

Using 21st Century Technology To Complete Performance Appraisals

Technology has dramatically changed the way we do business, permitting us to communicate quickly, perform tasks that would have been impossible 20 years ago, and do things faster than we've ever done them before. Human Resource departments, like other areas of business have taken advantage of these ongoing technological advances.

Not so long ago a pencil and paper were the primary performance appraisal tools. While generally reliable, (as long as you could find your paper and pencil), this method had its drawbacks. A decade ago various HR software applications began to change the way performance appraisals were done. The paper shuffle was eliminated, rows of filing cabinets became expendable, increased automation meant that appraisals might be better customized to organizational needs, and HR managers could retain at least some of their sanity as appraisal administration improved.

With the advent of the internet, technology has taken another leap forward, solving some of the irritations and limitations inherent in software based technology and providing ever greater possibilities. Today, HR programs may be hosted by an "Applications Service Provider" (ASP) who stores your performance evaluation programs and data on its servers and provides you and your employees secure, easy access to it through an internet connection.

Advantages of Internet Technology

The advantages of an internet application are many. Your internal IT headaches are virtually eliminated as there is no software to install (and reinstall), no hardware and software compatibility issues to worry about, and no upgrades to track. Program updates are received as they are available, and any "bugs" are exterminated immediately. There's no waiting around for a new disk to arrive in the mail. And, since an ASP hosts this service, company servers remain uncluttered. Off-site professionals also handle data security and backup.

Web-based applications allow employees to securely access password protected programs 24/7, worldwide. Telecommuters, employees travelling on business or scattered around the world, and those at home in their bunny slippers at midnight, can complete a task with a click of a mouse.

Employee Appraisals: It's About Time, Credibility, and ROI

If you ask most employees and managers about performance evaluations, at best you'll get a glare and at worst an unprintable response. Typically, employees believe appraisals take too much time, are too complicated, less than meaningful, and sometimes unfair. Senior management often believes that appraisals are a necessary evil, don't promote organizational strategy, and don't impact the bottom line; except as a cost.

Good web-based appraisal systems recognize these concerns and effectively address them. Customizable systems that often provide hundreds of position templates and pre-written performance standards make program setup easy and appraisals more strategic, as employees are evaluated on factors and goals that are specific to their positions, departments, and

organizations. The “one size fits all” appraisal is a thing of the past as evaluations can truly be used to improve performance and productivity and drive strategic company goals. Appraisals become more objective and fair, making compensation decisions more accurate and ensuring that salary and merit increases truly reward good performance. Personalized appraisals can help employees with performance problems become more productive, or if necessary, a thorough case can be built for them to join the “alumni,” thereby reducing your risks of expensive lawsuits.

An online appraisal system is a powerful tool for company management. Managers can literally complete appraisals in minutes, keep informal notes about employee performance (both good and bad) throughout the year and even complete formal documentation, all from one central location. Employee self-appraisal, often integrated with the formal appraisal, can be used to improve communication and provide valuable input to the appraisal process. Downline view and edit features allow senior managers to review appraisals and performance documentation of their subordinates, including those that don't directly report to them.

HR managers save time (and headaches) as administering the appraisal process just got a lot easier. Data import makes program setup and maintenance simple, reports make overseeing company performance evaluations easy, and automatic e-mails provide “friendly” reminders to those who may not have completed their appraisals on time (a rarity I know!). Most importantly, appraisals are professional, meaningful, and affordable.