



# How Portals Are Transforming European Boardrooms

A Director  
and Company  
Secretary  
Roundtable  
Discussion

## Ending the paper chase

In the past, creating a well-oiled information review process for boards of directors was a daunting task involving labour-intensive printing, copying and distribution. With the advent of board portals and the ubiquity of iPads, that process changed dramatically. To understand the impact, Diligent gathered a group of journalists and customers to explore the changes wrought by board portals.

During the session, customers described the paper-based chaos of assembling and receiving boardroom material. One executive shared how the company's secretariat office would be overrun with paper stacked on office filing cabinets. Papers were collated, manually bound and finally mailed. And when the inevitable last-minute changes arrived? Edited pages were rushed via courier to board members—often to far-flung locations—and then manually inserted. The end result: A costly, complicated process that left too much room for human error in the creation and distribution of materials.

## The Diligent Boards difference for administrators

Conversation from the roundtable moved into the specific benefits delivered by secure board portal applications such as Diligent Boards™ for administrators and company secretaries. Some of the strongest benefits were evident in simplicity of use and quality of service.

According to Roger Clifton, Head of Secretariat, Resolution Group, “The problem with the secretariat role is that we’re often in the position of producing materials last minute to meet production deadlines. And when that’s the case with a printed book, speed wins over quality in terms of priorities.” Because the Diligent Boards portal is so simple to use, board packs can be built quickly and easily by dragging and dropping documents into a pre-fabricated book structure.



**Diligent**

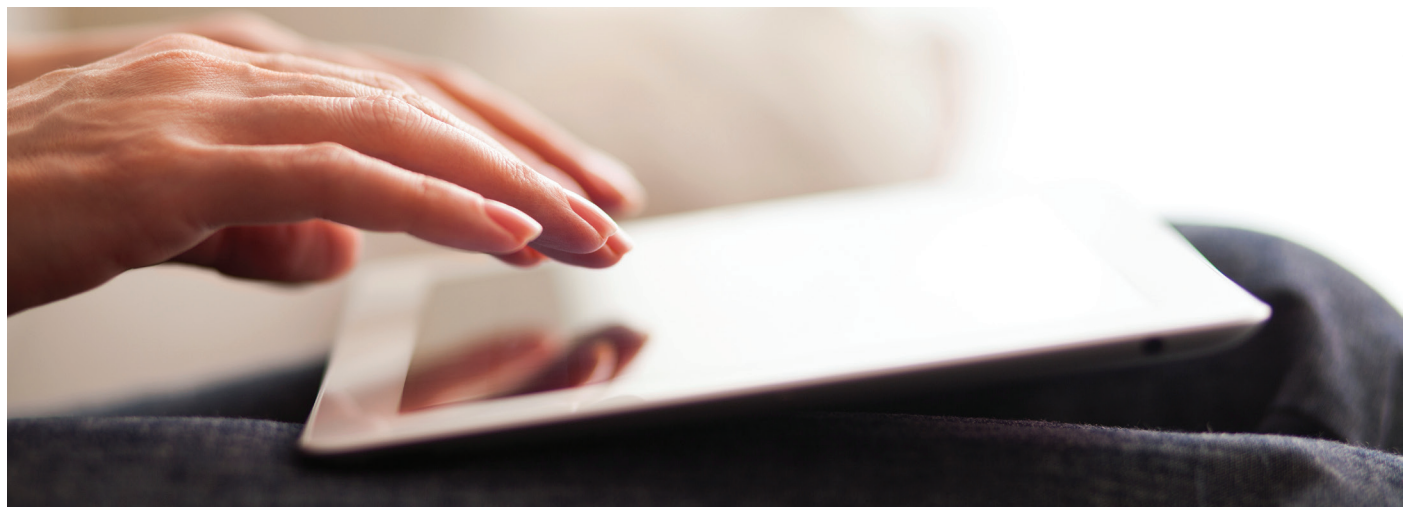
**PANEL MEMBERS INCLUDED:**

Chair: Rhodri Harries, *Managing Director*, **Kaizo PR**  
 Roger Clifton, *Former Head of Secretariat*, **Resolution Group**  
 Paul McKenna, *Company Secretary*, **Standard Life**  
 Gerhard Roggemann, *Deputy Chairman*, **Deutsche Börse AG**  
 Charlie Horrell, *Managing Director*, **Diligent Corporation**

**JOURNALISTS INCLUDED:**

Fiona Graham, *Section Editor*, **BBC News Online - Business and Technology**  
 Pete Swabey, *Editor*, **Information Age**  
 Behiye Hassan, *Reporter*, **Director Magazine**  
 Rod Newing, *Freelancer*, **The Times** and **Financial Times**  
 Karl Flinders, *Services Editor*, **Computer Weekly**

Clifton explained that when edits are required digitally, “you simply delete the page with the erroneous information, re-upload with the correct information and ask directors to re-synch on their iPads. I can’t tell you how many days of our time it has saved in terms of getting rid of this ridiculous production process.”



The advantage of the Diligent Boards portal was further illustrated by Gerhard Roggemann, Deputy Chairman, Deutsche Börse AG, when he described the materials distributed during an attempted merger. He noted, “For that merger alone, we had a board pack that was 880 pages long. And it was revised by the administrative team almost every day—sometimes two to three times. Those constant amendments were uploaded into the Diligent Boards portal, meaning that updated documents were available to me and the other directors almost instantaneously.”

The group also discussed the need for multiple versions of books for the same board. The information the CEO requires is not identical to that of the members of the remuneration committee, for instance. Through the Diligent

Boards portal, user permissions can be customised by an administrator so that confidential information can be kept private.

## The Diligent Boards difference for directors

Moving from a paper-based to a digital solution for creating board materials has its obvious advantages for administrators. What then are the major benefits for directors? Users at the roundtable agreed that the greatest advantage was having instant access to meeting materials on the iPad or browser, whether online or in transit.

Standard Life’s Associate Group Company Secretary, Paul McKenna, said, “The advantages are that board members will always have the latest papers available to them, assuming they’ve been given a moment or two to sync them. And there’s no longer the need to get additions and corrections distributed around the world.”

Roger Clifton added, “With paper-based solutions, board members would be bound to their houses, waiting for the courier to arrive with the latest materials. And as far as efficiency is concerned, you’re better able to navigate and

assimilate information presented on an iPad versus a 600-page spiral-bound book.”

Another critical issue is that directors often serve on multiple boards. Gerhard Roggemann uses the Diligent Boards portal on four separate boards and explained, “You can have everything available on one iPad device. That makes it much easier to access whatever material I may need for my next meeting.”

Roggemann noted that he often travels from city to city. Carrying multiple paper-based books is unwieldy at best: “There are times that I need to travel from Germany to Guernsey, often in small planes where you cannot stow your suitcase on board. I would carry all my packets in my hand luggage.” Considering that an iPad weighs less

than a kilo and a 500-page book weighs more than twice as much, there are clear advantages with the Diligent Boards approach. Beyond the sheer weight of paper, Roggemann added, “It’s not only the meeting that you have right in front of you that you need to prepare for. You need the information

---

*“I can’t tell you how many days of our time it has saved in terms of getting rid of this ridiculous production process.”*

---

on what was decided last year. All of it is now kept in one place digitally instead of individual paper stacks supporting every aspect of every meeting.”

According to Roger Clifton, accessing information through a board portal is much easier than reading through a paper book. “Given new reporting requirements, our report packs have grown over the last few years from 400 or 500 pages to 600 or 700 or 800 pages. Using the iPad renders it much more navigable. With a paper book there’s only one way you can dip into it—front cover to back cover—unless there is some clever tabulation system. To work your way through materials on the Diligent application is just so straightforward.”

## Security—distribution and disaster recovery

Given their confidential and strategic nature, board materials are highly sensitive. Secure handling of them is paramount and distributing paper-based books implies a host of issues. Standard Life’s Paul McKenna explained: “When the courier arrives to deliver a pack of board materials and the director is not home, there is the difficulty of what to do with it. Often it’s left in a greenhouse or the garage, or with a neighbour.” Loss of material during transit or after a meeting is a very real concern.

“There have been many stories about sensitive documents being left on a train,” said McKenna. However, if an iPad is lost or stolen, Diligent has built in a sophisticated level of data encryption to protect critical board information stored in the Diligent Boards app and access to the information can be set to expire at a certain time.

Karl Flinders of *Computer Weekly* asked about another aspect of security: disaster recovery. The group discussed Hurricane Sandy in the United States—a natural disaster that knocked out Internet connectivity along the Eastern seaboard. For clients of Diligent, their information is replicated between a primary and secondary geographically diverse location, which creates a structure aimed at keeping vital information fail-safe.

## Selling portals into your board

Although digital board books are an evolutionary move in corporate communications in an era of email, cloud computing and collaborative software, some executives are still resistant to the change. Discussion turned to the topic of how to sell board portals into boards.

According to Roger Clifton, based on his experience at Resolution Group, “The biggest selling point is that most of the people around the table, with the exception of your executives, will be directors of a number of different companies. So if you can say to them, ‘Look I know you’re carrying around a suitcase full of board papers because I’ve seen you complaining at the desk in whichever airport it happens to be because it’s been mislaid. What if you had everything you needed on one device?’ You see the behaviour change with the awareness of the benefits.”

If logistics and physical discomfort weren’t argument enough, Clifton reminded the gathering that by using digital platforms, boards save significant money. “We’re spending so many tens of thousands of pounds just on delivery.”

Standard Life’s Paul McKenna’s advice for accelerating adoption is to focus on board members who are already iPad users. “It really helps if you’ve got early adopters on the board.” They act as advocates for other board members. McKenna said, “We had a few people who were quite

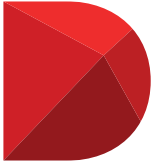
---

*“To work your way through materials on the Diligent application is just so straightforward.”*

---

hesitant about the likelihood of going digital. In fact we had two members who said they didn’t think they would use it at all.” With this in mind, they were offered a choice of both printed or online board materials at the first board meeting. The biggest surprise to Paul was that after just one meeting, there was universal adoption of the online version and subsequently no further requirement for paper.

Another key selling point touched upon by the group: service. Diligent Boards offers concierge-level support with round-the-clock help for both administrators and directors. The company’s eight-year client retention rate of 97 percent speaks for itself. Diligent’s teams are expert at helping clients achieve board acceptance and making the subsequent transition to a board portal.



# Diligent

*Unleashing the value of information.  
Securely.*

*Diligent helps the world's leading organisations unleash the power of information and collaboration – securely – by equipping their boards and management team to make better decisions. Over 3,100 clients in more than 50 countries rely on Diligent for immediate access to their most time-sensitive and confidential information along with the tools to review, discuss and collaborate on it with key decision makers. The Diligent Boards (formerly Diligent Boardbooks) solution speeds and simplifies how board materials are produced and delivered via iPad, Windows devices and browsers. At the same time, it delivers practical advantages like cutting production costs, supporting sustainability goals, and saving administrative and IT time.*

*Visit us at [www.diligent.com](http://www.diligent.com) and find us listed under DIL on the New Zealand Stock Exchange.*



Diligent is a trademark of Diligent Corporation, registered in the United States. All third-party trademarks are the property of their respective owners. ©2015 Diligent Corporation. All rights reserved.