

Employee Self-Service in the Application Portfolio

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The technology explosion over the last decade brought us new and innovative ways to use the internet in our daily lives. The technological changes have conditioned people of all walks of life to the online environment as a resource for shopping, banking, job hunting and more. Online applications are now considered to be required for businesses to reach their customers and to support their employees.

Employee Self-Service (ESS) applications represent another step forward in the evolving internet-based services providing employees with access to information and company communications. Self-service programs can be executed over the Internet or a company's Intranet.

ESS Features

Browser-based and integrated to the company HR applications, ESS provides 24/7 access to employees regardless of where they are, through the Internet or the company Intranet. This access allows for the verification of personal data and the updating of data as changes occur in the employee's personal and professional life. The end result is data with a higher degree of accuracy and data that is current. ESS portals can be used to access personal and contact information, view paychecks, enroll and change benefit selections and more. Additional links added to the ESS provide access to 401K providers and to company communications and handbooks.

ESS systems offer features that meet the needs of the business, employee and industry with many functions seemingly appearing in several products. Internet-based payroll solutions, for example, facilitate cost savings by allowing companies to reduce resources needed to support the payroll function. Following are some of the features supported on ESS Portals:

Personal Data and Payroll: Review and updates of personal information is one form of self-service which allows employees to view and edit their own personal information. Companies can give their employees permission to review and make changes to their personal data (name, address, etc.), W-4 elections, and voluntary deductions, as well as view their payroll stubs and W-2s. Changes are then reflected in the appropriate HCM systems and the employee database reflects more timely and accurate information. Payroll information can consist of a mix of current information and payroll history.

Benefit Enrollment: The employee maintains information on plan participation and keeps track of benefits plans, performs cost plan analysis, budgetary projections, and tracks/reviews outside carrier reports. Benefits Open Enrollment gives employees the ability to check available benefit plan information and make enrollment changes. The company can provide the benefits manual online to help the employee understand the benefit selection process and options.

Time and Attendance Tracking: Electronic time sheets can dramatically improve payroll efficiency by allowing employees to enter and track their own work hours, paid time off and sick time. This is especially useful for companies with multiple worksites, a widely distributed sales force, employees who telecommute, or contract workers on location at other companies. With Time and Attendance tracking using ESS electronic time sheets, employees enter their hours and worksite (if applicable) according to

company defined categories. Then, they forward the sheet electronically to their supervisor who can approve it online. Electronic time sheets can improve accuracy and reduce handling time by 50% to 75%.

ESS Benefits and Savings

ESS can save time and resources associated with updating and maintaining employee data and company materials for employees such as handbooks and benefit announcements. For example, updating the employee handbook online eliminates the printing and distribution costs associated with a hardcopy manual. On the employee side, the information can now be updated in a more timely manner without utilizing HR resources. This is a win/win for both the company and the employee as the data is more current and the employee has convenient access without going through the HR department.

Self-service has great potential to support the decision-making process by allowing employees to perform "what if" scenarios to test decisions before implementing them. Employees can be given access to tools to try out various strategies for insurance coverage, benefits contributions, and other financial planning, which eliminates the need to request the information from HR or payroll.

ESS Long Term Benefits

When properly implemented, ESS solutions provide a positive impact for employees and employers alike. Employees appreciate the convenience and ability to control personal data, which can ultimately affect performance and retention. Within the payroll department, self-service eliminates paper shuffling and removes tasks that can be handled more efficiently by others. Communications to employees can be done via the portal, eliminating printing and distribution of hardcopy announcements and manuals. Finally, storing information electronically is cheaper than filing paper documents in cabinets.

As the technology becomes more affordable and the number of self-service features increases, ESS solutions will find greater acceptance in the business world. Employees will become increasingly more comfortable with online systems to make changes, get information and manage their own data. Whatever system you chose to run your business, ESS can be integrated to provide timely data and services to your entire staff.

LBi Software specializes in providing custom applications for enterprise HCM systems.

Read about LBi's Employee Self-Service Portal at <http://www.lbisoftware.com/selfservice.html>.

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