

Taking

Paper Out

By Alan Goldstein

of the Office

Businesses engaging in “e” processes—e-payroll, e-reporting, and e-benefits—can achieve big pay-offs when they understand the considerations and consequences of transitioning away from paper-based management processes.

Whether the goal is reducing hard copy payroll costs, eliminating the burden of shipping and postage, or disseminating benefits information, employee portals are gaining credibility, viability, and visibility in today’s workplace.

Points to Ponder

Before taking the paperless plunge, consider the following:

Clearly Assess the Situation. Virtual employee management requires an in-depth understanding of the processes, workflow, and environment supported by paper. Businesses need to identify, track, and document the various paper-based daily communications and keep in mind how the transfer to electronics will affect departments and employees. Include all relevant documents such as paychecks, employee handbooks, benefits policies, evaluation forms, merit increase records, and time-off requests.

Stake Out the Stakeholder. Process change requires input and buy-in from several internal stakeholders. Without their support, a conversion can overlook critical steps and potential obstacles. Addressing stakeholder concerns early on significantly increases the likelihood of widespread endorsement and subsequent adoption.

Prioritize the Process. The good news is that critical stakeholders are engaged and involved. The bad news is that critical stakeholders are engaged and involved. Balancing the needs of individual departments, then prioritizing and implementing processes to meet corporate goals, is akin to tightrope walking.

To begin the task, identify priorities that are likely to engage everyone early, such as electronic payroll processing. E-payroll presents a clear financial benefit and it empowers employees with a tool to track payroll histories. Keep an eye toward demonstrable value, ease of acceptance, and strength of reporting because these attributes facilitate buy-in during the prioritization process.

Choose Vendors With Technological Depth and Breadth. Evaluating employee portal technology platforms can be confusing. Fortunately, there are various

sizes and shapes of technologies available. To select the right one, look to vendors with a breadth of offerings—in-house applications, outsourced hosted solutions, and Web services platforms. Also, investigate the architecture. Is it open? Does it use standard technologies? Is it adaptable, scalable, and reliable?

Finally, compare the benefits of costly built-from-scratch portal solutions against ready-made options that deliver employee-centric functionality and timely implementations.

Secure the Security. Ensuring security requires various interpretations. From an IT perspective, businesses want to know that the tool selected has the capa-



bilities to obstruct hackers and withstand unanticipated system outages. From an HR perspective, security is defined by employer/employee availability, accessibility, and privacy. At the outset, define and clarify business rules that are currently in place with your management approval processes, the accessibility to records, and reporting procedures.

Phase Success. When new technology affects employees’ day-to-day work habits, the change can be overwhelming regardless of the benefit. To manage change, develop a methodical approach to the system’s rollout. Focus on the most obvious benefits early,

and then steadily begin the implementation process in phases. Give employees time to adjust to the change while also implementing a check and balance system to measure the system's operational performance.

Determine White and Blue Collar Scenarios. Not all businesses are created equal—at least in terms of employee access to online information. While a call center offers employees online access 24/7, employees at a manufacturing plant likely have little access to computers.

When considering an employee portal, review the online habits and accessibility of employees, keeping in mind that the goal is ready information. Employers may want to offer computer discount programs or matching funds to encourage a computer purchase at home or place computer and printer kiosks onsite.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate. The last phase of a workforce portal implementation is the most critical: communicating. Start with managers, making sure they understand the benefits. Once you have their buy-in, communicate with all of your employees. Keep them informed before, during, and after the portal is introduced. Use diplomacy every time a new phase is introduced, always emphasizing the benefits to the business and employees. Offer training and self-governing tutorials while reinforcing the value of the program through management meetings, employee newsletters, and one-on-one conversations.

Empowering and Liberating

Companies wading through the workforce management paper trail are quick to realize the monetary benefits of an online portal. Electronic payrolls and HR support are dramatic business facilitators. They empower employees by offering easy access to benefits and payroll history, while liberating managers, IT, and HR staff from the administrative tedium of a cumbersome paper trail.

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