

REAL WORLD CASE 3

Du Pont and Southwire: Implementing Successful Enterprise Information Portals

Companies typically plan and deploy enterprise information portals to provide employees, customers, and suppliers with a single Web-based access point for data, content, and both new and legacy applications across the enterprise. But things don't always go as planned. Too often, companies build portals, but users just don't come. In a recent Delphi survey of 500 companies spanning 20 industries, 37 percent of the companies that had installed portals said they were disappointed by the lack of "adequate interest among target users."

According to Delphi's findings, the reason people aren't using portals is because there isn't a strategy for keeping people involved—what Delphi calls change management, explains analyst Nathaniel Palmer. "There's a lack of strategy beyond the technical architecture," he says. Indeed, too many companies got caught up in the hoopla surrounding portal technology. Meanwhile, critical usability issues get shortchanged, such as educating users about the portal's capabilities, training them to use it efficiently, and marketing the value of using the portal, especially its value in addressing very specific business problems a company may have.

Du Pont. At Du Pont Co.'s (www.dupont.com) \$3.8 billion Performance Coatings group, the critical issue was content management. "We have a very large number of documents for marketing: brochures, press releases, warranty information on products, and general support content for our distributors and car repair body shops," explains Catherine Marchand, the group's e-business strategy manager. "Our salesmen were driving around with 50 pounds of obsolete literature in their trunk."

Du Pont opted to deliver the information through a Web-based intranet/extranet portal, using technology from Bowstreet, a portal software and Web development tools company. Du Pont wanted the ability to customize information about its half-dozen coating brands. It also wanted each of its 2,500 distributors and repair shops worldwide to see the information displayed in almost 4,000 different site views, which the technology would allow it to do.

Since the content capability was initiated, Du Pont's site has grown rapidly. The body shops can now get training, benchmarking tools, and car paint color formulas via the portal. There are also job-posting and résumé services, Marchand says. And for the distributors, Du Pont is researching adding order-tracking and order-accuracy capabilities soon.

Southwire. At Southwire Co. (www.mysouthwire.com), a \$1.7 billion, Carrollton, Georgia-based manufacturer of cable and wire, the critical business issue was streamlining business processes. Southwire didn't set out in 1999 to build an ideal portal. The privately held firm just wanted a spot on the Web where customers could place orders. It also wanted to

clean up multiple internal and corporate websites, which had been set up by IT on behalf of various departments, each using different Web development software. But four years later, Southwire's portal is yielding impressive business results.

Customer orders are up 33 percent, and 25 percent of all orders are electronic, with online customers ordering twice as many items as those who place orders via fax, telephone, or electronic data interchange. And thanks to content management and workflow capabilities added in the past year, Southwire's managers can approve and post announcements to the portal without involving IT.

"We had several independent websites and a fairly robust e-commerce site. The portal provides an umbrella to bring all those separate websites under, along with providing a single sign-on, multilevel security access, customization, and personalization," says Sheda Simpson, development manager in Southwire's IT Services group. The underlying portal technology is from Sybase Inc. "Southwire was trying to be ahead of the game—at the urging of our CEO," recalls Simpson.

Southwire's initial portal offered only 1,200 commonly ordered products out of the company's 65,000 stock numbers. The emphasis wasn't on creating a "pretty front-end storefront" for the ordering site, according to Simpson. The true business need was cutting costs associated with processing lots of paper and increasing productivity. "We didn't want the behind-the-scenes manual processing," says Simpson. "Southwire was trying to become more efficient. We did not need to create more work; we needed to eliminate work, to streamline," she says.

Thus came the emphasis on integrating the order site to the back-end systems. The company eliminated a significant chunk of manual work which means fewer telephone calls to answer and less faxed information to rekey into the computer system. This streamlining of operations is a big part of the portal's popularity at Southwire.

Case Study Questions

1. Why do so many enterprise information portals fail to attract "adequate interest among targeted users"? What can be done to improve the usage of portals in business?
2. What is the business value of their enterprise portal to Du Pont's Performance Coatings group? How could it be improved?
3. What are the business benefits of Southwire's enterprise portal? Describe several ways it might be improved.

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