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10 Tips for Successful Implementation of an Electronic Board Portal

1. Corporate Secretary Lays Out the Plan. The Corporate Secretary should present the case for the use of a web portal to the Chairman of the Board/CEO citing to several reasons, including security of materials, time and cost saving, and convenience for those Directors who serve on multiple boards and/or travel frequently. The presentation should include not only the cost of the product, but the cost of any laptops or other technology that will be used by the Directors. (See item 5 below). The presentation should also identify the target date for the elimination of paper mailings.
2. Chairman Announces the Decision. Consistent with other decisions that are within the purview of the Chairman of the Board, the Chair should announce that, based on the data presented by the Corporate Secretary, the Board will be moving to the web portal. The announcement should include facts which will mitigate anticipated concerns, including the ability for each Director to print the materials, as well as the provision of the necessary technology.
3. Involve the Key Directors. Key Directors should be involved in the selection process. It is important to include Directors who may be skeptical regarding the use of the web portal. At SJI, the Corporate Secretary identified five products and along with the Chairman, presented two of the five products to the "Selection Panel" for review. The panel then selected the product and a representative from the selected portal company presented to the full Board. The presentation included information from the Corporate Secretary regarding technology and other tools that would be provided to the Directors.
4. Select a Dedicated IT Person. The Company should select a dedicated IT person who will be available to work with the Directors regarding any problems with the technology. This IT person is an essential part of the process, as many of the questions will be related to the equipment, not the use of the portal.
5. Provide All Necessary Technology. Provide the necessary technology to the Board. The Company must be willing to provide the Directors with laptops, printers, air cards, and other items needed to use the web portal. In addition to these items, my Company provided tablets for use in the Board Room so that the Directors would not have to bring the laptop to meetings. Further, our Board Room is equipped with flat screen televisions so that the electronic materials can be displayed on the screens during all presentations. *It is important to remember that not all of the Directors will need the listed equipment.* Some will use their own laptops and printers, and others will choose not to print at all. Attached is a technology questionnaire used by SJI's IT department to determine the Directors' IT needs. Be sure to provide the Directors with written instructions regarding the use of the laptop. (Example attached). The written instructions should also be posted on the portal.
6. Communicate Thought the Web Portal. Resist the urge to use email or paper to communicate with the Board. Do not use emails with documents attached, even if confidentiality is not at issue. In order to get the Directors accustomed to using the web portal, send an email identifying the location of a newly loaded document so that the Directors can go in and view the document.

7. News Articles and Press Releases. Use the web portal for more than Board meetings. On our web portal, we create a book called “Monthly Information” where items of importance which are unrelated to a Board agenda are posted. These postings include articles, press releases, etc. Again, this gets the Directors accustomed to using the web portal.
8. Computer Savvy Assistant. The Corporate Secretary’s assistant is also an essential part of the process. While most administrative assistants are technologically savvy, it is important that the administrative assistant demonstrate an ease in working with the portal as well as the ability to work with the portal provider to trouble shoot any issues.
9. Look Before You Publish. Before making the documents loaded onto the portal viewable to the Directors, be sure to check each agenda and exhibit for issues that may not exist when the documents are in hard copy. These issues include print size, readability of the font, documents which are landscape versus portrait, the appropriate margins, etc.
10. Other Important Tips for Success:
 - Select a web portal that “looks like a book” so that the transition from a hard copy document is easier.
 - Select a web portal that prints the materials with ease.
 - The Corporate Secretary should keep each of the Directors’ user name and passwords in a secure location and use the log in information to have each Director logged into their tablet when they arrive to the Board Room.
 - Publish materials when ready. For example, if the materials for the Governance Meeting are ready, publish that book and allow the Directors to view the material while other books are being completed.
 - Use the web portal to store other information such as contact information, materials used for Director Orientation, minutes, etc.
 - Use the web portal voting function for electronic voting in lieu of email or phone conferences or polling.
 - Utilize the portal’s security function so that confidential documents can be hidden from Management or certain Directors as appropriate.