

A Technology Application White Paper

Saving Time and Streamlining Your HR Processing with Automatic Email Alerts

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Technology as a Double-edged Sword

While technology (in the form of an HRIS (Human Resource Information System)) has greatly improved the ability of HR departments to track, process, and analyze important information, it also has created more challenges in terms of increased workload and new responsibilities. HR managers are tasked to communicate and access corporate data more frequently in support of strategic planning.

While these are positive steps in improving HR's ability to respond more proactively to corporate initiatives, the same challenges still exist: time management with increased tasks. HR departments must generate more reports and communicate more data—isn't that what "automating" was supposed to improve?

Although systems have been established to automate administration, maintain records—even empower employees and managers to access and update information—the burden still remains. HR departments are required to continually monitor and communicate information; the ability to analyze more information merely increases the workload for HR.

As companies realize the benefits of HR as a source of strategic information, the responsibilities for HR departments to fulfill this role adds another level of service required by HR staff. As a result, HR departments struggle for time to perform standard duties such as employee management and benefits administration, while fulfilling strategic activities.

Proactive Communications with Push Technology

Technology must, therefore, further automate administrative tasks to offset increased HR responsibilities. While human intervention is often necessary, implementing technology can empower and invigorate an organization. This can be accomplished by using technology as a catalyst to action, providing the tools to inform and monitor progress while reminding us of our responsibilities. This proactive approach ensures the continued, timely flow of information to individuals so they can take due action. This approach is called "Alerts."

Alerts represents what corporate communications experts know as “push technology”—where information is proactively delivered to an audience. Push technology and alerts are frequently used across the Internet, monitoring and communicating everything from stock prices to weather and travel updates, to product pricing.

For HR, this means that Alerts tools enable you to select the information you wish to monitor, as well as determine who should be notified of the event, change, or critical date. Then, at the time the event occurs within your HRIS, an email (or emails) is issued to the relevant parties. It’s that simple!

This technology is very appropriate for the HR function, as many daily, monthly, and yearly tasks occur in predictable periods and require consistent monitoring. As such, Alerts can be combined with an organization’s Human Resource Information System (HRIS) to:

- **Streamline the employee review process** by notifying employees and managers of upcoming performance reviews
- **Monitor overtime costs** by sending controllers a spreadsheet of overtime information of employees
- **Ensure adherence to company policies** by alerting employees of available time-off balances and company time-off policies
- **Improve recruiting efforts** by promptly sending personalized (not “Dear Applicant”) emails to new applicants
- **Generate automatic and repetitive emails** such as new hire welcome messages and personalized emails with corporate forms and attachments
- **Easily create proactive notices** to warn HR, employees and managers of critical certifications or plans that must be submitted

Streamlining the Employee Review Process

HR departments are traditionally responsible for facilitating the employee review process across the organization. Relevant tasks include: issuing reminder notices to managers; sending appropriate forms and paperwork; and processing completed paperwork.

One way to help streamline this process is to establish automated communications that promptly remind managers of upcoming reviews while distributing the necessary paperwork.

Additionally, policy and procedural information can be automatically issued to ensure consistent practices across the company. To this end, HR staff is relieved of redundant communications tasks, which saves valuable time.

Notably, firms with multiple operations or decentralized human resources functions may have gaps in their programs that prohibit consistent adherence to policy. Through timely, consistent communication of company policies, procedures, and practices, alerts can reduce inconsistencies and promote a better workplace.

With an alert system, notifications of reviews can occur automatically up to and after the review date; this ensures that (especially those 90 and 180-day reviews) are done on time. Employees who receive regular feedback are more likely to feel more connected to an organization, and thus have less of a tendency to leave—this directly affects the bottom-line. The following example describes how Alerts can assist in streamlining the employee review process:

- Notifying the supervisor of a pending review (including the review form)
- Notifying the employee of a pending review (including the pre-review form)
- Copying HR that a review is due
- Sending reminder emails to a supervisor until review is complete

Monitoring Overtime Costs

Overtime is of great value to an organization, and also of great fear. Overtime allows for a company's workforce to expand in tandem with work while providing comfort of not having overhired and facing layoff decisions.

Still, paying attention to overtime and associated costs are of critical importance to an organization. Why are overtime dollars being spent? In what area is the most overtime? Are we going to miss budget projections because of overtime expenses?

These questions can be answered quickly with a proactive notification, which sends overtime amounts to appropriate financial or payroll staff. Staying on top of overtime costs has several meanings for an organization, and a proactive HRIS that monitors and immediately communicates information allows for a company to put measures in place to ensure financial viability.

Adherence to Company Policies

By automatically informing managers of upcoming reviews, time-off balances, and other important information, Alerts helps employees work within company policy. Managers and staff are alerted of the proper timeframes and provided appropriate company documentation or information. This empowers staff to easily perform their assignments in compliance with company procedures and policies.

Recruiting: Marketing your Company

Most likely, your business has retention policies in place and effective training programs to build employee skills and spark motivation. Nonetheless, turnover does occur, and you will continually face the challenge of recruiting in a tight labor market.

Alerts can act as your recruiting arm, taking a proactive approach with various possibilities. In a sense, alerts acts as a direct marketing tool, communicating with new prospects to persuade them to become your employees. The way in which you communicate with new employees is as important as what you communicate. For example, your prompt response to an applicant's resume sends a positive message that your company is interested and efficient. Alerts can automatically:

1. Send personalized emails when resumes are received
2. Send current press releases, announcements or employee testimonials to applicants

3. Send personalized thank-you emails during the hiring process
4. Send personalized rejection messages

After this process, although an applicant may not have been the right fit for the position at the time, if they are still a ‘quality lead’ you might want to keep in touch with them—as part of an “Applicant Retention” program. With the same philosophy as a Customer Retention program, an “Applicant Retention” program can help fill your employee prospect pipeline by communicating with potential employees.

Generate Automatic and Repetitive Emails

With Alerts, you can generate repetitive emails for everyday activities, thereby removing the additional effort of your HR Staff. The perfect example of this is automating the new hire process. Upon entering new hire information into your HRIS, automatic notifications can inform the following:

1. Supervisor – ensure the immediate supervisor is aware that an offer has been accepted and start date of their new hire
2. IT/MIS department – notify this group to ensure they obtain necessary equipment prior to the employee’s arrival
3. Operations department – obtain space in the building, order name tags, clean the new hires office, stock desk with standard inventory items
4. Front desk – ensure the employee phone list is consistently up-to-date
5. Companywide – make sure your new hire feels welcome by announcing their arrival to staff
6. New Hire – welcome new employees with an email the very first time they log into your network. In addition, include instructions and all forms that must be processed

Easily Create Proactive Notices

Alerts enable your company to issue automatic and proactive notices for just about anything you do manually, such as birthday lists, available time-off, missing time cards, etc.

1. Birthday Lists - A monthly birthday list can go to the immediate supervisor so that he is aware of an employee's important day. Acknowledgement of someone's birthday coincides with retention efforts.

2. Available time-off – Send employees and supervisors information about time-off balances to avoid misunderstandings. Employees and their supervisors should be aware of these balances before time-off is requested, and an alert is one way to accomplish this.

3. Missing time cards – your alert system can automatically communicate to staff whose time cards are missing. In addition, follow-up alerts can be sent directly to the employees with missing time cards. This provides more time for Payroll managers to focus on impending payroll.

The Business Benefits of Alerts

While implementation costs are relatively low for Alerts, the returns can be tremendous. A few examples are improved retention of employees and reduced job downtime due to missed certifications or training.

Employee Retention

The estimated costs of replacing an employee can range from a few thousand dollars to all of his annual salary. Alerts provide the benefit of frequent and timely communications about company policy, benefits, and corporate information. This is an effective retention tool to help build employee loyalty.

In addition to the time involved in finding the right candidate, other tasks include additional paperwork and employee orientation. The costs of filling that spot can be varied, but in general they involve:

- Internal recruiting efforts
- Management time spent interviewing
- Outside agency costs
- Advertising
- Relocation

Job Downtime

When a key employee is out or unable to work, often their responsibilities are on hold until they return or performed with less quality and productivity by replacement staff.

For instance, a manufacturing company may experience the domino effect of employee downtime as illustrated below:

1. Employee down time affects production time
2. Production time causes production delays
3. Production delays create:
 - Hurried, poor quality work
 - Dissatisfaction among employees and managers
 - Shipping delays
4. Customer receives either poor quality or delayed shipments
5. Customer begins reviewing options for another supplier

Often, when one link in the chain breaks down, this affects your entire organization. Alerts can be established to monitor and communicate planned gaps in staff, notifying employees, managers, and HR staff of needed action. As a result, proper training or certification can be facilitated in time to ensure a qualified replacement. Proactive notification leads to proactive response, which leads to proactive methods.

Bottom Line

An Employee Who Never Quits

Alerts can be likened to having an HR assistant, dedicated 24x7 to monitoring critical employee-related tasks and ensuring their timely completion.

The costs of having an actual 24x7 HR assistant would be very high and not very realistic; however once implemented in your environment, Alerts is on board for the duration of your

HRIS. This provides your organization peace of mind with automated and proactive communications that work independently regardless of staff turnover.

Flexible and Easy-to-Use

Although the concept of Alerts is very new, its underlying technology is not “bleeding edge.” Rather, it is based on reliable, stable technology. Therefore, when focusing on a system that will not only improve the amount of work accomplished, but enhance your company’s bottom-line, you must look for a flexible system that:

- Allows you to create new alerts at any time
- Includes built-in features for document attachments
- Offers training and customer support
- Is simple and easy to use

Strategic Corporate Communications

Alerts for HR is the culmination of what HR staff has been asking for many years. Implemented in conjunction with a company’s HRIS, Alerts creates an intelligent system that proactively notifies and informs individuals or organizations of important actions. This not only measurably relieves the burden of communications tasks for HR staff, but also positions a company to keep a workforce that is informed, knowledgeable, and happy.

In fact, the ROI justifies the use of this helpful technology. So don’t tell your CFO that happy employees make a better company, just remind her of just how much money she has saved today. In fact, create an alert that reminds her every day.

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