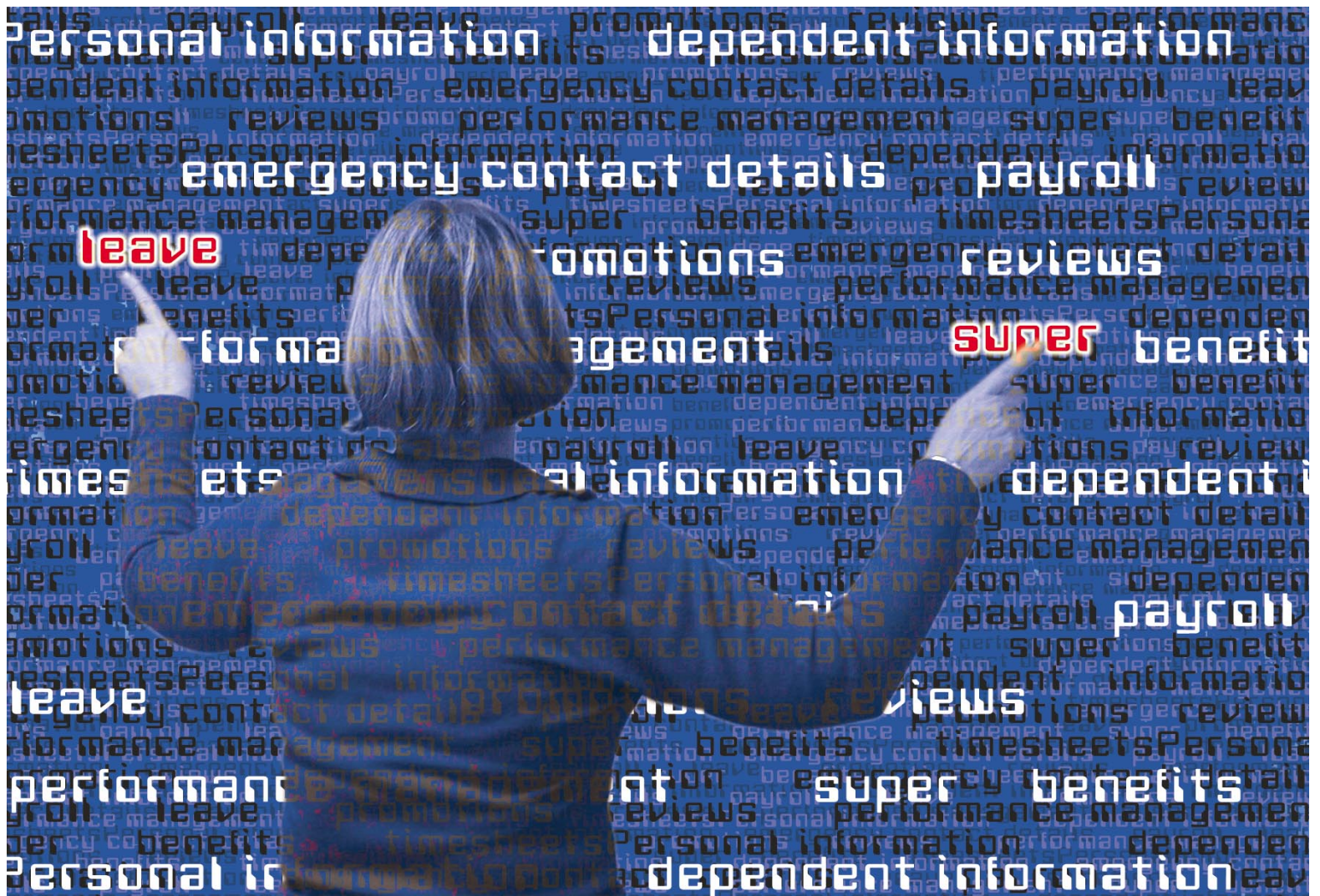


The latest and greatest i



Employee self service has proliferated over the last few years, turning the traditional HR model upside down by providing managers and employees with access to information typically reserved for the HR department. *Human Resources* examines some of the latest ESS developments and shares some practical insights into the makings of successful ESS systems

Employee self service (ESS) kiosks and the utilisation of internet-based systems allow employees to maintain a subset of their own information, such as personal, dependent and emergency contact information, timesheet and payroll details, leave balances and report requests.

ESS is still a relatively new development in HR as far as the industry goes, but as the systems evolve, additional functionality is being integrated, including benefits enrolment, online evaluations, skills inventories, training enrolment and tracking, and career planning. And as these new features are developed, ESS plays a continuing role in reducing HR's administrative burden.

Rapidly technology developments are giving way to such evolution in ESS systems, with Sun Microsystems Australasia, for example, currently rolling out a customisable ESS portal.

"Employees can tailor information that will appear in their browser based on the information they need to have available to their job on a day-to-day basis," says Sun Microsystems Australasia head of human resources, Caren Schadel-Sevil. "So if a sales person wants different information about customers, programs or pricing, for

example, they can customise that and have that information on-hand without having to go searching for it."

ESS for managers

While ESS promises a number of benefits for employees, managers can also benefit through a streamlined workflow process and access to employee information without having to wait for a response from HR. This provides convenience and flexibility while reducing the administrative burden on HR, whereby managers can view and change earnings information, leave balances, manage promotions and review information useful for day-to-day management of their employees.

From a transactional perspective, Schadel-Sevil sees Sun's ESS system, or 'webform', as a 'one-stop shop' for assisting managers who want to hire new staff, award promotions and pay rises, administer performance management, understand retention issues and help them develop their team members.

"One of the things that HR and the business have been focusing on generally is that from an HR perspective, we really want to focus on work that will add value to the organisation. Part of this is reducing the amount of time spent on administration and transaction work,

so supplying managers with appropriate ESS tools to manage their teams more effectively is key to this," she adds.

Putting the administrative workload on line managers frees up the HR function to focus on more meaningful tasks, according to Simon McCoy, national HR manager for Corporate Express.

"The overarching view we have of HR is that it is best performed by line managers and not by HR departments," he says. "We've got a decentralised HR function with no HR department. To make that work effectively, we need to empower our managers with the information and tools they need to perform their HR role.

"So rather than have all the information centralised where it is difficult to access, our plan is to have all our HR-related information at the fingertips of managers and employees alike to empower them to make decisions about payroll and HR-related issues," he says.

ESS and strategic HR

McCoy wanted a system that would streamline the flow of information associated with HR and payroll administration, and an intranet-enabled ESS approach helped him facilitate a strategic HR approach,

n employee self service

he says.

Schadel-Sevil agrees that ESS has the potential to assist HR in becoming more strategic.

"When you read about HR and where it's going, it's all about business partnering and being strategic. But the reality is that you want to be able to do that and not spend time on things that don't add value like processing forms, so if systems like this help you focus on being strategic, then that's ideal," she says.

Freeing up HR from administrative work is all the more important in HR departments with minimal head counts. For Corporate Express, McCoy is the HR department, along with an employee benefits manager, two full timers and one part timer for a growing organisation of around 1,600 staff across the ANZ region.

"In terms of head count in this area, we've managed to maintain our thin numbers, which are the same as when the organisation was a third the size it is now."

Reducing paper flow

Given such a small HR head count, streamlining the workflow through reducing paper has also benefited Corporate Express.

"The not inconsiderable amount of paper flow that used to occur when we had our paper-based system doesn't exist anymore," he says. "What I wanted was something that would eliminate the typical paper flow associated with managing and administering employees in an organisation."

Sun has also benefited from a reduced paper flow and improved transactional efficiency through use of ESS, Schadel-Sevil says.

"We have found a saving of about 80% in the actual time it takes for a manager to make a decision in hiring or promoting someone, for example, instead of having to resort to hand-written forms and fax them here or post them there. It's made a huge difference in HR's and managers' lives, because you have simple online records rather than pieces of paper flying around the office," she says.

"What I wanted was something that would eliminate the typical paper flow associated with managing and administering employees in an organisation"

"It's been a huge change from a productivity perspective and relatively seamless in terms of getting people to adopt and start to use a different approach."

Keeping the process seamless also benefits data accuracy, according to McCoy. ESS has saved him time and improved information accuracy,

Product news: EmployeeConnect

EmployeeConnect's philosophy is that ESS should be an enterprise-wide solution. A quality ESS implementation will provide significant value beyond the basics of personal detail updates, leave requests, timesheets, payslips, banking details and leave balances being pushed out onto your intranet. You should consider automating any administrative business processes with your ESS system. This may include performance management, expense claims, contractor management, recruitment, capital expenditure requests, training and development, employee uniform ordering, new hire induction and skills management as just a few examples.

Another consideration should be that of data integration. Leading ESS systems would have the capability to integrate with multiple back-end systems. For example, you may have

a local Australian payroll system, your parent company's global HR/ERP system, and other home-grown databases that all need web enablement.

Key benefits of an EmployeeConnect ESS portal, include:

- Integration with leading HR/payroll/ERP systems
- Highly configurable forms and workflow process to automate any administrative business process
- Flexible security to support role based personalisation and your company's single sign-on logins
- Support for multiple languages
- Dynamic organisation chart driven from database hierarchy
- Style sheet support to match your exact corporate look and feel
- Short implementation times

More information can be found at www.employeeconnect.com.au

Product news: Aurion

Aurion Corporation has a track record of delivering robust and reliable business software that anticipates market direction. As the first company to deliver ESS capability, Aurion ESS has now matured into an integrated web application enabling employees to access and update their 'HR account' from anywhere in the world.

Aurion ESS delivers a high ROI, reducing processing costs by at least half. Aurion fully automates high volume transactions such as leave from data capture to posting to the ledger, without your payroll staff having to intervene, allowing them to focus on other activities. The ESS workflow guides leave request transactions from entry through approval and into the payroll

database for payment in the appropriate pay period.

Aurion ESS empowers your employees by enabling them to perform a range of tasks for themselves, including requesting reports, customising their personal knowledge base, entering timesheets, printing payslips, performing a skill gap analysis and updating/viewing career goals. It also offers secure access across both intranets and the internet, which is critical for sensitive payroll and personal information, and essential if your workforce is mobile or dispersed and you want your staff to have access from home.

For more information contact Grahame Neilson at Aurion on 0412 784 525

because data now comes in electronically and gets uploaded straight into the payroll system without having to be re-keyed, he says.

Optus has also experienced similar benefits with ESS, removing unnecessary layers of bureaucracy and sign offs, according to Guy Chapman, Optus' information services manager for corporate HR.

"One of our real benefits has been data integrity. A lot of the Optus HR intranet basically used to be a whole lot of word documents or Excel spreadsheets that people downloaded and emailed, printed or faxed – all paper-based processes. And generally a lot of those came back to HR for some sort of approval, which then had to be passed onto some other department. So that has streamlined the workflow considerably," he says.

IT issues

As with almost any other HR and technology process, there are lessons to be learned in hindsight, according to Chapman. Optus went through a period of rapid growth three to four years ago, as did a number of other telecommunication companies, and required a number of e-HR solutions to cope.

"I think because Optus grew so fast, they went out and bought one of whatever was available, just to get the work done. This was fine at the time, but it's ended up in a bit of a shambles with lots of different systems," he says. "I guess that's one thing that could have been done better, with some more rigorous benchmarking before venturing into e-HR."

As such, Chapman has been working mostly on migrating from small local legacy systems to a proper strategic platform, and consolidating

and integrating data sources. Optus is currently working on consolidating two e-HR systems and providing a common interface and single user name and password for both.

"Although they're both working and doing their job fine, it's something the managers would like. They would prefer one login for simplicity, particularly in sales where they have to use multiple applications in the course of their job, and can end up with multiple logins."

Schadel-Sevil also underlines the importance of a proper strategic platform and ensuring your architecture actually supports what you envision. As such she also cautions against using a number of stand-alone systems if data is to be integrated from across different areas.

However, key to the whole process is having a technical support champion for the ESS product, according to McCoy.

"The products that people sell you might be good and useful, but unless you've got somebody trained up and skilled who can actually service, fix the inevitable bugs and tinker with it, so it performs the way you want, then it's going to seriously delay your implementation and compromise your ability to deliver," he warns.

"That's really important, and we learnt that early in the piece. We've got somebody working in our business information solutions department, who is dedicated to that task."

While ESS promises to offer a number of benefits for an organisation, it is obvious that careful planning and research is required to fulfil both the needs of employees and managers, if the workload for HR is to decrease.