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VALUE TO THE EMPLOYEE

by Peter DiMaria, Accu-Time Systems, Inc.

In this third part of my four-part series, "Deploying ESS: Faster, Better, Stronger", I will outline why employee self service (ESS) is of value to employees. ESS means different things to different companies so I am using a broad and general definition. The two greatest benefits that employees receive from an ESS system are convenience and empowerment. It is during the initial stages of creating user "buy in" that these benefits should be communicated to employees.

Simple ESS systems offer basic features like time card approvals, vacation requests, and 401k and insurance benefit information. Sophisticated ESS programs include the basic features plus a host of other functionality that may include running "what if" scenarios for paycheck withholdings, signing up for daycare services, departmental transfer requests, training requests, access to company documents like HR manuals and policies, and the list goes on. No matter how basic or how feature-rich the ESS system is convenience and empowerment are still delivered to employees.

In using well implemented ESS systems employees report high degrees of satisfaction with convenience. There is also a great degree of time compression in how long it takes to complete a task. The conventional approach to a benefits change is to go to the HR person or department, request a change form, complete it, return the form to HR, wait for them to process it, wait for acknowledgement from the HR department that the change has been implemented, and then wait for the change to take effect. Days, even weeks, may pass for this process to occur. With an automated ESS system that process can be done on-line, in near real time, allowing both the employee and the HR person to focus their energies on the highest value work, like talent development. Additionally, the process becomes easy and non-stressful for the employee.

Another convenience factor that delights employees is the 24/7 availability of their data. If they are not at their workplace many companies allow employee access to ESS systems via the internet. So, an employee can use their home computer or web-enabled smartphone to access their ESS account. This could be advantageous when a family is discussing a vacation and an employee would like to know how many vacation days they have remaining or they would like to submit a request for time off. Another scenario where 24/7 access is convenient is when an employee needs to examine their benefits in order to make informed decisions regarding healthcare. Many of these kinds of discussions happen at home.

An often overlooked benefit of employee self service systems is the empowerment the ESS system provides to employees. The three words that best describe this empowerment are ownership, collaboration, and awareness. When employees feel a sense of ownership of their personal and professional information they have

an unprecedented level of control and want to ensure the accuracy of that information. That control gives them a feeling of collaboration with their organization, rather than an "us vs. them" attitude. And by collaboratively interacting with an ESS system employees become more aware of their data, how it represents them as employees, the complete view of the benefits afforded them, and their intrinsic value.

More sophisticated ESS systems allow employees to track their professional training, sign up for courses, and look at other measures of their professional development. Some systems refer to this service as "talent management." Companies at the forefront of talent management also provide a professional development roadmap for employees to follow in order to advance their careers. Employees feel a tremendous sense of self-determination and empowerment when they can see their path to success, understand organizational expectations, and are able to actively manage their advancement.

Since employers benefit from a fit and healthy workforce some have woven personal health management functionality into their employee self service systems. Employees are able to chart their exercise and nutrition lives, receive professional suggestions and analysis of their needs and goals, obtain information on stress management, and even have access to tools that track their blood pressure, cholesterol levels, weight, and other critical health factors.

Creative, progressive employers are continually finding new ways to add ESS functionality. Some offer college counseling, personal financial planning calculators, elder and child care resources, bulletin boards, blogs, and dozens of other services that bring employees into the heart of the company where they feel like a member of a dynamic, caring organization, rather than just a worker. In a report published by IMS Research, author and analyst Justin Siller comments "Self-service kiosks provide more employee interaction with companies. As employees feels more involved in company activities, their comfort at work should increase and could lead to greater employee satisfaction." This increased satisfaction level creates happier, more productive employees and aids in employee retention.

Empowered employees that have convenient access to their personal and professional data provide unprecedented levels of engagement to employers.



Most research and available scholarly articles focus on the benefits to the employer of ESS implementation. I have attempted to promote the employee's perspective here. Ultimately, of course, happy employees benefit the employer. However, if employees are inconvenienced or feel disconnected

from an organization because of unwieldy HR processes they will be more susceptible to low levels of satisfaction with the organization. Turnover, inefficiency, low productivity, and other detrimental behavior will result.

There are several platforms to deliver ESS to employees. ATS provides workforce management terminals that are usually serving as "time clocks," "punch clocks," or time and attendance terminals. The main benefit of providing ESS at the point where employees clock in is convenience. Employees are interacting with these terminals at least eight times per day to clock in and out for shifts, breaks, and lunches. For ESS services that require some time for the employees to perform most companies will install kiosks in strategic areas like cafeterias and lounges. Employees with computers at their work stations usually already have access to ESS.

ESS implementations can fail miserably or succeed profoundly based on employee adoption and satisfaction. Companies like Time & Technology, Ceridian, Workforce Software, Empower, Cybershift, Red Prairie, and several others have years of experience in creating and deploying ESS solutions around the world that boost employee morale and engagement.

In my next and final installment of this series I will address how multiple platforms like ERP, ESS, time and attendance, talent management, scheduling, and others are converging into singular offerings.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter DiMaria is founder, president, and chief executive officer of Accu-Time Systems Inc., a leader in the design and manufacture of workforce management terminals for time and attendance and employee self service (ESS.) DiMaria is a recognized industry veteran with 30 years' experience in automatic identification (ID.) From bar codes to biometrics, DiMaria holds numerous international patents for his many technical contributions to the industry. DiMaria holds a B.S. in Mathematics and a Masters in Business Administration.