

Web-based HR Solutions Deliver Higher ROI Compared with Web-Enabled Counterparts

HR departments face increasing pressure in today's challenging economic marketplace to make the correct decision when evaluating technology solutions to maximize benefits while minimizing costs.

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Technology has revolutionized HR departments during the past decade. Administrative – and often isolated – activities have been translated into streamlined solutions, while HR best practices have been formalized and strengthened by technology ranging from fully integrated HRIS packages to company-wide intranets. Innovative solutions have the potential to continue redefining the workplace and boosting internal performance. But in this era of shrinking budgets and expanding expectations, selecting the best technology to invest in has become more critical than ever.

Given today's faltering economic environment, it comes as no surprise that recent surveys indicate current or impending cutbacks in corporate spending in general, and, IT spending in particular. In early February, leading polling service *infoUSAPoll.com* asked 500,000 U.S. businesses, "Will you cut back on your expenses with the expectation of a recession?" Sixty-three percent of the respondents replied that their spending would be affected, while only one-third stated it would remain unchanged.

Similarly, in the latest corporate IT spending survey conducted by market research firm ChangeWave, during mid-February, nearly one-quarter of the approximately 2000 respondents from companies of all sizes reported IT spending would decrease – or there would be no spending at all – in the second quarter. These results marked the first time since August 2001 that a ChangeWave survey projected negative IT spending growth.

The same survey found that only 43% of the respondents said their company was giving a "Green Light" to normal IT spending, the lowest level in more than four years. It is also the first time in more than four years that the combined "Yellow Light/Red Light" percentage (53%) has been higher than the "Green Light" percentage.

Clearly, to move full speed ahead with an IT investment, HR departments must be prepared to prove that the technology delivers a substantial bang for their bucks. More

than ever, advocating successfully for innovative technology demands the ability to knowledgeably weigh its costs, benefits and ROI.

Web Technology Offers Clear-cut Advantages

Web-based technology that utilizes the Internet as its application delivery platform has increasingly become the preferred choice of vendors and users for a host of reasons.

Benefits of Web-based technology include:

- **Broad accessibility.** By leveraging the Internet as their architecture, Web-based applications support HR departments' increasing need for expanded access to information across multiple locations and users in today's increasingly mobile and global working environment. Secure access to the applications and vital information is easily available from any computer with web browser software and Internet access, meaning users are no longer restricted to particular computers running a particular software package.
- **Ease of set-up.** Web-based applications are an IT department's dream come true – they require no installation, configuration or hard drive space, eliminating the time and expense required to install and configure new software packages at each work station. As soon as users log in, they are up and running on the most current version of the application.
- **Ease of management.** The vendor handles all system upgrades and enhancements, data back-ups and maintenance at a central server. As a result, the latest updates are instantly available to all users whenever – and wherever – they access the application. The need to update each workstation is eliminated, as are the compatibility issues commonly encountered between new software and out-of-date legacy versions that remain in use.
- **Cost reduction.** Web-based options dramatically reduce total cost of ownership compared to software. Deployment costs are virtually nonexistent and software licensing costs for each workstation are eliminated. Operational and maintenance costs also drop substantially, since supplemental hardware such as in-house servers and back-up systems are no longer necessary and IT staff involvement is rarely required. Reducing or eliminating these upfront and ongoing expenses minimizes the risk of investing heavily in technology that may quickly become obsolete or fail to deliver as promised.

Differentiating Between Web-based and Web-enabled Applications

Web technology can be either Web-based or Web-enabled, and the differences between the two are significant. Web-based systems use the Internet as their platform and have no additional software requirements, while Web-enabled systems are modified software applications featuring Internet compatibility through the use of an entry point or add-on software. Designed from day one to operate as a Web application, Web-based solutions take full advantage of the capabilities of the Internet and require nothing more than a Web browser and Internet access to utilize. On the other hand, Web-enabled solutions remain based on client-server technology, not Web technology, meaning that part of the software resides on the server while the other resides on the user's desktop. In order to utilize this Web-enabled technology, an additional product beyond the base Web connection, such as a Web viewer or Web component, is required.

Service providers who have invested heavily in older technology often find it difficult or prohibitively expensive to transition completely to a Web-based format. In an effort to deliver applications that leverage the efficiencies of online solutions, they may choose to add a new Web component as well as integrated features, support and additional applications into their software. However, the solution continues to lack the full benefits of a true Web-based application.

Plus, Web-enabled options typically involve added costs for both deployment and support, creating a lower ROI. Additional software needs to be purchased, distributed, installed and maintained on all user workstations and laptops, requiring ongoing IT involvement and expense. In addition, Web-enabled applications are burdened with many of the same issues and limitations inherent in desktop solutions. Only users with the required software on their computers can use the Web browser to access the application – restricting who can use it, as well as where and when. The IT department faces a constant challenge to update and protect data, and ensure that all users are accessing the same, current version of the application.

In contrast, Web-based applications minimize IT costs and maximize accessibility without any additional software to purchase, install or support. All configuration and customizations are made on the server by the vendor, ensuring that end users always log on to the most current software version and the same data, regardless of geographic location.

Web-based Solutions Optimize IT Investment

For HR departments seeking to accelerate productivity and ROI in today's arduous economic climate, Web-based applications can generate impressive returns compared to both traditional software packages and Web-enabled solutions. They deliver secure yet virtually unlimited accessibility and are hassle-free and far less expensive to set up and manage. In fact, as a result of the expansion of Web-based applications, the formula for assessing the ROI and TOC for technology products and applications has changed. With Web-based solutions enabling the distribution of investment and ownership costs across multiple departments, an entire enterprise can now capitalize on savings and operational enhancements. There's ample evidence that Web-based applications are not simply an investment in technology – they are an investment in decisively enhancing performance and strengthening that crucial competitive edge.

SIDEBAR

Web-based Model for Immigration Legal Services Cuts Costs and Boosts Performance

Immigration services provide a vivid example of the advantages of utilizing an innovative Web-based solution to slash legal outsourcing costs and improve HR performance. As companies increasingly recruit specialized foreign workers to stay competitive, HR departments face mounting pressure to manage the immigration process more efficiently and cost-effectively.

While other application and service providers continue to progress from Web-enabled to Web-based solutions, most traditional immigration legal services providers are now just beginning to implement basic software components that were commonplace years ago across corporate America. For example, an add-on software component implemented by a law firm may only provide clients access to a limited amount of information such as case status or filing dates, in lieu of the cost-efficient solution they deserve – including increased access to legal information, strategy and specialized expertise.

Adopting technology as the foundation for delivering legal services revolutionizes the way information is organized, processed and accessed. With a Web-based solution versus a software component, immigration service providers can easily scale to increase workload, expedite client communications and more effectively respond and adapt to a full range of client needs.

A Web-based application model delivers multiple benefits to clients, including:

- More applications can be processed more quickly, and at lower costs. For example, a typical paralegal can process 60 applications manually per month versus 400 per month with online capability.
- The legal services providers respond more quickly to client questions and concerns. With technology at their fingertips, attorneys can generally provide responses to immigration processing questions within 30 minutes, compared to the days or weeks traditional immigration lawyers usually require.
- A Web-based solution gives clients complete access to real-time information and counsel, empowering corporate employees to communicate directly with the legal services provider and eliminating the need for HR and in-house legal professionals to serve as intermediaries. As a result, more time is available for these professionals to focus on strategic initiatives and other corporate responsibilities. In addition, the global 24/7 access provided by a Web-based service is key in a practice area that requires input from multiple parties in locations around the globe.

Bottom line, the Web-based application model is a win-win opportunity when it comes to immigration management solutions. Not only can clients instantly access key information wherever and whenever they choose, the upfront expense involved in the installation and configuration of a software solution is removed from the equation. Costs decrease while value and efficiency increase, enabling HR departments to continue to raise the performance bar by accomplishing more with fewer resources.

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