

Enterprise Information Portals: Efficacy in the Information Intensive Small to Medium Sized Business

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The focus of this case study is a successful regional law firm (an information intensive enterprise) that integrates information technology to improve the timeliness and quality of their work product. The firm uses information technology as an efficient and productive tool allowing them more time to understand their clients' needs and envision where their businesses will be tomorrow. Their information services professionals evaluate new technologies with an eye toward improving delivery of legal services: the goal is to build an atmosphere where complex business is handled with ease. In this case we explore the issues related to the implementation of an enterprise portal. The issues are both technological and behavioral.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

MT is a successful law firm providing legal services to the Pacific Northwest and Intermountain region since 1954. With offices in Boise, Idaho Falls, and Pocatello, Idaho, the firm is strategically situated for direct contact with the governor's office, the legislature, federal and state administrative agencies, courts, and international and national corporations engaged in business throughout the region.

MT has 41 attorneys, 11 paralegals and 60 support staff serving clients in the full-spectrum of business, litigation and regulatory areas. Their attorneys focus on the realities of their clients' continually evolving business needs. Whether they are working with a small start-up company or an international corporation, they take a teamwork approach in responding to legal issues with practical and innovative legal solutions.

To improve the timeliness and quality of their work product, the MT law firm attempts to deliberately integrate information technology in their practice. The firm is very cognizant of the fact that technology is only as good as the people who use it. To that end they employ a group of information services professionals who evaluate new technologies with an eye toward improving the delivery of legal services. These professionals also provide updates and educate attorneys and staff on the use of the firm's technology.

Like their clients, the firm uses information technology as a productive tool, allowing them to understand where their clients' businesses will be tomorrow. MT firm realizes that because Idaho is located in the heart of the Intermountain West, long distance transactions are a fact of life. MT's clients do business in all 50 states and internationally. To meet the physical challenges of the Intermountain West location, they aggressively utilize technology. Beyond being accessible to their clients through e-mail, voice mail and fax, every attorney office and workstation has Internet access, together with research services and access to firm-produced documents. These technology capabilities are further enhanced by a commitment to old-fashioned hard work: 24-hour word processing, 11-hour business days and Saturday morning business hours. They use technology every day to be more efficient, responsive, accessible and prompt. This firm's goal is to build an atmosphere where complex business is handled with ease. MT firm strives to continually improve on the ways they utilize information technology in their practice. To that end, the firm looked into the development and utilization of the enterprise information portal.

Enterprise information portal is a presentation methodology for information that exists in computers "out there somewhere." From the end-user perspective, an enterprise information portal is customizable web page that contains pertinent information from the enterprise databases and data warehouses, e-mail and calendars, enterprise's messaging systems, stock quotes, news headlines, corporate communications, reference links, and relevant, for a given user, task resources (Collins, 2001).

The typical computer user does not care where the information comes from. They basically want everything they need to be easily accessible so that they may perform their job correctly (Malhorta & Galetta, 1999; Melbourne, 2002). Portals deliver on this ability to organize and present information from many sources, including the Internet, databases, document repositories (directories or document management systems) and organizational intranets (Finkelstein & Aiken, 1999).

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