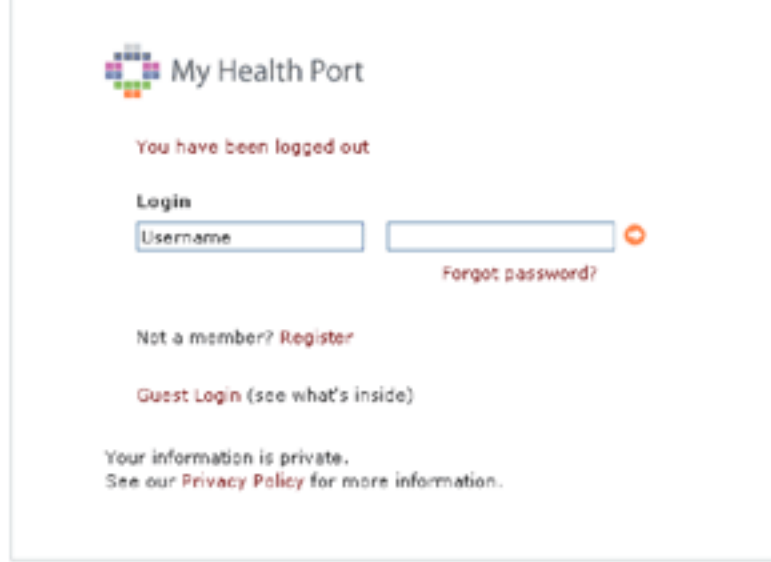


Internet Home Alliance Concludes Consumer Study to Examine How an Intuitive Health & Wellness Portal System Can Be Successful

Consumer's Say . . . it's simply good preventative medicine.

By David Skelly, Vice President—Cookson Consulting & Senior Manager, Collaborative Research & Market Development—Internet Home Alliance

Internet Home Alliance (Alliance), a network of leading companies advancing the home technology market, recently concluded its Health & Wellness Portal project, a study designed to test how an intuitive connected health portal system can help consumers manage chronic diseases like obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure. The project's goal was to examine the role digital home technologies can play in not only addressing chronic diseases but assisting engaged healthy consumers with maintaining their overall well being with devices and some level of connectivity—in and out of their home.



A cross-industry collaboration involving several Alliance members AT&T, Cisco, HP, Icebox and Whirlpool, created *MyHealthPort.Com*, a consumer-based web portal in conjunction with a simulated wireless connection of various health monitoring devices and communication tools including a PC, PDA and mobile phone. The project was the second step in the Alliance's research into how digital home technologies can help consumers improve their health. The Alliance's first step, in 2003, was a health and fitness needs assessment study, which found that

many Americans are overweight because of three factors: a lack of time to cook and eat healthy foods, a lack of time to exercise and a lack of discipline to exercise regularly. The Health and Wellness Portal project tested methods designed to minimize the barriers to change that and drive healthier lifestyles as identified in earlier Alliance research.

Technology is currently playing a role in helping consumers make the right lifestyle choices; however, better solutions need to prevail to help keep the compelling chronic disease statistics at bay and address overall human health and wellness. There are many reasons a robust health and wellness technology solution is needed and would be widely adopted. Current options fail on several fronts including: disparate information; lack of integrated/coordinated support; some solutions create confusion; force of propriety/closed system choices for consumers; and there is a lack of regular timely feedback based on interaction and history. By leveraging technology and connectivity, in and outside the home, there is an opportunity for individuals to make real time decisions and take actions that influence their health and ultimately, prevent a chronic ailment from progressing or becoming a potential issue in the future.

The Alliance's recent study consisted of in-depth interviews with engaged consumers, those with chronic ailments and healthy individuals in the United States. By engaged, they are proactively doing something about their well-being. Additional interviews were conducted with the channel (potential providers of the portal and/or devices), and North American employers of 1000 people or more. Studying this three segment approach tested the appeal of an intuitive platform and connected, integrated capabilities of various devices which today, are islands of technology providing independent data points. In the study, the system included the monitoring devices, communication tools, web portal and a level of wireless and/or wired LAN or WAN connectivity—commonly referred to as 'the portal', 'system' and/or *MyHealthPort.Com*. Among a number of points, the research focused on the following key aspects of the system itself:

- **Customization/personalization:** database-generated recommendations for exercise routines, menu plans, and articles/news on chosen health topics; the system makes customized recommendations based on data from body monitoring devices and surveys completed online—it learns about you.
- **Monitoring devices:** data from proposed wireless devices (scale, training watch, calorie expenditure monitor, blood pressure monitor, glucose monitor) is uploaded to the site; the data populates graphs which show results over time and progress towards goals; data also drives the customized recommendations generated for the user.
- **Central online repository** for all health data including prescriptions, health histories, doctor visits, food diary, plus device data.
- **Interaction with others:** communication via community forums, personal trainers and doctors.
- **Connectivity:** users can log on by PC or another device with wireless access, and send health-related reminders to their cell phones or email.

According to the Alliance's research findings, consumers find *MyHealthPort.Com* a compelling tool and a good use of technology that will help people with chronic health conditions who really want to get healthier. It provides personal data and recommendations which can help a user stay motivated and on track with a diet or exercise program. The primary benefit of the site is tracking health information over time and seeing results right in front of you with some level of graphical representation. The graphs show gratifying results for those who stay with their programs, and they fulfill the desire for accountability in diet and fitness programs. Progress – or the lack of it – is plain as day. As one participant said: "...it's the workout buddy I've been looking for."

From the employer's viewpoint, nearly all human resource managers found *MyHealthPort.Com* compelling, very interesting and potentially a good benefit for employees. They shared that the portal looks like it would be the product of a health care provider or an insurance company (rather than from the company itself or from a gym or weight loss center) because it's wellness and preventative, and covers all health topics. All HR directors expected it to be an upgrade offered by their insurance carrier or their medical provider.



Some expected the cost of *MyHealthPort.Com* (the complete system) would be rolled transparently into their next premium increase, while others expect it might be an extra and optional service. It is clear that corporations want to stay a safe distance from employee health and medical data. Privacy of employee data is paramount. Nearly all HR directors want *MyHealthPort.Com* to be a lifestyle benefit rather than a regulated benefit. Staff can choose to use/not use it; they would likely buy devices themselves at a discounted cost (employees). In a best-case scenario, it could reduce absenteeism over time by improving the health of employees. But HR directors emphasized that corporate adoption of *MyHealthPort.Com* won't necessarily translate into reduced absenteeism or the curtailment of rising health care costs. Employees must change their behavior in order to bring health care costs down – not just check their graphs on a Web site.

A critical component of *MyHealthPort.Com* was the business model behind the engine. How would this type of solution be marketed? Who would own it? How could it be accessed? How would it cost? A natural fit, the Weight Watchers, Jenny Craig's and Bally's of the world, were originally anticipated as potential providers. The message from the channel was mixed at best mostly due to the limited breadth of their focus and experience in this space; *MyHealthPort.Com* and its all-encompassing nature strayed too far from their core businesses (fitness through exercise, or weight loss through diet). The channel sees usefulness in such a system, but views it as a new initiative that perhaps they are simply not ready for. The question now is, that as these type of connected health and wellness solutions proliferate, how will they be leveraged with current management tools provided by the channel? Will they soon see the importance of combining all aspects of health and wellness together, as a holistic and connected approach to creating and maintaining a sound well being?



The overarching goal with *MyHealthPort.Com* was to show consumers, employers and the channel, how data could be gathered using the latest technologies, creating a resource to see influencers that affect our well-being including, what we've consumed, how we've expended energy, how we can improve upon or at least proactively maintain a chronic disease or prevent one from taking control.

A connected system such as *MyHealthPort.Com* has the potential to maximize our understanding of the metrics our bodies generate, transforming this data into tangible evidence and recommendations for how we need to behave to stay healthy. The difference with the system Internet Home Alliance members created to test versus what has been deployed in this space, is that it's simply intuitive, complete, functional, seamless, and would be non-proprietary—this is what consumers really want. Advanced research in the areas of sensors, contextual computing, data mining, and multi-modal interfaces will eventually pave the way in creating an infrastructure to deliver a personal, on-demand health and wellness tool like *MyHealthPort.Com*—a solution that consumers will use and make a difference in their lives—that is what consumers really need.

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