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The Importance of Boardroom Technology for Healthcare Boards

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Introduction

E-consults. Wearables. Home-linked electronic health and medical records. Pay-by-phone apps. Portable personal medical records on a credit card chip. The digital landscape is rapidly evolving and impacting the healthcare industry, not only for providers and patients, but also for organizations and their boards of directors. Smart hospitals, health systems and community health center boards also want to position themselves as tech-enabled decision-makers.

Just as healthcare organizations want to embrace new technologies to improve the quality and efficiency of care, they understand that these investments must be done within strategic, efficient and cyber-secure strategies and systems.

For healthcare leaders, their board portal technology must help foster and support alignment between the overall strategic imperatives of the enterprise and the technology roadmap of the healthcare organization. The board's own decision-making processes and communications for wise and regulatory compliance must embrace new security, HIPAA compliance and ease of use, and protect the decision trail of major policy decisions about medical staff, quality of care and financial investments.

Board portals—as they are commonly known—are now being designed to enable and empower secure communication and engagement among board members, executives and others involved in the governance process. However, these board portals are more than just a window into board meeting minutes; they have evolved into highly interactive, decision-support systems. They not only centrally and digitally store documents; they also foster faster, more intelligent and more collaborative decision-making.

Pressing questions also arise:

- What are the benefits of boardroom technology?
- Is our current boardroom process HIPAA compliant?
- How do board portal vendors measure up against each other?
- What evaluation criteria are best suited for healthcare boards?

This BoardEffect report examines the technology challenges healthcare boards face, makes the case for adopting boardroom technology and provides what to look for when selecting board governance management software.

Redefining Board Portals
It's time to rethink the old definition of board portals.

Board portal technology was first introduced in the market in the early 2000s and has now become a benchmark for boards seeking to improve how they prepare for meetings, communicate with other directors, receive and share documents, review minutes and reports, and more without any of the risks or waste that a paper board book creates.

That definition worked for yesterday's needs. Today, board portals are no longer just online repositories of board documents and data; board portals are now transforming into governance management software platforms with extended functionalities.

It's imperative to redefine and rethink boardroom technology as board governance management software—and with that refreshed definition, let's examine the benefits of adopting this specific boardroom technology for healthcare boards.

Benefits of Boardroom Technology
Improved Governance and Efficiency

Boardroom technology can provide a healthcare board with greater governance and efficiency; for example, some board portals provide a governance library of documents for board members to use as a reference, and templates, guides and samples that boards can use to create their own policies, board handbooks, meeting agenda and minutes templates, board self-assessments, CEO evaluations and more.

Let's examine some of the challenges healthcare boards face and how these obstacles can negatively impact governance and efficiency.

Challenges include:

- Some healthcare boards use a mix of digital solutions (e.g., emailing documents, file sharing). This approach of having too many solutions creates security and compliance risks.
- Healthcare boards—particularly those of rural healthcare centers—often struggle to find board members. Rural communities might have populations too small to support regular board turnover and renewal.
- Healthcare boards—particularly of larger healthcare systems—can have complex structures (e.g., for multiple boards, committees, subsidiaries and nonprofit healthcare entities, all of the board members are essentially volunteers).
- Hospitals need to stay informed about regulatory changes and compliance.

There are also some healthcare organizations that will try to build their own "board portal," but that's not an ideal approach because boardroom technology requires ongoing investments in updating security, building new features, supporting board directors in using the system, and training staff.

It's imperative to select a board technology provider that has a singular focus on developing board-related software. However, not all vendors are the same. Questions to ask boardroom technology providers include the following:

- Does the vendor have governance-enhancing features?
- Is it a single solution? How does it scale to fit the governance needs of healthcare systems—from small critical care access hospitals to large healthcare systems with multiple subsidiaries?
- Does it give the organization's governance professionals—the staff that helps facilitate board work—enough control and visibility?

Overall, the board portal needs to promote efficiency and not create obstacles; a healthcare board is busy and its trustees need to concentrate on the organization's mission.

Greater Security

In 2017, there were 78 healthcare data breaches involving more than 10,000 records.[1] The global average cost of a data breach is $3.62 million.[2] Ransomware is hitting healthcare organizations and their boards, so it's important NOT to send sensitive board documents as email attachments; in fact, over 71% of unintentional actions that resulted in a breach are accidentally delivering sensitive information, disposal error or loss.[3]

How can healthcare boards mitigate all of this cybersecurity risk?

First, healthcare board trustees and administrators need a secure way to communicate because emailing sensitive documents (whether using third-party corporate or even personal email accounts) is not secure and creates inherent risks. Basic security

measures need to be implemented, such as all trustees and administrators adhering to security best practices and deploying boardroom technology that places security as a high priority.

Evaluation considerations include the following:

- A board portal that subjects their security to rigorous third-party testing; and
- A secure (third-party) cloud that:
  - Offers access to critical board documents for board trustees and administrators if the system goes down.
  - Facilitates management of an incident response plan.
  - Assists with the business continuity plan.

While digital technology, such as the cloud and mobile, creates more opportunities for convenience, collaboration and communication, your board's and organization's confidential data must remain secure and protected. Look for a board portal that has robust, advanced security measures, such as strong user authentication. In the case of a data breach or cyberattack, ask the vendor how they respond to incidents, and more importantly, how they resolve the security breach.

Ease of Use

The boardroom technology you adopt must be easy to deploy and use for board trustees and administrators. Board trustees are often very busy so they don't have time to grapple with complex technologies.

NOTES
1. Largest Healthcare Data Breaches of 2017, HIPAA Journal
2. 2017 Ponemon Cost of Data Breach Study
3. 2018 Protected Health Information Data Breach Report

Meanwhile, healthcare board administrators have a lot of responsibilities, so approaching technology in the boardroom with multiple solutions instead of selecting one platform creates challenges.

An interesting challenge specific to healthcare boards is that these organizations are very complex entities. Some healthcare organizations are small, while some are massive, with various foundations and different committees. For example, you may have a small critical care access hospital with only 15 board members. Conversely, gigantic healthcare systems can have more than 57 separate boards—each one responsible for a different hospital or group of hospitals within the system. Furthermore, other healthcare entities have one governing board with subsidiary "advisory" boards. There are also foundation boards, an auxiliary board and so on. Overall, these challenges prove that a healthcare board needs a singular provider that can easily grow and adapt to their specific structures and needs.

Ease of use questions to ask a vendor:

- How easy is it for users—no matter their technical skill level?
- What's the level of support and training provided to board members?
- How long does it take to deploy?
- What services do you offer to help us configure the system to meet the needs of our healthcare institution—small or large?

Select a vendor that values simplicity on the front end (user interface) while it is committed to innovative advanced technology powering the solution behind the scenes.

Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System Case Study

The Challenge:

Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System printed and manually distributed all board materials. Not only did it drain staff time to produce copies of 200-page meeting books, but active travel schedules meant that often board members weren't home in time to review or even receive their materials before board meetings. It was clear that the board needed to make the digital switch.

Reaching Out to BoardEffect:

Around the same time, Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System was considering its membership renewal to The Governance Institute and found that special access to BoardEffect would be among the valued benefits. The healthcare organization implemented BoardEffect and saw immediate time savings.

Results:

Now, board trustees and administrators can quickly access board books online and in a timelier manner. The healthcare organization also realized the benefits of creating board books online and has made the whole start-up process simpler and more convenient for board members. Furthermore, the organization realized that BoardEffect could be an invaluable tool for posting information about events and news stories to keep the board trustees engaged and informed.

How BoardEffect Empowers Your Healthcare Board Governance

Digital technology is changing the healthcare industry, so it's imperative that you choose a leader in the space. BoardEffect understands the challenges and the evolving needs of healthcare boards. We

are committed to the healthcare industry, which composes more than one-third of our client base, and have designed an innovative product from the ground up. BoardEffect puts all the benefits of boardroom technology covered in this report into action – whether it is improved governance, security, efficiency, ease of use or greater control. BoardEffect is fully HIPAA compliant, which benefits organizations that are required to safeguard sensitive patient information under these guidelines, particularly for the quality and safety committee. Overall, BoardEffect has the proven track record, expertise and experience boards need. With over 2,200 clients serving more than 170,000 directors and executives, BoardEffect has built a broad client base with strong representation in healthcare and looks forward to innovating new technology for the future.

About the Author

James A. Rice, PhD, FACHE is the Managing Director & Practice Leader of the Governance & Leadership practice of Integrated Healthcare Strategies, a division of Gallagher Benefit Services, Inc. Gallagher GovernWell™, in partnership with BoardEffect, offers healthcare organizations a robust set of resources to help boards reach best practice—quickly and efficiently.

Learn more about how your healthcare board of trustees can leverage the Gallagher GovernWell™ package of necessary governance resources by clicking here:

https://www.boardeffect.com/gallagher/

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