

# Getting the Most Out of Your Board Portal

Written by Alan Hewitt on April 30, 2019

**A** Board Portal application should make your life easier. Easier to do what needs to be done, easier to do what you want to do and easier to ensure that you stay compliant. So easier for whom?

There are two primary user groups for a Board Portal – the Administrator and the Board Member. Each of these user groups has distinctively different needs, but the one thing that they share in common is the need for the Board Portal to be used and deliver the value that it is capable of.

Let's begin with the Administrator. The Administrator is vital for setting up meetings and ensuring that the Board Members are well informed, engaged, and equipped to perform their role well. They also have to maintain an audit trail of past meetings along with their minutes, and ensure related action items are assigned, followed up and completed.

If we look at each of these in more detail, we will start to see what we need a Board Portal to be capable of doing while making it easy for the Administrator to execute.

## Ensuring Board Members are well informed

At a high level, each Board Member needs to know:

- When will the planned meetings take place over the rest of the year?
- What is the format of each meeting? In-person, video/conference call or a mixture of both? If it is a video/conference call, what are the remote dial-in details?
- What does the agenda look like?
- What are the pre-reading materials for each agenda item?



- Are there any outstanding actions from each Board Member?
- What are the latest changes and developments in the organisation the Board should be aware of?

## Keeping Board Members engaged

The Administrator needs to make each Board Member feel that they are a key part of the meeting. Through collaboration and review functions of the Board Portal, Administrators can allow Board Members the opportunity to contribute to the flow and content of the meeting agenda as well as assign Board Members as leaders or presenters of specific agenda items. Also by keeping information organised in a logical and easily accessible fashion, you avoid Board Member wasting their valuable time trying to locate the correct document or consuming an outdated one.

## Maintaining an audit trail of records and outcomes of each meeting

It is the responsibility of Administrators to keep records of important discussions and outcomes from meetings. Minute taking functions allow you to capture such information by agenda items, as well as meeting attendance tracking and reporting. Action items can be created and assigned to the responsible members of the Board. Finalised and approved meeting minutes should be archived and immutable and made available to Board Members (with the appropriate permissions) for easy access at all times.

If the Board Portal Administrator can achieve all of the above through the application, there is an increased chance that Board Meetings will be more engaging and hence more productive and efficient. Moreover, the organisation will be able to demonstrate that its'

governance processes are well documented, managed and auditable.

Let's now turn to the Board Members themselves.

Board Members are often very busy people. It is common for a director to be serving on multiple boards and committees at the same time, not to mention the day job they may be held down to.

## Present key information effectively

So when a Board Member is alerted that there is an upcoming meeting, they need to see when the meeting is and its agenda quickly. More importantly, Board Members need to understand what their role will be in that meeting – whether they will be leading a session, contributing to a topic or merely an observer. Board Members should also be able to track and complete any outstanding action items or tasks that they have been assigned to from previous meetings. Having these key information at hand and presented in a timely manner helps directors perform their role

## Productive meeting preparation

One of the main advantages of using a board portal is that it enables Board Members to access published board packs electronically in a paperless manner, which brings much greater convenience than carrying around stacks of printed board papers. A good Board Portal should present information to the user that matches the ways the user work. Users should be able to read a document on their laptop in the office, and easily pick up where they left off on a tablet or phone while they are on the go.

With this in mind, the documents should be written in a style and structure that makes it easier for

the reader to assimilate the relevant information considering the medium that they will be reading it on.

To summarise, a Board Portal should be helping all stakeholders to:

- efficiently manage and run board meetings;
- create good quality agendas that reflect the needs of both the organisation and the board members;
- deliver good outcomes that add value to the organisation; and
- demonstrate that the organisation is compliant for audit purposes.

**How efficient and effective are the board meetings that you hold today?**

**Does the process/software that you use help make your board meetings more efficient and effective?**

**What are the major pain points that you are encountering with the way your organisation runs or manages its board meetings?**



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan is a Non-executive Director at Praxonomy. Alan has worked in IT Services and Consulting for nearly 40 years including 30 years at IBM, where he was an Executive Partner in IBM's Global Consulting Business responsible for the development of the Workforce Transformation Practice. Since leaving IBM in 2010, he has worked as an independent Business Consultant working for major companies across industries and the world. Alan is a Fellow of both the IET and BCS.