

---

# *Great Boards Buyer's Guide* to Board Portals

---



Published by Great Boards

*The Web site dedicated to promoting excellence in healthcare governance.*

[www.GreatBoards.org](http://www.GreatBoards.org)

Bader & Associates © 2009  
Health Governance Consultants  
12225 Seline Way, Potomac, Maryland 20854  
Phone: 301-340-0903  
E-mail: [bbader@GreatBoards.org](mailto:bbader@GreatBoards.org)

Information in this Buyer's Guide may be used by individual organizations for their own board education and development, but may not otherwise be published or reproduced for distribution without the permission of Bader & Associates.

## PURPOSE

This Buyer's Guide is designed to help hospitals and health systems conduct an intelligent selection process for a governing board portal. Our target audience includes chief governance administration officers, board assistants, and others involved in reviewing potential portal products and vendors. It will also interest board members and senior executives who will be the primary users of the portal.

## BUY OR BUILD?

An organization must decide whether to buy a board portal from an outside vendor or engage its information technology staff in developing a customized program. This guide is oriented toward evaluating outside vendors, but the approach and questions will also be valuable for those choosing the in-house route. Outsourcing has the potential to draw on the expertise of companies whose core business is board portals, while in-house development may permit greater customization. However, a hospital or health system should also ask whether developing and supporting a board portal is a cost-effective use of internal IT resources.

## CONTENTS

This Buyer's Guide includes the following:

- Potential benefits of a board portal
- Step-by-step process and questions to ask about products and vendors
- Pricing and features comparison of four leading vendors and products
- Contact information for vendors
- Reprint: "Using E-Governance to Make Board Work Easier" from the *Great Boards* newsletter

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Linda Battaglini has 25 years of senior management experience in strategic planning for multi-hospital systems. Currently, as advisor to the CEO of Emerson Hospital, she is responsible for governance and special projects. As president of Battaglini Consulting, she works with leaders of major healthcare providers to help implement their board development agendas. To contact her, call Battaglini Consulting at 781-270-6678, e-mail [lbattaglini1@verizon.net](mailto:lbattaglini1@verizon.net), or check her Web site at [www.battagliniconsulting.com](http://www.battagliniconsulting.com).

## POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF A BOARD PORTAL

Exactly what is a board portal? It's a Web-based, online workspace devoted exclusively to the board. A portal offers directors confidential access to board materials, past and present, and provides tools that make it easier to prepare for board meetings. Typically the portal includes security controls that keep board documents and members' communications with each other protected and confidential. It also includes tools that greatly reduce the time and cost of producing and managing board materials and scheduling board work.

Board portals offer a way to cut unnecessary steps and streamline the board's communications and work processes. They improve information flow to and among board members, despite trustees' increasing time and travel commitments.

Board portals support the board through:

- Increased efficiency in producing/distributing board books and other documents.
- Increased efficiency in scheduling and rescheduling meetings.
- Increased security, including protection for confidential documents and built-in safeguards to prevent accidental e-mail transmissions. The corporate secretary can delete documents and e-mails completely without lingering copies on other computers. Board members can discuss an issue freely in a secure online space, since e-mails can be purged once a decision is made.
- Sensitive documents can be delivered at any time to board members who are traveling. Urgent communications can be transmitted securely during a time-limited crisis or opportunity.
- All features are integrated into a single tool for board members and staff. Meeting materials, communications, policies, bylaws, and archives can be accessed within a highly reliable, secure portal.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT PRODUCTS AND VENDORS

Successful implementation of a board portal starts by involving the right people in the selection process, asking vendors the right questions, and carefully considering the tradeoffs involved in any choice. Successful implementation requires a gradual transition with sufficient support and training for every board member.

As a hospital or health system begins to consider the transition to a sophisticated board portal, there are several key steps to follow and questions to ask to ensure an orderly and successful process.

1. Enlist the support of CEO, board leadership, and board administrative staff. Analyze their goals and address their concerns before undertaking a full comparison of options.
2. Engage staff in gathering information about various products and vendors. Understand the common features of various board portals.
3. Draft a list of priority requirements and budget parameters.

4. Set up a task force to agree on priorities and evaluate products. Include trustees (both least and most tech-savvy board members) as well as administrative staff responsible for board books and committee materials. Consider identifying one lead board member. Distribute a copy of the Great Boards' article, *Using E-Governance to Make Board Work Easier*.
5. Finalize your list of priority requirements, that is, the features that are most important. Find a balance. The portal must satisfy both basic and sophisticated users. Tech-savvy board members may be frustrated by a tool with limited functions; other board members may be intimidated by too much complexity. Ease of use should be a top priority: if it's hard to use, trustees will resist adoption.
6. Choose a short list of vendors who meet your top priorities.
7. Request contact information from users who are willing to discuss their experiences. Ask why they chose that vendor. Ask what is working well for them and what is not.
8. Bring in one or more vendors for a demonstration with staff and the task force.
9. As you talk with vendors, ask a full range of questions to be sure there are no surprises after you make your choice. Ask about the features that are most important to your hospital. They might include:
  - Document management tools (e.g., to create board books or to update documents after they've been uploaded.
  - An alert system that notifies board members when new information is available.
  - Efficient printing for board members.
  - Remote access from any computer.
  - Ability to download materials to board members' computers and review offline.
  - Note-taking and book-marking capabilities.
  - Easy access to notes during meetings, then archive notes after meetings.
  - Survey tools and templates for board self-assessments, developing consensus, and voting.
  - Archives of uploaded documents, searchable by keywords, dates, and committee references.
10. In addition, ask detailed questions about security, the implementation process, and support:
  - What will this portal cost? Are there optional services that come with added charges? Is there a charge for downloading software onto board members' home computers for off-line use?
  - Does the vendor offer special pricing for not-for-profit clients?
  - What forms of implementation support are offered?
    - Help with start-up and initial board meeting?
    - Training on site or by phone?
    - Help with scanning/uploading archival documents?
    - Are there additional charges for these services?
  - What ongoing support services are offered? Phone? Call back? Chat? 24/7?
  - How many hospital/health system clients currently use this portal?
  - Among hospital clients who selected this tool, what proportion of board members are actually using the portal? How satisfied are board members? Administrative staff? Have they gone paperless?
  - What are the sign-in requirements? Single or multiple steps to access materials?
  - Does the administrator control documents after they've been downloaded to a board member's computer?

11. Make your selection. In doing so, maintain a focus on priorities. Don't pay for a complex tool if you only need basic functions.
12. Remember, selecting the appropriate board portal for each organization means looking at trade-offs among features, support, and price. A basic board portal might offer improved communications, archives, board books, and a board action calendar. A more robust board portal might offer more sophisticated user interface, security, 24/7 support, survey tools, and note-taking capability, but at an increased cost.

See our charts, "Board Portal Pricing and Support Comparisons" and "Board Portal Feature Comparisons," to evaluate which board portals would be most appropriate for your organization.

## VENDOR CONTACT INFORMATION

### **BoardEffect, Inc.**

161 Leverington Avenue, Suite 1001  
Philadelphia, PA 19127  
Contact: Dottie Schindlinger, Vice President of E-governance  
Phone: 866-672-2666 or 215-508-4920, ext.14  
E-mail: [info@boardeffect.com](mailto:info@boardeffect.com)  
[boardeffect.com](http://boardeffect.com)

### **BoardVantage**

1060 Marsh Rd., Suite 110  
Menlo Park, CA 94025  
Contact: Mary De Frenchi, Vice President of Accounts  
Phone: 650-614-6069  
E-mail: [mary@boardvantage.com](mailto:mary@boardvantage.com)  
[boardvantage.com](http://boardvantage.com)

### **Diligent Board Member Services, Inc. (Diligent Boardbooks)**

39 W. 37th Street, 8th Floor  
New York, NY 10018  
Contact: Jeffry Powell, Vice President, Boardbooks Licensing  
Phone: 973-939-9431  
E-mail: [jpowell@boardbooks.com](mailto:jpowell@boardbooks.com)  
[boardbooks.com/diligentbooks/index.shtml](http://boardbooks.com/diligentbooks/index.shtml)

### **Directors Desk**

A NASDAQ OMX Company  
One Liberty Plaza  
New York, NY 10006  
Contact: Tina Buringa, Sales Director  
Phone: 509-931-1023  
E-mail: [tburinga@directorsdesk.com](mailto:tburinga@directorsdesk.com)  
[directorsdesk.com](http://directorsdesk.com)

## BOARD PORTAL PRICING AND SUPPORT COMPARISONS

The following pricing and support service comparisons are based on a community hospital with a \$250 million budget, three boards, and six committees. There are 40 distinct board and committee members plus 10 vice presidents and administrative support staff, for a total of 50 users. The hospital may also purchase laptops to be used in meetings, but that expense isn't reflected in these numbers. NOTE: Specific figures might vary in alternative scenarios.

Vendor	Annual License	Other Costs	Reliability & Security	User Support	Training	Startup	Upgrades
<b>BoardEffect</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$9,000 for unlimited users or committees</li> <li>• \$12,000 with The Governance Institute's materials &amp; member support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No setup fee</li> <li>• Additional training: \$1,500/day</li> <li>• Optional consulting &amp; customization: \$150/hour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SAS 70 Type II certified managed hosting facility</li> <li>• Redundant data centers</li> <li>• Daily backups</li> <li>• Dual server mirror environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phone support during business hours</li> <li>• Online ticketing system at all times</li> <li>• Consulting on roll-out plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admin training on-site or remote</li> <li>• Webinars &amp; Help Guides for users</li> <li>• Free on-site user training for TGI members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No installation required (Web-based system)</li> <li>• Initial set-up included</li> <li>• Document migration &amp; customization available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Included in annual license</li> </ul>
<b>BoardVantage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$28,750: includes discount for NFP hospitals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes all setup, training, support, and upgrades</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warm backup within minutes</li> <li>• Full backup daily</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24/7 online and phone support with three-minutes or less call-back</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Done by account manager</li> <li>• Administration and all board members either one-on-one or by phone/Web</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Onsite for first board meeting</li> <li>• Training to set up calendar &amp; load archives</li> <li>• One week from signing to startup</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Included in annual license</li> </ul>
<b>Diligent Boardbooks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$26,400 total: \$3,000/board \$300/director \$100/committee \$600/admin</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optional Secure ID token \$200 each</li> <li>• Installation fee \$3,200</li> <li>• Offline software version (fee based on number of users)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dual server with triple redundancy</li> <li>• Data backup every 15 minutes</li> <li>• Token generates secure password</li> <li>• Quarterly third-party penetration &amp; vulnerability testing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global</li> <li>• Live</li> <li>• 24/7/365</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Onsite</li> <li>• Web-based</li> <li>• Unlimited for all users</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation consulting</li> <li>• Document migration</li> <li>• Onsite for first board meeting</li> <li>• Installation to directors' &amp; administrative computers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Included in annual license</li> </ul>
<b>Directors Desk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$15,300</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No added costs for setup, training, support, or ongoing upgrades</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three-minute real-time backup</li> <li>• Hosted by NASDAQ servers</li> <li>• Scramble pad for easy pin entry but tight security</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24/7/365</li> <li>• Live call back within five minutes</li> <li>• User guides</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unlimited training for current/new administrators &amp; board members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board meeting demo</li> <li>• One-on-one board member training</li> <li>• Welcome kits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Included in annual license</li> <li>• Works with users to customize if needed</li> </ul>

## BOARD PORTAL FEATURE COMPARISONS

This table identifies features that distinguish the tools from each other. It describes particular strengths and weaknesses based on product descriptions provided by vendors. This summary is not based on hands-on testing comparisons.

Vendor	Overall	Features and Support Services Profile	Document Management	Calendar Management	Alerts	Note-taking	Survey & Voting Tools	E-mail & Discussion Tools	Other Comments
<b>BoardEffect</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designed to support good governance for healthcare, education, &amp; not-for-profits</li> <li>Partnership with TGI</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Essential features &amp; intuitive interface</li> <li>Embedded resources on good governance</li> <li>TGI resources &amp; member support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting books (board &amp; committee), resource library, &amp; board manual</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting notification and RSVP</li> <li>Board action calendar</li> <li>Links to Outlook</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E-mail alerts</li> <li>Daily e-mail digest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Private folder for each user to store notes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Voting and polling tool</li> <li>Ability to record official votes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Links to user's e-mail</li> <li>Integrated threaded discussion forums &amp; live talk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>33% of clients are in the healthcare industry</li> <li>97% client retention rate</li> </ul>
<b>BoardVantage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scoped by F500 for feature set</li> <li>Clients of all sizes</li> <li>For high security &amp; functional needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Robust features, security &amp; support</li> <li>Board vault local computer area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agenda wizards</li> <li>Edit documents in portal without reloading</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting notifications with links to documents</li> <li>Download to local Outlook calendar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E-mail, v-mail &amp; text alerts</li> <li>Links to new materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Notes flagged on agenda &amp; document</li> <li>Save or delete after meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey tools &amp; wizards</li> <li>Voting tools</li> <li>Summary reports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Web conferencing tools</li> <li>Easy integration to portal documents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>160 clients</li> <li>15% of users are hospitals</li> </ul>
<b>Diligent Boardbooks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designed for corporate users</li> <li>6,500 users</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Robust features, security &amp; support</li> <li>One-click off-line module</li> <li>Board Book has familiar notebook look/feel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drag &amp; drop uploading</li> <li>Agenda &amp; calendar links</li> <li>Search tools</li> <li>Searchable documents</li> <li>Archives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Links to Outlook</li> <li>Meeting notification and RSVP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Searchable e-mail, v-mail &amp; text alerts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Private &amp; shared notes</li> <li>Meeting summaries</li> <li>File exporting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drag &amp; drop survey creation</li> <li>Voting &amp; polling tools</li> <li>Surveys &amp; questionnaires</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Available within the portal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>250+ clients</li> <li>93.7% customer retention rate over last eight years</li> <li>Signature image</li> </ul>
<b>Directors Desk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Began as a tool for hospital boards</li> <li>Bought by NASDAQ</li> <li>More than 7,000 users</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Robust features, security &amp; support</li> <li>Windows look &amp; feel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agenda templates</li> <li>Searchable</li> <li>Document version control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Search tools</li> <li>Calendar links to meeting materials</li> <li>Attendance-tracking module</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alerts link to new materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Private &amp; shared notes</li> <li>Meeting summaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey &amp; voting tools</li> <li>eSignature</li> <li>Board assessment templates</li> <li>Summary reports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discussion thread for brainstorming within portal</li> <li>Secure e-mail and Web conferencing tools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board roster &amp; composition management tools</li> <li>35% of users are healthcare clients</li> </ul>

These charts are based on information provided by the vendors, and each vendor had an opportunity for pre-publication review. *Great Boards* has made every effort to ensure accuracy, but takes no responsibility for inadvertent errors or for subsequent changes by vendors.



## Using E-Governance to Make Board Work Easier

by Linda Battaglini

### Buyer's Guide to Board Portals

The Great Boards "Buyer's Guide to Board Portals" compares features and pricing for four commercially available board portal products. It also offers practical advice and questions to consider when evaluating portals.

Download a free copy at [GreatBoards.org](http://GreatBoards.org).

Hospitals have brought advanced information technology to every corner of their organizations. They are even bringing electronic health records to physician offices. At the same time, the hospital governing board has remained the last bastion of old-fashioned communications.

Today that's changing, as more and more boards adopt so-called "board portals" to deliver materials to directors and expedite information flow between the hospital and its board, between subsidiaries and their corporate parents, and among board members themselves.

What is a board portal? It's a Web-based, online workspace devoted exclusively to the board. It offers directors confidential access to board materials, past and present, and provides tools that make it easier to prepare for board meetings. Typically the portal includes security controls that keep board documents and members' communications with each other protected and confidential. It also includes tools that greatly reduce the time and cost of producing and managing board materials and scheduling board work.

A number of vendors offer "turnkey" board portal products, and some hospitals and health systems have developed their own programs.

Dottie Schindlinger, vice president of E-governance for BoardEffect, Inc., a board portal vendor, likes to say that the time for e-governance has arrived. "E-governance is the conscious, strategic use of online tools to facilitate board communication, governance workflow and board engagement,"

she says. "With e-governance, board members stop being passive consumers of historical data and become active agents of knowledge creation and informed governance."

The Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth Health System, which uses the Directors Desk board portal, would agree. In their experience, online technology can significantly improve the effectiveness of board-management communications and essential record-keeping functions. They are particularly happy with all-hours external IT support and a newly developed feature that lets them search a database of potential board members for specific skills. (See "Regional System Relies on Exhaustive Search Process" for more details.)

Online technology can significantly improve the effectiveness of board-management communications and essential record-keeping functions.

—Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth  
Health System

continued on page 14 →

→ continued from page 13

## How One Health System Selected a Board Portal

The Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth Health System (SCLHS), in Lenexa, Kansas, has eight boards, each with 15 to 17 members, as well as five or six committees, spread over four states.

“We wanted a portal that would help us achieve governance excellence across our system,” says Peggy Ford, RN, JD, and SCLHS director of governance. “We wanted to improve efficiencies, increase communication, and make sure that current information is always available and at the forefront for our board members.”

Ford started out by researching and doing remote training sessions on half a dozen board portals.

She designed a process that fully engaged board leaders and set clear goals for the outcome of the search, convening a system-wide board portal committee. It included both sophisticated and novice users, as well as representatives from all levels of the organization, from hospital board chairs to administrative assistants who develop and distribute board notebooks.

The committee reviewed pro-and-con summaries on the four front-runners, and after several phone meetings narrowed the choices down to two options. All committee members traveled to the corporate office for two days of hands-on vendor demonstrations.

At this point, the committee leaned strongly toward Directors Desk. Before committing, Ford spent a full day at another system that uses this portal, asking scores of questions. Last May, the SCHLS system board was trained and piloted the portal. “If we had tried the pilot and it didn’t work out well, we were done,” Ford recalls. “Maybe it’s the lawyer in me, but before I put anything out there I want to be sure we’ve tested it inside out and outside in. We didn’t sign the contract for payment until after the pilot test.”

The pilot was a big success. But Ford had one more specialized requirement, and it was a deal-breaker. She needed a database of information on current members and potential candidates for boards and committees, a database that would let her search for specific skills, membership experience, and potential conflicts of interest. “We thought that would truly be an excellent governance support feature,” she says. “Well, no portal had it, but Directors Desk was willing to build it. We, and all their clients, now benefit from this improvement to the system.”

Why is SCHLS happy with the portal? “It is comprehensive. It can handle something as simple as updating the roster and e-mails, and something as complicated as complying with Sarbanes-Oxley on retention of minutes,” Ford says. She also values external IT support, available 24/7. “No one in our IT department had to put a penny or an ounce of work into this system, and that’s a good thing, because they are booked solid. They checked the portal to ensure that it met our security issues, and after that they said, ‘We’re done.’”

continued on page 15 →

→ continued from page 14

## Home-Grown Systems: Possible but Clunky

Some board members ask, “Why don’t we just use an in-house addition to our current Web site? We could easily add ways to e-mail documents to board members, manage version control, schedule meetings, and provide an agenda with links to relevant documents.”

Spartanburg Regional, a health system serving Spartanburg, South Carolina, tried an in-house system, using a shared computer drive dedicated to the board to simplify access. However, navigating multiple layers of logins and folders proved onerous to board members, and it was a daunting task to print the entire board book. Board members soon decided that paper was easier, and the shared drive was underutilized.

While home-grown systems can work and even include customized features, they have a downside. Most hospital IT staffs are already overburdened with rolling out and supporting electronic health records and other IT advances. They may not have the time to develop a product that equals “best of breed” portal applications from companies that specialize in one product.

## Board Portals Offer Ten Key Features

A well-designed board portal is easy to use. It’s possible to navigate intuitively among all features, to print the entire board book with a single click, or to print separate documents as needed. While each vendor offers its unique suite of services, key features often include:

### Document access and management.

Board members have inbound access to confidential board materials and communications. They can sign into the system by clicking a single link on their computer desktop, whether it’s a personal laptop, or a workplace computer. When traveling, trustees can download materials before or during the trip, and review them in locations that don’t have Internet access.

### Board books and document

**controls.** Portals typically include robust tools for creating a board book and centrally managing corporate documents. According to research conducted by BoardEffect and the Alliance for Nonprofit Management, it can take two to five people several days to prepare board and committee mailings. Even a small board could spend \$7,500 per year on printing and mailings, and board portals can substantially reduce this expense. Portal administrators can broadcast materials to all board members, or to a specific committee or selected individuals. They can reach a document even if stored with an off-line version of the software, and set rules for document retention and destruction.

**Reliable security.** Board members have user-level defined access to board and committee materials. They can access the portal from any computer. Portals use a variety of methods to maintain strong security, such as multiple passwords, scramble pad, or key fob. Committee staffers have user-level access matched with their scope of work, keeping all other board materials confidential.

**Alerts.** Board staffers can easily send out alerts about new materials. Some portals take board members directly to new materials when they log in.

### Calendar management and meeting scheduling.

The portal shows the complete board calendar, including all meetings and board events. Some tools link calendars to materials for each scheduled meeting.

**E-mail and discussion tools.** All e-mails among board members stay within the board portal, with confidentiality controls that prevent unintended e-mail transmissions. Access is limited to appropriate staff.

**Survey and voting tools.** The portal often includes survey tools for polling board members and conducting board assessments. The board chair can call for online voting.

**Note-taking.** Board members can make online notes as they review the meeting packet and access their notes during meetings, just as they would when reviewing a paper document.

continued on page 16 →

→ continued from page 15

**Reliable support.** The portal is a hosted environment, and the vendor provides software, servers, storage, and backup systems that ensure business continuity. Vendors may offer 24/7 support, along with a high level of expertise on specific board portal functions.

**Searchable archives.** Most portals provide unlimited storage for key corporate information. The archives might include the board manual and bylaws, minutes and meeting materials, financial and quality reports and dashboards, annual reports, and strategic plans. Materials can be searched by keywords, by topic, by committee, and by date.

Board portals are still an innovative approach to governance support. Great Boards asked hospitals that are using board portals to discuss the benefits and drawbacks they've experienced.

#### Directors Desk Offers Online Discussions and Voting

Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center in Boise, Idaho, started using the board portal developed by Directors Desk three years ago. "We use it constantly," says Cinda Perkins, executive assistant to the President/CEO. "It's a great time saver. It used to take a day to put board books together. Now, the updates all get done automatically. It has just brought us into the 21st century." The hospital bought laptops that stay in the board meeting room, and almost all directors use them during meetings, though one or two board members still rely on paper copies.

---

"We use  
[Directors Desk]  
constantly. . . .  
all the updates get done  
automatically.  
It has just brought us  
into the 21st century."

—Cinda Perkins, Executive Assistant  
to the President/CEO, Saint Alphonsus  
Regional Medical Center

---

Unlike SCLHS, Saint Alphonsus didn't go through a rigorous search process. At that time, Directors Desk was based in Idaho, and they called to ask if they could make a presentation. The CEO was so impressed by the available features that this portal was selected without investigating other options . . . and Saint Alphonsus hasn't regretted that decision.

The software includes an electronic voting feature which has been used for relatively minor decisions that can't wait for the next board meeting. Board members can vote online, anywhere in the world, at a time of their choosing. The system maintains security through a password combined with a unique, user-set four digit code.

To develop goals for 2010, board members engaged in an online discussion, using a secure discussion area within the board portal. Each director identified top three priority goals, and then engaged in significant give and take. "Each board member was able to review and comment on the previous discussion, on their own timeline," Perkins says. "We took a summary of that preliminary discussion to the board meeting that set the final goals."

In addition to board support, Saint Alphonsus found that the portal tools have unexpected benefits. Directors Desk works well for building and converting complex multi-part documents into a PDF format, so the hospital used it to develop its 400-page budget for 2010. Saint Alphonsus is part of the Trinity Health System, a 40-hospital system based in Michigan. "Now that the home office has seen what the portal can do, they are recommending it to our other hospitals," Perkins says.

#### BoardEffect and The Governance Institute Team Up to Promote E-Governance

Shore Memorial Hospital, in Somers Point, New Jersey, has five boards plus associated committees, totaling 65 board members. Since 2004 they've been using a secure in-house board Web site based on a Microsoft product called FrontPage, which includes board packets, minutes, and the board calendar. However board members have been reluctant to use the in-house portal, and Shore Memorial still sends out paper packets to all board members.

continued on page 17 →

→ continued from page 16

A year ago executive staff members came across a BoardEffect demonstration at The Governance Institute's (TGI) leadership conference, and realized it would be a more convenient way of dispersing information to board members. TGI offers members a board portal that incorporates material from their extensive library of white papers and templates. Portal support services are integrated with TGI member support functions, and TGI offers onsite support for the first board meeting.

Shore Memorial is now in the process of transitioning to BoardEffect, with the goal of going paperless by the end of 2010. "I believe our board members will be much happier with the look and feel of the BoardEffect portal, and have a greater comfort with the reliability,

---

"Several of [our trustees] have seen the benefits of paperless systems in other aspects of their lives, and that makes them eager to go forward now."

—Patty Herron, Secretary to the Board, Shore Memorial Hospital, about the transition to BoardEffect

---

confidentiality, and ease of password management," says Patty Herron, secretary to the board.

The Shore Memorial board encompasses a wide range of computer skills, including three members who don't own computers or cell phones, so Herron envisions a phased-in migration process. "This is just like any time you start to make a change; it's like going on a new exercise program," she says. "Unless you conscientiously make a firm decision, you tend to fall back into those old habits. But at our recent board retreat, many trustees came up to me and said they wanted to help test the portal. Several of them have seen the benefits of paperless systems in other aspects of their lives, and that makes them eager to go forward now."

### Diligent Boardbooks: Support at Midnight

Spartanburg Regional had developed its own board support system, but it required quite a bit of clicking and finding to access all the materials, and several board members decided they needed paper copies shipped to them. The hospital wanted speedier communications between management and trustees, with more time to review materials before board meetings, so it decided to examine a number of board portal options. Both tech-savvy and tech-phobic board members participated in the search. They were particularly impressed by the presentation from Diligent Boardbooks, according to Matthew Van Patton, chief of staff to the board. "After seeing how intuitive and user-friendly the software was, everybody at

the table felt that it was a no-brainer." Another important factor was the assurance of reliable support. "They seemed to be very customer-focused," Van Patton says. "They asked about our needs and said they would support us over time."

---

"After seeing how intuitive and user-friendly [Diligent Boardbooks] was, everybody at the table felt that it was a no-brainer."

—Matthew Van Patton, Chief of Staff to the Board, Spartanburg Regional

---

Diligent Boardbooks went live at Spartanburg in March 2009. Nowadays, board meetings are paperless. The hospital invested in inexpensive laptops that remain in the board meeting room, and are completely set up when directors arrive. In addition, directors can access materials before or after the meeting on their home or work computers.

Van Patton likes to work late at night, and so does one of the physician board members. Recently he got an 11:30 p.m. e-mail from this doctor, who said he couldn't log on to the board portal. When Van Patton's suggestions

continued on page 18 →

→ continued from page 17

didn't work, he e-mailed the account representative for help. "He immediately e-mailed me back and then proceeded to fix the problem at one in the morning," Van Patton says. "I thought that was phenomenal. They promised us support, and they've kept their word."

Board portals have gone through three generations of development; they are a stable technology with proven benefits. Their added capabilities make it easier for the board to carry out its responsibilities. There is a transitional period while boards learn how to use these new tools, but there's a substantial payoff as they find they can carry all needed materials on a laptop, and participate in secure online discussions at any convenient time.

## Four Board Portals

We checked pricing information on four major portals often used by hospitals and health systems. For a community hospital with a \$250 million budget, three boards and six committees (totaling 50 users), the estimated annual license costs would be:

- **BoardEffect** \$9,000 basic; \$12,000 with The Governance Institute's materials and member support
- **BoardVantage** \$28,750
- **Diligent Boardbooks** \$26,400
- **Directors Desk** \$15,300

**For more information**, including additional costs, questions to ask vendors, and a chart comparing features and pricing of board portals, please visit [greatboards.org/newsletter/](http://greatboards.org/newsletter/).

### To Contact Vendors:

**BoardEffect, Inc.** Contact: Dottie Schindlinger, Vice President of E-governance | Phone: 866-672-2666 or 215-508-4920, ext.14 | E-mail: [info@boardeffect.com](mailto:info@boardeffect.com) | [boardeffect.com](http://boardeffect.com)

**BoardVantage** | Contact: Mary De Frenchi, Vice President of Accounts | Phone: 650-614-6069 | E-mail: [mary@boardvantage.com](mailto:mary@boardvantage.com) | [boardvantage.com](http://boardvantage.com)

**Diligent Board Member Services, Inc.** (Diligent Boardbooks) | Contact: Jeffry Powell, Vice President, Boardbooks Licensing | Phone: 973-939-9431 | E-mail: [jpowell@boardbooks.com](mailto:jpowell@boardbooks.com) | [boardbooks.com](http://boardbooks.com)

**Directors Desk** A NASDAQ OMX Company | Phone: 509-931-1023 | E-mail: [tburinga@directorsdesk.com](mailto:tburinga@directorsdesk.com) | [directorsdesk.com](http://directorsdesk.com)

### For More Information:

- Peggy Ford, RN, JD  
[peggy.ford@sclhs.net](mailto:peggy.ford@sclhs.net)
- Patsy Herron  
[pherron@shorememorial.org](mailto:pherron@shorememorial.org)
- Cinda Perkins  
[perkinck@sarmc.org](mailto:perkinck@sarmc.org)
- Dottie Schindlinger  
[dschindlinger@boardeffect.com](mailto:dschindlinger@boardeffect.com)
- Matthew Van Patton  
[mvanpatton@mac.com](mailto:mvanpatton@mac.com)

Linda Battaglini has 25 years of senior management experience in strategic planning for multi-hospital systems. Currently, as advisor to the CEO of Emerson Hospital, she is responsible for governance and special projects. As president of Battaglini Consulting, she works with leaders of major healthcare providers to help implement their board development agendas. To contact her, call Battaglini Consulting at 781-270-6678, e-mail [lbattaglini1@verizon.net](mailto:lbattaglini1@verizon.net), or check her Web site at [battagliniconsulting.com](http://battagliniconsulting.com).

---

**GREAT BOARDS** is published by Bader & Associates | Governance Consultants | 12225 Seline Way, Potomac, Maryland 20854  
Phone: 301-340-0903 | Fax: 240-595-6162 | E-mail: [bbader@GreatBoards.org](mailto:bbader@GreatBoards.org) | [GreatBoards.org](http://GreatBoards.org)

**Elaine Zablocki**, editor of Great Boards, is a freelance healthcare journalist whose work has appeared in *Physicians Practice*, *Internal Medicine News*, *Medicine on the Net*, and numerous other publications. To contact her, e-mail [greatboards@ezab.net](mailto:greatboards@ezab.net).

**Graphic Design by:** Ruzow Graphics, Inc. | [ruzowgraphics.com](http://ruzowgraphics.com)

© 2009 Bader & Associates. Information in Great Boards may be used by individual organizations for their own board education and development, but may not otherwise be published or reproduced for distribution without the permission of Bader & Associates.