

Portal of Power?™

TECHIE
TALK

Tomorrow's Cleaning's resident technology expert, Dean Hudson, Development Manager for CleanLink, describes how to manage growing expectations from both Staff & Customers alike for 24/7 access to 'their' data and information.



Q. I'm trying to win some new business from a prospective customer, but I'm flummoxed by their request for 24/7 access to 'their' data. I could cope with sending some spreadsheets once a week, but I don't know how to handle their need for 24/7 live access. Any ideas?

A. My young son has recently become immersed in a computer game called Skylanders Giants™. He places plastic characters onto a Portal of Power™ and sees them instantly 'teleported' to life inside the game, where he can then interact with them. He loves it!

You need a Portal of Power™ too – but for your data instead of plastic toys! Fortunately such things already exist. They are called 'web portals'.

Web portals

These are simply 'places' on the internet where you can allow specific users to interact in specific ways with whatever data or documents you have placed (teleported?) through the portal. Creating one is actually the easy bit. There are lots of products and services available (some free) – that will enable you to do this; whereupon your uploaded documents and data are available 24/7 to whomsoever you wish.

But, as I said, creating a portal is the easy bit. The real value comes not from simply being

able to make information and data available, but rather in how easily and efficiently you are able to 'teleport' it!

Great fun?

My son physically moves his characters on and off his portal, which is great fun for a young boy – but lets suppose the data 'toys' you want to provide to your customers are their staffing figures, store & stock levels, site audits, risk assessments – whatever the 'toys' are – consider the actual physical mechanism needed to make this data available. Will 'Jenny' in your office spend her time manually extracting all of this data from your system for each customer, converting it into a suitable format and then uploading it to the appropriate place in your web portal?

And what about your staff portal? Will 'Jenny' have time every week to upload .pdfs of all staff payslips, to the correct 'pigeon hole' for each member of staff? What if you have 300 customers and 3,000 staff, or even more? Once you move beyond a fairly small number of users, having to move 1,000's of 'toys' around suddenly isn't quite so much fun anymore!

So, when you investigate any portal offering, ensure that you understand how the regular maintenance tedium of 'moving the toys around', can be automated.

Integration and automation

For instance, our CleanLink web portal is integrated with our base data system. So,

publishing 10,000 payslips to each staff member can be done automatically by the system as part of the regular payroll run. An on-site Supervisor Site Audit can be 'published' to the portal, directly into the relevant Client's 'pigeon hole' – live, in real time, just as soon as it is completed.

I don't have space to go into detail, but another consideration is that web portals can also be used to receive information too, which allows for automatic actions or workflows to be triggered in your back-end system, say – in response to a customer's submission of a 'job request' or a staff member's request to book a holiday.

First steps

Ask questions of your current 'back-end' system provider to find out what 'web portal' integration capabilities they offer. You can then compare this with the services available to you from elsewhere. This will help you to understand the possibilities that are open to you and will bring direct relevance to your situation, which will help you to make some informed decisions that will perhaps help you to win that new business.

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