The Bluegem Portal

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INTRODUCTION

"Portal technologies" in recent times have become a catchphrase within information technology circles. The concept of the “portal” (more commonly termed Internet portal), has initially been used to refer to Web sites, which presented the user with the ability to access rich content, resources, and services on the World Wide Web (Kakumanu & Mezzacca, 2005; Smith, 2004; White, 2000). As such, the Internet portal provides its users with a one-stop entry point to the resources of the World Wide Web.

The term “portal” originally derives from the Latin word portale, which is defined as “city gate” (Zhou, 2003, p. 120). Thus, similar to the portale providing access to the services and resources of a city, Internet portal technologies provide a point of access to information and services to the users of the Internet.

The concept of the Internet portal has since been applied within the business environment with an increasing number of organisations adopting this “gateway-to-the-world” approach (Wilder, Davis, & Dalton, 1999, p. 18). Corporate portals are implemented for the benefit of an organisation in order to integrate the data-based components of the business and to streamline employee access to organisational information (Millman, 1998).

This article examines the concept of the corporate portal and discusses their features and usage within organisations. Using the example of a portal in use within an organisation, this article will explore and illustrate the principles behind the corporate portal, and predict the future trends within organisational portal development. This article concludes with a call for future research within the field of portal technologies.

BACKGROUND

Corporate portals provide a single access-point to organisationally relevant data and documents (Aneja, Rowan, & Brooksbys, 2000; Auditore, 2001; Watson & Fenner, 2000), combining data from disparate data stores and information systems (Raol, Koong, Lui, & Yu, 2002; Watson et al., 2000; Wilder et al., 1999), in order to facilitate the sharing, access, and distribution of this business information throughout the organisational environment (Aneja et al., 2000; Auditore, 2001; Shilakes & Tylman, 1998). This therefore, provides employees with a universal point of access to the organisation’s knowledge base.

In this way, Corporate portals can be utilised in order to reduce inefficiencies within the workplace because of the need to use differing sets of data (and their related technologies) in order to complete a single work-task (Raol et al., 2002; Rose, 2003; Watson et al., 2000). By providing one point for employees to access all data at their fingertips, staff can quickly and easily locate required information, without the need to request aid (Kakumanu et al., 2005); thus, increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisational workforce. As such, the corporate portal presents itself as a knowledge-aggregator, providing access to required organisational resources from one single and consolidated point.

The following section illustrates the corporate portal concept with the use of the Bluegem Portal. The Bluegem Portal will be utilised as an example to describe the features of a typical corporate portal, and to also acknowledge future trends within these portal technologies.

THE BLUEGEM PORTAL

Bluegem Software Solutions is a successful Western Australian software development company. Founded in 1996, Bluegem specialises in providing Web-enabled technical solutions including business applications, knowledge management, and learning systems. Bluegem is a relatively small organisation, however they too have recognised the benefits of easily and quickly disseminating business information and documents between all members of the organisation.

Bluegem began the development of their corporate portal in 2002 with the implementation of their company intranet. This organisational intranet has since grown to encompass features including document management functionalities, electronic team collaboration for development documentation, and universal access to organisational documents by all members of the software development team. The availability of search functionalities for the contents of the portal demonstrates that the Bluegem portal exhibits the most commonly cited functions of the corporate portal.

The features of a corporate portal are cited as including access to information, ability to collaborate and cooperate on document creation, content management, and search functionalities (Kakumanu et al., 2005; Kim, Chaudhury, &
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