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## HR Technology Hot Topics

### Experts: Web-Based Onboarding Can Aid Employee Retention

By **Aliah D. Wright**

ORLANDO, FLA.—Onboarding, the process of acquainting a new hire into an organization, has often been a time-consuming process. Paperwork needs to be filled out, drug testing completed, health plans selected.

With all the work required to hire a new employee, "it may take upwards of 45 days or more before that individual becomes productive in the job that they were hired to do," D.J. Chhabra, president of [Enwisen](#), told *SHRM Online* recently at the International Association for Human Resource Information Management (IHRIM) technology conference.

But why 45 days? "Because the (new hire) is now focused on completing forms, enrolling into benefits, getting a computer, getting a place to sit—all the basic services that they need to be productive and focus on the job they were hired to do."

According to the [Human Capital Institute](#), the most effective follow through to a good hiring process is an equally strong onboarding program. Using technology and best practices, companies can hasten the time to performance of new hires by blending them into their new jobs more thoroughly and expeditiously.

#### Enter the Web

With web-based onboarding—which automates that process—experts say employers can drive productivity and acclimate employees better into their organizations.

According to Enwisen, web-based onboarding's popularity has grown increasingly over the years as more employers seek to streamline the hiring process, allowing companies to:

- Track and monitor new hires in the onboarding process and make new employees feel more welcome and excited about beginning their new jobs.
- Enable firms to go paperless with all forms while eliminating data entry and improving accuracy.
- Take new hires through an online tour—with personalized content, streaming videos and more.
- Automate provisioning for uniforms, parking passes, computers, e-mail addresses, security badges and the like.
- Help new hires evaluate and select health and insurance and other benefit plan choices, which can be processed on the appropriate date after employment begins.
- Guarantee that policies and compliance requirements are approved and recorded electronically.

#### Retention Is Key

"As an employee, when you're leaving an organization to join a new one, you're leaving a job you're comfortable with, a place that's familiar," Chhabra continued. Entering a new culture with new peers can be trying for some employees because it is then that they realize they're vulnerable, and when they begin to question whether or not they've made the right decision, he said.

In an article for *Kaiser Insight*, [John Parkin Kent](#) wrote in 2007 that: "I have witnessed over 90 percent of my close college friends hop to two or even three different companies since graduating five years ago. Times have

changed, and the old-economy retention mechanisms that once kept mom and dad devoted to a single enterprise have weakened. With pensions and free health care plans disappearing, and the information age providing far greater access to job openings and salary data than in the past, it's not a big surprise that we are becoming more opportunistic and mobile in our career choices."

According to a study of HR and business unit managers released in February 2008 by the research company The Aberdeen Group, 86 percent of organizations surveyed agreed that newly hired employees decide whether or not to stay with their employer within the first six months of their employment. The study found that 68 percent of best-in-class organizations surveyed describe their onboarding systems as partially automated or fully automated. Of the remaining 32 percent, more than half plan to adopt technological tools to automate their onboarding efforts over the next year.

Compare that to a 2006 SHRM survey that found that although 83 percent of companies reported the use of a formal orientation (or onboarding) program for new employees, only 11 percent of companies conducted orientation programs using a computer-based format, preferring instead to use group-based and individual sessions.

### **Millennials Expect It**

"I don't think anybody was even talking about online onboarding five years ago," said

Jeffrey Fina, vice president of [Michael C. Fina](#), a 73-year-old provider of employee reward and recognition programs. Based in New York, Fina unveiled its web-based onboarding system, which it calls an early engagement program, at the SHRM Annual Conference & Exposition in Chicago held June 2008.

"I think what is driving it is the fact that the companies want all of the employees to find all of their benefits and total rewards in one cohesive location," and that's typically on their intranet sites," Fina said.

There's another factor, too, Fina pointed out—millennials (generally regarded as being born between 1980 and 1994)—anticipate it.

"Companies need to be driving toward" instituting web-based onboarding "because as the influx of generational employees (millennials) come into the workplace, this is what they're used to—this is what they expect," he said.

Aberdeen recommends that companies begin the onboarding process before an employee's first day on the job and extend it through the first six months of employment, something with which experts agree.

"Technology is undoubtedly playing a vital role in achieving high performance in new-employee retention and productivity," Kevin Martin, research director, Human Capital Management at Aberdeen, said in a statement about the study. "In fact, our data showed that companies that automate elements of their onboarding process are 59 percent more likely to achieve best-in-class status than companies that don't."

Make no mistake, Chhabra said, keeping employees is an important part of onboarding. "Indirectly it drives a wealth of retention."

According to a study by Corning Glass Works, employees who participated in a structured onboarding program were 69 percent more likely to stay with their company after three years than those who did not go through a program.

*Aliah D. Wright is an online editor/manager for SHRM.*

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[Using Technology To Get Employees On Board](#), *HR Magazine*, April 2005

Welcome On Board: Press 1 for Training, HR Technology, July 2006

Organizational Entry: Onboarding, Orientation and Socialization, SHRM white paper, November, 2006

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