



Buy or Build?

Where to turn for a Board Portal

If your IT people have enough idle time to work on a board portal, you need to ask one question:

“Why are they not working on vital company programming?”

There often comes a time in the life of a company when someone forwards a memo, or says at a meeting, “Hey, why don’t we build our own board portal?”

The usual first reaction is, “What’s a board portal?”

The second reaction is then, “Great idea! We can have our IT people whip something together that is perfect for us.”

But the most effective thing someone needs to say is, “WAIT! Let’s examine what we are trying to achieve here, and look for a more sensible – economical and functional – solution.”

Can you DIY a Board Portal? Yes, it’s possible but **Not Your Best Option**

“ *In the end, you will probably only get ½ the functionality you really need.* ”

Here are the simple facts about building your own board portal:

- It will take 6 months or more for the complete construction of the portal, including beta testing and fine-tuning.
- In the end, you will probably only get ½ the functionality you really need.
- You will spend a further 3 to 6 months creating add-ons that you missed in the original design.
- Calculate the cost in wages of at least three months building and testing the new software package.
- You will lose an incalculable amount in “lost opportunity” while your IT people are working on your portal instead of other vital company software needs.
- If the portal is built by your internal IT staff, they will have access to the confidential board materials in the future.

Consider this: does your IT team have the expertise to build a mobile app with all the features you need? That is a very special talent that most IT departments do not possess.



IT professionals are wonderful at their work. They can deliver just about anything you ask for. But their final product is dependent on the “job description” you create. If you do not tell them exactly all the tasks your Board needs (even the functions you don’t think of immediately) the final deliverable will fall short of your requirements.

Exactly what is a board portal?

It’s a Web-based, online workspace devoted exclusively to your Board of Directors. A portal offers Directors confidential access to board materials, past and present, and provides tools that make it easier to prepare for board meetings.

/// *Board portals offer a way to reduce or even eliminate unnecessary steps, and streamline communications and work processes.* **///**

The portal usually includes security controls to keep board files and documents, and members’ communications with each other, protected and confidential. It may include tools that greatly reduce the time and cost to produce and manage board materials and schedule board work.

Board portals offer a way to reduce or even eliminate unnecessary steps, and streamline communications and work processes. They improve information flow to and among board members, despite Directors’ increasing time and travel commitments.



Board portals support the board through:

- Increased efficiency to produce & distribute board books and other documents.
- Increased efficiency to schedule and reschedule meetings.
- Increased security, including protection for confidential documents, and built-in safeguards to prevent accidental e-mail transmissions. Administrative staff can manage documents and e-mails to reduce redundant copies. Directors can discuss an issue freely in a secure online space, with a purge – if deemed necessary – of any e-mails once the Board makes a decision.
- Deliver sensitive documents at any time to travelling board members.
- Transmit urgent communications securely during a time-limited crisis or opportunity.
- Integration of all features into a single tool for board members and staff. Board members can access meeting materials, communications, policies, bylaws, and archives within a highly reliable, secure portal.

Your Board Portal Must Offer These Vital Functions

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.

So, if you want to build the system in-house, this is a list of "must haves" for your application:

Mobile Apps

- Your board governance solution needs to include mobile apps (e.g. an iPad app) that are easy to use and understand and allow for on-line and off-line functionality. Directors (and administrators) travel frequently. They need access on portable devices such as tablets and laptops far from the convenience of their desktop computer to allow for direct annotation of documents.

Document Access and Management

- Directors need inbound access to confidential board materials and communications. They can sign into the system by clicking a single link on their desktop computer, laptop or tablet. When traveling, trustees want to download materials via Wi-Fi connection before or during the trip, and review them in locations with or without Internet access.

Board books and document controls

- Your portal must include robust tools to create a board book and centrally manage corporate documents. Research reveals, "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 print and mail, and board portals can substantially reduce this expense." This does not include the cost of staff time. Producing a board book can be extremely time-consuming particularly if using paper and extremely cumbersome at managing last minute changes.
- What you want is a system like APRIO Boardroom that allows portal administrators to 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.



Calendar Management and Meeting Scheduling

- You want your portal to show the complete board calendar, including all meetings and board events. You want to include tools that link calendars to materials for each scheduled meeting. It makes it easier to plan meetings for the various board committees and Directors can self-serve.

Reliable Security

- Directors require user-level defined access to board and committee materials. They want to 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 within their scope of work, thus keeping all other board materials confidential.

Survey and Voting Tools

- The portal often includes survey tools for polling board members and conducting board assessments. This feature allows the Board Chair to call for online voting.



Directors & Staff Making Notes, Highlighting, Striking Out, Etc.

- Allow board members and administrative staff to make online notes as they review the meeting packet and access their notes during meetings, just as they would when reviewing a paper document.

/// *All e-mails among board members must stay within the board portal, with confidentiality controls to prevent unintended e-mail transmissions. Access is limited to appropriate staff. ///*

Alerts

- Board staff need to easily send out alerts about new materials. Do you want your portal to take board members directly to new materials when they log in?

E-mail and Discussion Tools

- All e-mails among board members must stay within the board portal, with confidentiality controls to prevent unintended e-mail transmissions. Access is limited to appropriate staff.

Reliable Support

- The portal is a hosted environment, and someone (your internal IT team) will have to provide software, software updates, server hardware storage, and backup systems that ensure business continuity. And they will need to do this for as long as you have a Board. Will your team be able to offer 24/7 support, along with a high level of expertise on specific board portal functions?
- APRIO Boardroom is a SAAS based solution; it is constantly being updated to conform to the latest trends in governance or shifting needs of Administrators and Directors - something that internal IT departments are unlikely to either think about or easily provide. And, even if they do, the time involved to build this may be considerable and draw them away from their other key responsibilities.

Searchable Archives

- You will want your portal to provide considerable 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. You want the ability to search materials by keywords, by topic, by committee, and by date.

Finally Prepare Your New Board Portal in 3 Easy Steps

I think the case against building your own Board portal is clear. Too many hurdles, too many unexpected expenses, and too complex for most IT teams.

So, where do you go from here? You turn to a reputable provider of a software solution such as APRIO Boardroom. And here is what you should do to prepare for your supplier:

1. Prepare a full range of questions to ask your vendor to eliminate surprises. Ask about the features that are most important to your Board. Here are some areas you want your vendor to be proficient at:
 - Document management tools (to create board books or to update documents after you upload them);
 - An alert system to notify Directors when new information is available;
 - Efficient printing options for Directors and the Administrator;



- Remote access from any computer or mobile device;
- Ability to download materials to board members' computers and review offline;
- Note-taking and bookmarking capabilities;
- Easy access to notes during meetings, then archive notes after meetings; Survey tools and templates for board self-assessments, developing consensus, voting and creating an atmosphere of open discussion;
- Archives of uploaded documents, searchable by keywords, dates, and committee references
- A solution to the problems that can arise if the Director's device is lost or stolen; and
- An ability to remotely wipe information on a lost device.



2. Ask detailed questions about pricing, security, the implementation process, and support:

- What will this portal cost? How many individual users and board committees for that charge? Are there optional services that come with added charges? Is there a charge for downloading software onto board members' personal computers for offline use?

- Does the vendor offer special pricing for not-for-profit clients?
- What forms of implementation support do they offer?
- Help with start-up and initial board meeting?
- Training on site or by phone or via direct online communications for both Administrators and Directors?
- Help with scanning and uploading archival documents?
- Are there additional charges for these services?
- What are the sign-in requirements? Does the portal require single or multiple steps to access materials?
- Does the Administrator control documents after downloading to a Director's computer?
- What ongoing support services do they offer, how frequently can you access support services at no charge and what format does that service involve (email, live person, and/or web chat)?

/// *When comparing APRIO Boardroom to alternative solutions, such as Diligent Boardbooks, the evidence clearly points to APRIO Boardroom as the best answer.* **///**

3. Ask about other clients similar to you currently using this portal.

- Among similar clients, who selected this tool?
- What proportion of Directors actually uses the portal?
- How satisfied are Directors and administrative staff?
- Have they gone paperless?



Go to www.APRIO.net and discover your best solution. Affordable functionality with amazing after-sales service. Power, portability, security in one easy-to-install, easy-to-learn software solution for all your Board's needs.

When comparing APRIO Boardroom to alternative solutions, such as Diligent Boardbooks, the evidence clearly points to APRIO Boardroom as the best answer. The APRIO Boardroom has as many, if not more, features and functionality as Diligent Boardbooks, but at considerable savings. APRIO Boardroom gives you all the tools to manage the most demanding governance environment at a cost that makes sense for large or small organizations.

When you combine the security features of Boardroom's file and document sharing utility, the ease-of-use of the entire package, and the modest price point, APRIO Boardroom is the clear winner for safety, security and efficiency.