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WHAT IS ESS?

by Peter DiMaria, Accu Time Systems, Inc.

In this first part of my four part series, Deploying ESS: Faster, Better Stronger, I will define employee self service (ESS) and how it s being used by forward thinking organizations. ESS means different things to different users so I will be broad in my description. Your organization will define its own requirements.

Every well run company in the world has continual improvement and cost reduction programs. We often think of these types of programs as manufacturing initiatives. However, smart managers in manufacturing and retail know that every area of a company s operations harbor improvement opportunities, including its human resource group.

As part of their improvement plans, many companies have been implementing technology enabled initiatives to put more of the administrative functions of the HR department into the hands of their employees. This puts more control of employee information back into the hands of employees. And it frees HR generalists to perform work that is of higher value to their organizations. Access to employee self service is usually through a PC or kiosk, or at the time and attendance terminal where employees punch in.

Typical ESS functionality that employers are providing allow employees access to open benefits enrollment, time card approval, vacation requests, personal data, sexual harassment complaint procedures, suggestion box systems, job postings, and a myriad of other tasks that could consume one or more human resources department employees to handle the hundreds of weekly incoming requests.

Michael Van Nuland, president and CEO of Time & Technology, a provider of workforce management software and solutions, and an ATS partner, describes ESS this way, ESS empowers employees to manage and review personal information without the assistance or interaction of the HR department. This includes such tasks as scheduling time off, monitoring benefit balances, documenting work related injury, or reviewing timesheets. In addition to the obvious benefits to the employer in the form of lower HR administrative costs, the benefits to the employee include greater convenience, immediacy, and privacy.

In forthcoming articles I will address the benefits of ESS to the employee and the employer, as well as the convergence trend that is bringing a variety of enterprise resource planning (ERP) and workforce management (WFM) systems together through smart phones, kiosks, employee terminals, and fixed time and attendance systems. But to illustrate why companies implement ESS systems consider a recent finding from The Hunter Group, a Baltimore HR consulting firm: of 340

companies surveyed that implemented some form of ESS program, 90% received a 100% return on their investment in the first year after deployment which means that every year after that the ESS system provides substantial savings to the company.

By allowing employees to manage more of their own HR requests, the HR department is freed from repetitive tasks, redundant paperwork, and risk of errors. They can spend more time on high value responsibilities like talent management, employee performance metrics, and training and development programs. In turn, employees who know their schedule and work assignments will be able to take care of routine HR functions with greater speed and accuracy. ESS systems and technology can afford HR departments substantial savings by reducing administrative costs, clerical processing, and functional layers.

Although ESS programs can save time and money for a company it is crucial that the company is ready for it. ESS systems can reduce paperwork, printing, transactions, employee waiting time, and overall HR costs but not if employees can't or won't use the system. As with most organizational change a company's culture plays an important role in determining the success or failure of new initiatives. If employees find the ESS system cumbersome or faulty they will continue to contact the HR department for the execution of trivial tasks. If they are mistrustful of technology or management's implementation of it they will be wary of its use and the anticipated savings will not be realized.

HR practitioners must also be aware that a successful deployment of an ESS system will result in them having far fewer contacts with employees. Losing direct interaction with employees may mean that the HR department staff becomes out of touch with the daily concerns of workers. A decrease in contact may also make employees feel disconnected and without sympathetic help as they work their way through complex benefits or payroll issues.

Proper training and program testing and rollout can help to alleviate many of the concerns that employees will express but it is very important that the IT and HR teams deploying an ESS system are aware of the changes in technology, processes, and culture that will occur.

In some ways companies today are being compelled to deploy ESS systems. As Generation Y and Millennial employees grow in the nation's workforce they are bringing their consumer expectations to the workplace. If they can purchase or inquire about almost anything through the Internet then why can't they do something as simple as add themselves to a company dental plan through the computer on their desk, they wonder. Why do they have to walk to the HR department, find the right person, request forms, go away and fill out those forms, bring them back to the HR department, and then wait several days for the paperwork to be processed?

Accu Time Systems starts by offering some basic ESS services like time card approvals, schedule requests, vacation time management, and other payroll types of functions through our Global Series of workforce management terminals. Our software and payroll partners add to that by offering ESS solutions with even greater functionality.

Implementing an ESS system can save companies thousands of dollars and hours of time in dealing with frequent repetitive tasks that can easily be pushed to the employee. But in order to realize those savings companies must implement the correct system for their company and workforce. Choosing an ESS system partner with the appropriate software and hardware experience will help ensure that you can extract the most benefit from ESS. Companies like Time & Technology, Ceridian, Workforce Software, Empower, Cybershift, Red Prairie, and several others have years of experience in creating ESS solutions.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter DiMaria, is founder, president, and CEO of Accu Time Systems, Inc.

Accu Time Systems Inc. is a leader in the design and manufacture of workforce management terminals for time and attendance and Employee Self Service (ESS.) Mr. DiMaria is a recognized industry veteran with 30 years experience in Automatic Identification (ID.) From bar codes to biometrics, Mr. DiMaria holds numerous international patents for his many technical contributions to the industry. Often invited to speak at industry events and to contribute white papers and articles to industry publications, Mr. DiMaria offers a unique perspective based on the evolution of Automatic ID and the latest developments in biometrics as well as trends in the workforce management disciplines. Mr. DiMaria holds a BS in Mathematics and a Masters in Business Administration.