

Portals are not a 'one size fits' all solution. Although the term portal is often treated as synonymous with enterprise information portals there are actually many, different types of portals; each one tailored to meet a specific business need.

This briefing explores some of the different portal types; providing an at-a-glance definition for a range of portal types.

Web searching portals

Portals started out on the web. These early web portals, such as Yahoo, provided aggregated content, usually as a series of predefined links along with a search engine. As their survival is dependent on advertising they must drive large numbers to their site.

E-commerce portals

E-commerce or e-business portals facilitate the sharing of information to external partners, customers and suppliers. They usually have a transactional processing component, provide information on products and services and often include supply chain management features. E-commerce portals aim to increase the value of the relationship whilst lowering the cost.

Self-service portals

Self-service portals allow employees, customers or suppliers to access information about themselves and to carry out certain business processes in a way that is suited to their own needs. Portals are usually justified in terms of removing hard cost from the business through self-service options. The employee self-service (ESS) portal in relation to human resources, IS or financial services, is an obvious starting point for many.

Business intelligence portals

Business intelligence portals or decision portals empower users in their decision-making process. More than just allowing users to query and report across multiple data stores, business intelligence portals have built-in tools that provide targeted reports to end-user groups and individuals. Business intelligence portals are likely to cater to the needs of executives looking for top-

level information relating to company performance; general employees requiring ad-hoc reports as well as those within the organisation whose specific role is to mine and analyse data.

Collaboration portals

Collaboration portals enable a geographically dispersed workforce to interact around projects and business-as-usual tasks through a common access or rallying point. Collaboration portals ensure that non-technical staff can administer the collaboration session, workgroup or site, including user set-up and creating online webpages, presentations etc. Collaboration portals offer generic tools such as chat, white boards and threaded discussion streams along with ways to share objects such as maps, documents.

Enterprise information portal

Of all the various portal types, the enterprise information portal is the most complex. The objective is a highly tailored, unique experience for every user. This is achieved by tying the various disparate legacy systems together and joining these to the business process. In this scenario multi-step processes are underpinned by complex workflows and business rules.

e-learning portals

No longer the domain of academic institutions alone, e-Learning portals focus on guiding students in the broadest sense through a structured learning experience. E-learning portals test abilities and provide feedback to the student in a personalised and confidential manner. They may also interact with other systems and business processes to provide in-context training and help.

Communication portals

Communication portals aggregate various forms of messaging into a single place. Bringing together email, voice, mobile, web feeds etc in a way that allows access and control from multiple interfaces and locations at any time. The individual can then tailor this, choosing for example, to receive and manage critical communications regardless of where they are or what type of device they have with them.