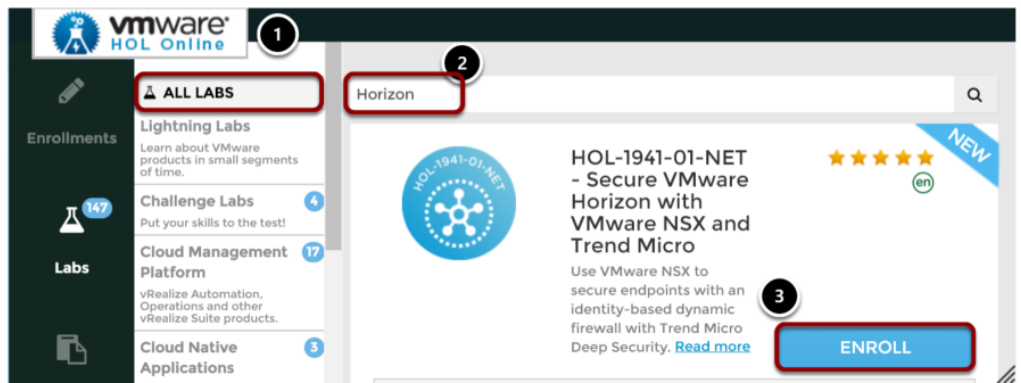
First off, the Hands-on Lab environment is a fantastic learning tool as designed. If you are not already familiar with the offering, just hop on over to <https://hol.vmware.com> and hit the Launch button shown below, create a user account and get started learning! Each lab is made up of multiple different lessons spanning most of the VMware software family.

Click here to Launch the Labs.



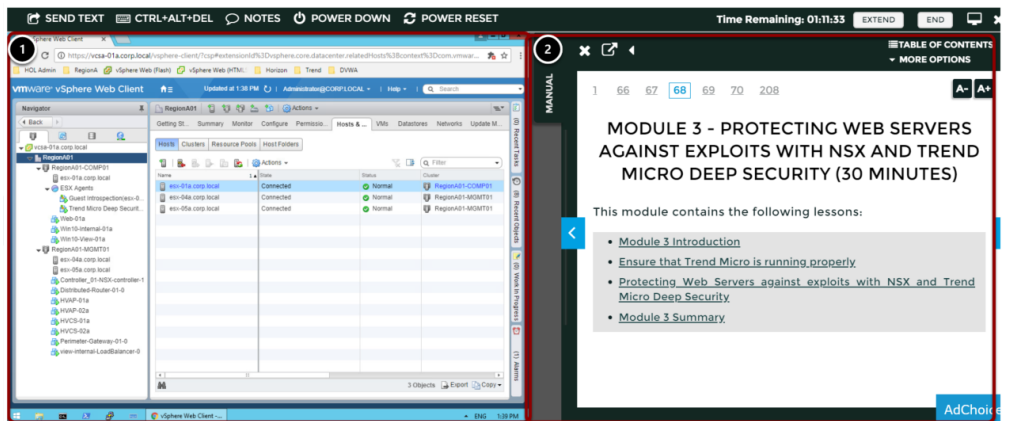
All of these lessons are searchable by selecting the All Labs section below and typing in your technology of interest.

1. Select ALL LABS
2. Search for your technology of choice
3. Click Enroll



Consume the Lab:

1. Live interactive environment (vPod)
2. Lab Manual (Manual)



vPods and Manuals are separate items... What?

Did you know the environment is backed by standardized “vPods” with predefined software loads and the manuals are separate? Yes, it’s true there is a method to the madness. At first look, the HOL environment seems to spin up a specific live environment for your chosen lesson. In part this is true, however, many lessons and modules use the same underlying vPod and software load. A vPod is a preconfigured software environment backed by vCloud director and presented through a technology called The VMware Learning Platform (VLP). Once you launch a “lab,” you are really viewing two separate items smashed together. The left pane in my example above is the vPod and the right pane is the manual. Note that this layout is customizable, and you can even launch the manual on a separate screen if desired.

More info on the VLP can be found here if you want to squirrel out and abandon this read:

<https://support.vmwarelearningplatform.com/hc/en-us/articles/201067380-What-is-VMware-Learning-Platform->

SKU breakdown

In short, each Hands-on Lab overall lesson is a presentation of a prewritten lab manual and the appropriate vPod presented together to the user. These Lessons each have a Stock Keeping Unit number or SKU. For example, the lab “VMware NSX Data Center for vSphere - Getting Started” has the SKU “HOL-1903-01-NET” From this information, I can tell you that this lab was developed for the 2019 lab development cycle, uses the same base vPod as HOL-1903-02-NET and HOL-1903-03-NET and is network-focused. How do I know this? Here is a breakdown of the SKU Code:

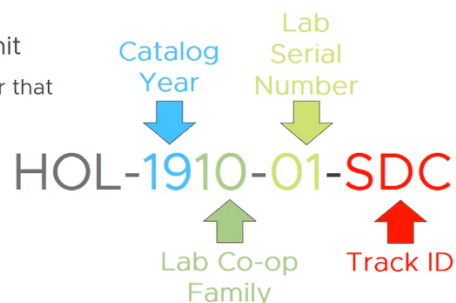
Deciphering The Lab SKU



SKU = Stock Keeping Unit

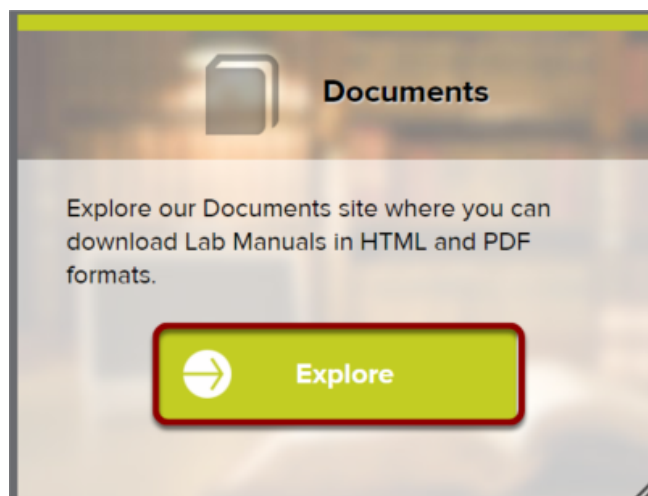
The SKU is a unique identifier that includes:

- Catalog year
- Lab Co-op Family
- Track ID
- Lab serial number



Finding the right vPod for the Job

Alrighty then! Now that we know that some of the labs share vPods and the manuals are separate items that just guide you along, we can choose to just use the vPod and ignore the manual. The easiest way to find the best vPod for our needs is to figure out what vPod has our desired software load. To do this we what to Go to the <https://hol.vmware.com> main page and select the Explore button instead of the Launch button.



Now we are presented with a more advanced searchable catalog that includes the SKU, Lab Title, and Description. Let's say we want to find a lab environment with NSX-T for testing. Let's Search for NSX-T.

You can use the dropdown box (1.) and or the search field (2.)

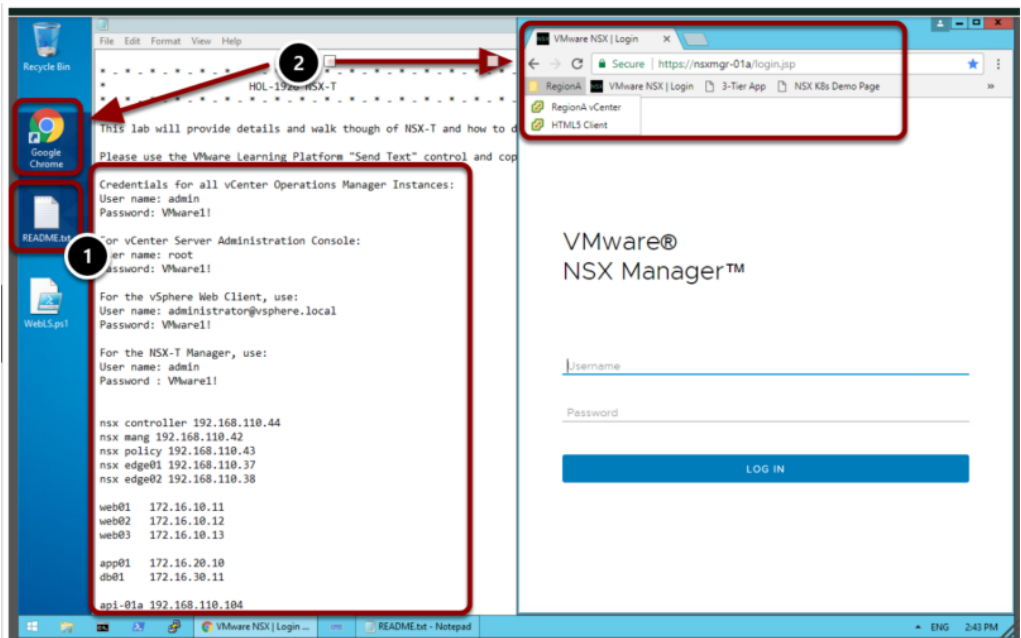


Scroll down and look for the “most common vPod used.” Since we know how to tell what SKUs include the same vPods, we can see how many of them match. Based on the descriptions, we can see that there is a good chance that any lab SKU starting with “HOL-1926” will have NSX-T loaded.

HOL-1926-01-NET	VMware NSX-T Data Center - Getting Started	Build developer clouds and host next-gen apps with VMware NSX-T Data Center. You will look at NSX-T multi-hypervisor capabilities and learn how to configure logical switching, routing, load balancing, and distributed firewall.
HOL-1926-02-NET	Integrating Kubernetes with VMware NSX-T Data Center	Integrate VMware NSX-T and Kubernetes using the NSX Container Plug-in. Understand how Kubernetes Namespaces, Services, Ingress Rules and Network Policies relate to different NSX-T logical network constructs, from a single pane of glass.
HOL-1926-03-NET	VMware NSX-T Data Center Operations, Troubleshooting, and API Consumption	Using the built-in tools for VMware NSX-T operations and troubleshooting, you will explore monitoring, troubleshooting, and resolve issues based on the results. Also explore the API via a variety of methods such as Terraform, Postman, and cURL.

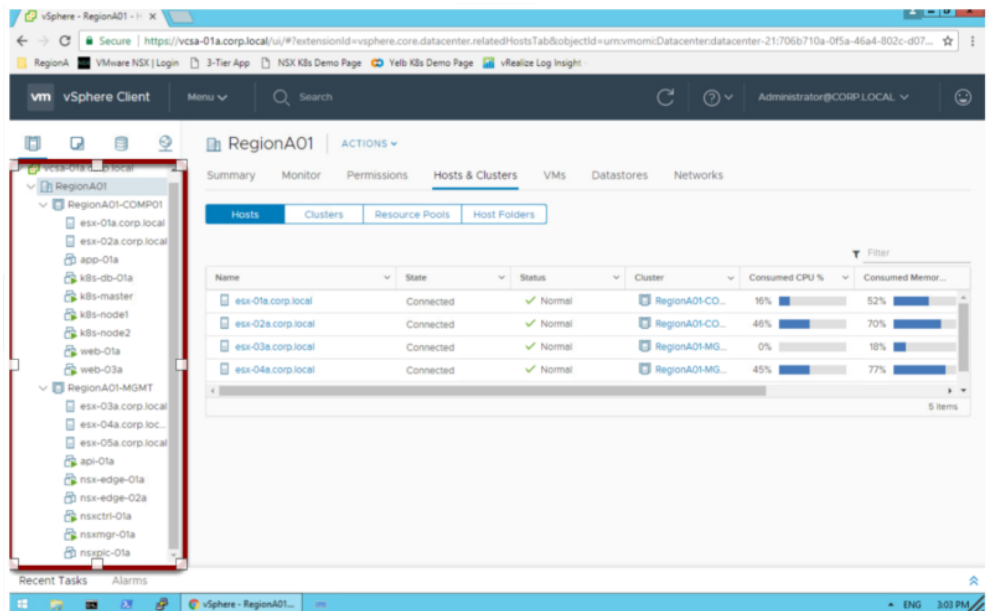
What software is loaded in my vPod?

OK, now that we have a target lab, let's launch it and see what it contains. I chose to launch HOL-1926-02-NET for this example. Launch the lab and just close the manual. As a third year Lab Captain, I'll share a secret: every lab has a README.TXT on the desktop that includes URLs, IPs and Passwords for the installed components and almost always has the main software component links bookmarked in Chrome. If in doubt, the administrative user names and passwords are typically root / admin and VMware1! See? You don't even need the manual to get started testing!!!



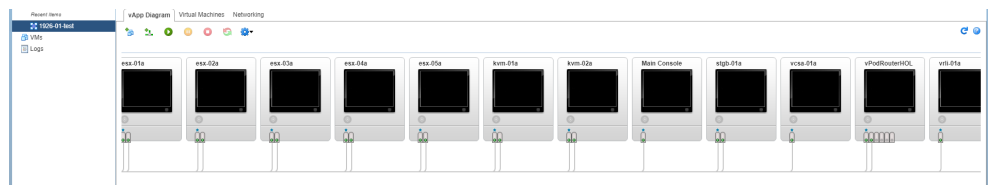
What is the structure of my vPod?

Most vPod have vSphere loaded by default. Some are multi-site and some are single. It is almost always safe to assume <https://vcsa-01a.corp.local> is the main vCenter and the keeper of the nested infrastructure. The lab that I launched contains 5 ESXi servers, a pair of HA-enabled Edges and many other components. Don't be afraid to create or delete VMs: if you "break it," just launch a new lab and it will be back to the way you found it.



Inside look at the vPod

Here is something you don't get to see in the HOL interface, this is one of the back-end vPod spun up for development. Yep, we use vCloud Director to provide the nested environment.



Come take the HOL tour at VMworld

Most Hands On Labs are created for and are launched at VMworld. If you find yourself at the San Francisco or Barcelona show this year, sign up for a HOL tour.

Disclaimer

As stated in the beginning, this certainly not the official supported way to use our labs, but we know that customers can and do use our labs in many ways. Happy testing and remember our labs can be extended for a maximum of 9 hours and, we aren't able to answer questions or provide support for customers who go "off script." Furthermore, if it is not in the vPod today, we are not going to add a feature for you to test your use case: "it is what it is". Please don't open a GSS ticket referencing the HOL environment for something that is not covered in the manual. If you have issues with content that IS in the manual, or if there is a use case that you feel is something that we SHOULD be demonstrating, please open a ticket and suggest the use case –we have an HOL-specific support portal at <http://hol-support.vmware.com/>. Who knows, it may be part of the next version of the lab. Above all, have fun!



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