



EVALUATING A WEB-BASED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES SYSTEM

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"Juliet Kontaxis and the Benchmark Technologies team have been helping clients develop procedures manuals for over 20 years. Their methodology is detailed in Rapid Documentation of Policies and Procedures: The Handbook."

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Web-based policies and procedures systems can improve efficiency and effectiveness in an organization. A thorough evaluation can help to ensure that you choose the web-based system that is right for your organization. To help guide the evaluation process, consider the following high-level criteria and system attributes for web-based systems, as well as the total cost of ownership versus direct and indirect economic benefits.

High-level criteria to consider as you evaluate a web-based policies and procedures system include the following:

SIMPLICITY OF IMPLEMENTATION AND MAINTENANCE

Is the application easy to install, and does it easily integrate with any legacy systems?
Can the system be maintained in-house or is an outside service vendor needed?

EASE OF USE IN DAILY OPERATIONS

Will the system help streamline existing processes, or will processes need to be altered to meet system requirements? If processes will need to be changed, will end users accept new processes? What are expectancies for productivity gains?

AMOUNT OF USER TRAINING REQUIRED

How easy is it to train new users on the system? Is training required for all users of the system, or only for the system administrator? Can a train-the-trainer approach be used?

EXPECTED USER ADOPTION RATE

Is the system user friendly, so users will immediately accept and adopt the system?

In addition, take a close look at system attributes. Are system attributes available to help define user levels and eliminate the most time-consuming manual processes? Specifically, consider the following features:

TIERED USER LEVELS

A policies and procedures system should enable tiered user levels and distinguish at a minimum between administrators, editors, approvers and viewers. Different permissions levels must be available, including view only permissions, and permissions to edit or publish documents.

PUBLISHING AND STORAGE

A well-designed system allows for both maintenance of policies and procedures and publishing and storage of the final documents. The storage structure should enable an organization to track the evolution of policies and procedures over time, and to determine which specific policies were in effect at a given historic date.

AFFIRMATION

The compliance effectiveness offered by an affirmation attribute is absolutely critical. This feature prompts users to acknowledge that they have read and understood a specific document, and to verify that they are in compliance with the rules and regulations mentioned in the document. The system keeps track of users' responses. This utility provides invaluable evidence at audits and is a helpful tool in disciplinary situations where an employee has not complied with a policy or procedure.

LINKING REGULATIONS, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A system that allows linking of regulations, policies and procedures enhances efficiency and effectiveness. Linking provides an instant overview of what documents need to be reviewed (and possibly updated) when regulatory requirements change. Links mean less time spent looking through physical copies of documents, as well as faster updates to ensure compliance.

Finally, a cost/benefit analysis of a web-based system should analyze the total cost of ownership versus direct and indirect economic benefits. While it is possible to make economic estimates of the above efficiency gains, it is difficult to estimate the effectiveness gains, such as the lowered likelihood of non-compliance. A qualitative assessment of a system, however, should focus on the likelihood of non-compliance incidents with and without the system under evaluation, as well as the potential severity of such incidents. For the total cost of ownership, estimates should include hardware and software costs, license and maintenance fees, as well direct and indirect costs of implementation (including training), operation and maintenance.

Web-based policies and procedures systems streamline policy management and distribution. Taking the time to consider system attributes, total cost of ownership, and other criteria can help you select the system that is right for your organization.

If you would like further details on the strategies outlined in the article, please visit: <http://www.rapiddocumentation.org>.