

Technology Experts Make Predictions for New Year

- Watson Wyatt

Companies will focus on upgrading and integrating their human resources technology in 2008 in an effort to improve administration and better engage employees, according to experts at Watson Wyatt Worldwide, a leading global consulting firm. Among likely trends are the increased adoption of advanced Web solutions, such as wikis, blogs and social networking, and a focus on making HR technology easier for employees to use.

"Managing a workforce is increasingly complex, and employers are searching for the right solutions to help them address this challenge," said Richard Hubbard, director of Watson Wyatt's North American technology and administration solutions practice. "Technology will continue to help companies manage the most intricate HR tasks, including some, such as talent management, that were once done more by intuition than by data analysis. Employers' biggest challenge is staying on top of the trends and investing in areas where they will get the most for their money."

Among the top trends Watson Wyatt has identified for 2008 are:

- Adopting Advanced, Web 2.0 Technology. With the rapid growth of consumer-oriented Web 2.0 applications, organizations are considering increasingly interactive strategies and technologies. While many corporations are using Web 2.0 elements such as blogs and wikis, organizations are just beginning to implement other elements of social networking. All of these systems could reduce the focus on traditional e-mail and make work communication a more dynamic experience for employees.
- Focusing on Improving Employee Service and Satisfaction. Companies are exploring the best way to leverage their investments and improve employee service and satisfaction. Many are incorporating HR technologies that feature decision support tools and online content in addition to improved usability and self-service for employees -- tools that reduce administrative costs while boosting employee engagement.
- Implementing Integrated Technology Solutions for Talent Management. More and more companies are using technology to manage the disparate data involved in talent management programs. Specialized technology for recruiting, succession planning, workforce planning and learning management processes is now widely available and can reduce administrative burdens.
- Taking a Flexible Approach to Outsourcing HR Administration. Rather than outsourcing the entire HR function, a growing number of companies are taking a flexible approach to their HR administration processes. A flexible outsourcing structure allows companies to administer the processes they do well while outsourcing processes and enabling technologies in which they have less expertise.

Other areas in which employers are expected to make inroads this year are the growing use of decision support tools, self-service applications and Software-as-a-Service. The last innovation helps companies reduce costs by allowing them to access software through an external provider, removing the burden of internal software maintenance.

"While many of these technology solutions hold great promise in engaging employees and solving HR challenges, they will not be successful if companies don't lay the proper groundwork for implementing them," Hubbard said. "Before selecting the right technology, companies need to make sure their HR processes overall are working well. Otherwise, even the best systems will not live up to their full potential."