

PEOs and the Use of Web Casts and Online Human Resources Information Systems: The Technology Behind the Benefits

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One of the greatest challenges most small employers face is disseminating data or information to their employees. Thanks to modern technology, small employers can now provide their employees with the same cutting-edge Fortune 500 human resource information systems (HRIS) as the nation's leading corporations. Through Web casts and self-guided Web-based training, small business clients and worksite employees can access a plethora of employment related activities and resources.

Using an HRIS helps employers and increases efficiencies. Only now are we beginning to realize the true value of the Internet. Although originally heralded as an economic boon to the traditional brick and mortar businesses, the Internet has now begun to show its real value and power by supporting business leaders in delivering their company's services and products. The natural progression of employment-related tasks to cost-effective and efficient delivery, which the Internet has to offer, only makes sense. Traditionally, the recommended ratio of employees to HR personnel has been 100 to 1. HRIS allows employers to manage three or four times as many employees with just one HR manager. A PEO can offer its clients the most sophisticated HR technology solutions

along with the highest level of commitment to compliance, all with an eye towards client service and employee satisfaction.

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arrangement can receive interactive training through the Web cast and clients can use it to manage the company's vital information. This can be achieved either via a "chat interface" used by the PEO for troubleshooting or training by its own in-house employees, or through a Microsoft terminal services type of ses-

sion, whereby the user actually logs into the PEO's in-house servers to gain access to the PEO's available resources. Both services, when used together, form a one-stop shop for all of the client small business employer and employee needs. Moreover, a PEO proficient with the technology, including the ability to pro-

tect, secure, and back up the system and its data, can create a bank of data for clients to access via the Web. These online resource centers can (and should) include such things as payroll and benefits forms, employee handbooks, and information about the services offered by the PEO (such as different benefit plans, etc.). This data is often specific to each client, creating a personalized atmosphere and also showing that your PEO is taking the time and effort to give its clients the best service possible.

The PEO's HRIS should include human resources administration and support, Web-based online software/training, comprehensive payroll and administration, online health and benefits administration, 401(k) plan and administration, and risk management solutions.

Human Resources Administration & Support

By creating an online resource center, PEOs allow clients to bypass technical support requests and instead help them-

selves to the resources they require. A developed resource center should have a customized and compliant employee handbook based on federal and state labor laws that includes workplace policies and procedures. The Web site should allow the client to have the ability to develop and manage HR forms as well as personnel files. This could include employee performance reviews, job descriptions, pre-employment screenings, hiring, disciplinary actions, terminations, and exit interviews.

In addition to these HR-centered forms, the resource center should contain personnel files (including I-9s, W-4s, direct deposit forms, COBRA, performance evaluations, etc.) to ensure workplace compliance. They can also include such helpful information as employee benefits literature, enrollment procedures, and new employee kits, as well as access to the PEO's HR coordinators.

The creation of such a system will allow the Web to become a valuable resource for information, advice, forms, or assistance with interviewing, hiring, performance appraisals, training sessions, termination, and other personnel tasks that typically challenge business owners.

Web-Based Human Resources Services

As previously mentioned, the use of Web casts as well as terminal services software can create an extraordinarily personalized HR solution for small business clients and worksite employees. For the authorized client employer, the Web cast side of a Web HRIS should include the ability to view the PEO's information on that client (including all employee data), review invoices and reports and create backups or print them, create documents for their employees and post them on the Web, and view, create, and print HR and payroll invoices and reports.

Employees should, through this system, have secure access to their own

information (as would be seen by the employer in his employee data). This system should include employees' personal information: pay history, benefit data and benefit plan summaries, tax data and deductions, payroll history and data, documents placed online by the employer, and the Web-based software/

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training provided by the employer and the PEO.

Useful software training programs for the client employer are Access, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, Publisher, and Windows 2000, among others. HR/safety training literature should be comprised of (at least) the following subjects: accident investigation, proper ergonomics, performance appraisals, personal protection equipment, sexual harassment, workplace security, and workplace violence. Finally, policies and procedure training and salary survey data should be provided by the PEO for the employer's benefit.

Comprehensive Payroll and Administration Services

Via the Web HRIS system, the employer should be able to administer one of the

most important aspects of PEO outsourcing, their payroll data. PEOs provide timely and accurate payroll services for their clients, including taking care of federal, state, and local payroll taxes, and sending out W-2s yearly to clients. They should also offer wage verification, vacation/sick/benefits eligibility tracking, direct deposit, check reconciliation, and tax filing services.

An online HRIS takes this system one step further by granting clients access to remote data entry, payroll history, and payroll reports and forms. Some PEOs even go so far as to provide employees the ability to log their hours via secure online timesheets that can then be reviewed and approved by managers, thus reducing the amount of paperwork and virtually eliminating paper records that need to be maintained and filed. In addition to this system, the PEO may set up an online time clock system; this provides the utmost in efficiency because it removes any work for the client related to payroll. All clients need to do is have employees clock in and out every day, and the PEO takes care of the rest!

Health and Benefits Administration

Using a PEO provides a small business with Fortune 500 benefits; these benefits include health, dental, and prescription drug plans, as well as group and individual life insurance and disability plans. The PEO also provides workers' compensation management, COBRA administration, unemployment claims management, and assistance with hearings and appeals.

Online, the PEO provides the client employer with access to forms and summary plan descriptions for the benefit plans made available, as well as detailed literature of what is included in each plan. Also included with these features should be the ability to review plan costs, which employees are participating

in each plan, and employee benefits eligibility. Client employers should also be able to prepare and print reports of benefit summaries by time period, employee, plan, or some combination thereof. As always, the employee should also have access to live support from a benefits coordinator provided by the PEO.

401(k) Plan and Administration

PEOs can offer their clients the ability to enroll in a 401(k) plan. These plans have the option of profit sharing and/or employer matching; the fact that they are being offered and administered by a PEO ensures that low administrative and investment fees will improve employee investment returns. The integration of the plans with the PEO's payroll system also improves efficiency by eliminating 401(k) reporting and fund transfers to the third party administrator.

Through the Web HRIS, client employers and worksite employees can view their portfolios and track daily and monthly changes. They can alter investments and print reports by employee or by company. Clients should have access to enrollment kits, as well as literature detailing the benefits of a 401(k) plan to them and their employees.

Risk Management

The proper creation of the above mentioned human resources administration and support section is integral to improving an employer's risk management abilities. The availability of safety and HR training, literature, Web seminars, Web casts, and videos helps create a relaxed and content workplace environment; employees working in this environment will be informed and less likely to engage in activities that could prove a detriment to employee morale, company efficiency, and safety. The availability of this information online is a

vital step in educating employees, which in turn helps to prevent problems before they start.

In the event an incident occurs, PEOs should have good communication channels with clients to manage claims quickly and quietly and assist the

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employee in returning to the workplace as soon as possible. By providing a proper risk management policy online, client employers and employees can reduce the time necessary to complete a claim. Additionally, Web-based reporting allows clients to monitor a claim's progress and assist the PEO in minimizing claim costs.

Web Cast Training

A vital aspect of an HR outsourcing service is the availability of Web-based training, which is the "pushing out" of Web-enabled activities to an end user. This technology, also known as Web casting, differs from Web HRIS and from terminal services. The Web cast allows the PEO to deliver all the services mentioned above via a live presenter in

an organized environment where employees from many different employer sites can log on for live training or a live seminar.

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Summary

Nowadays, employers should not even consider choosing a PEO that does not provide them with a comprehensive online human resources information system. These systems are priceless in their ability to reduce paperwork, increase efficiency, and provide employees and employers with information to help them in a timely fashion. Prospectively, the innovations which have been integrated into such a system are sure to do nothing but improve with time, thereby increasing the benefit to the most important member of the relationship with a PEO: the client.■

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