

HOUSTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

Strictly Houston. Strictly Business.

Week of July 25-31, 2008

Technology should be your HR department's new best friend

Human resources bytes.
That's "bytes," not "bites."

While you may, on occasion — and perhaps justifiably — be dissatisfied with your HR department, that is not what we're talking about here.

We're talking about the most progressive and prevalent technology being developed and deployed within the field of human resources.

Like many fields, HR is adopting technology to more efficiently perform many of its functions and to offer more enhanced client services.

From time-tracking to online training, new and innovative software applications are making the delivery of human resource services to employees better, faster and easier. For example:

- **Time and labor management:** Automated Web-based time and labor management systems are replacing antiquated time clocks rife with inefficiencies and swipe cards that seem to invite "buddy punching" and other forms of time theft.

Web-based systems give both small and large companies advanced online tools to monitor and manage their employees. In addition to tracking employees' time and attendance, some systems allow employers to tap into real-time labor data on demand so that employers can assess their immediate staffing needs and manage or adjust employees' schedules accordingly.

Such systems can also seamlessly integrate with a company's internal or outsourced payroll systems to streamline processes and eliminate inaccuracies.

- **Applicant tracking:** The process of recruit-

ing and hiring good people takes time, organization and ongoing communication.

Automated applicant tracking systems assist HR personnel throughout the process by providing online applicant databases, screening applicants' skills and qualifications and automatically communicating with candidates and applicants.

By streamlining an otherwise time-intensive and sometimes tedious process, these programs can significantly speed up the hiring process and reduce recruiting costs.

- **Online benefit enrollment:** Benefit enrollment, a once labor-intensive process, is now often conducted online. Employees submit their benefit elections electronically, so an HR team no longer has to set aside days or even weeks each year to enroll staff into the company's benefit plan. Instead, the team needs only manage and address the outstanding issues and more complex employee concerns surrounding benefit enrollment.

- **Employee self-service:** Perhaps the most well-known technological advancement in the field of human resources has been employee self-service.

Technology now allows employees to access their own individual employee data, such as payroll information like tax withholding or 401(k) contributions. Not only can employees access the information, but they can make adjustments online as well, so almost-immediate changes can be made to withholding levels or contribution amounts.

Self-service expands to managers as well. In addition to accessing their own personal information, supervisors can also electronically administer managerial tasks such as scheduling or performance evaluations.

- **Talent management:** Hiring the right talent is an ongoing challenge for companies, so it becomes critical that they manage their talent well once they find it.

In the area of talent management, technology is delivering fully integrated solutions that help businesses manage their employees, from the time they are hired to the time they retire.

From training and career development to performance management and succession planning, talent management programs allow companies to be more responsive to their employees' professional needs and improve overall retention.

- **Training:** Online training programs offer employees a wide range of courses to further develop their professional skills. And the classes are convenient — individuals can often take them when and where they wish and go at their own pace.

While online training can greatly reduce the frequency with which a company needs to hire instructors and fill classes, there are irreplaceable benefits to a classroom environment, such as the face-to-face interaction with instructors and other students. Some Web-based classes, however, do offer trainees the opportunity for cyberspace interaction through message boards and chat rooms.

HR bytes or HR bites? If your HR team has failed to adopt some of these progressive applications, then perhaps the less-than-flattering vernacular applies.

JOHN ALLEN is president and chief operating officer of Houston-based HR and administrative services company G&A Partners. www.gnapartners.com.



PEOPLE
PERSPECTIVE

JOHN
ALLEN