BoardDocs®

Frequently Asked Questions

What's the difference between your two products - BoardDocs Pro and BoardDocs LT?
BoardDocs Pro is our flagship product and a full-featured solution. BoardDocs LT is a less expensive, "lighter" version ideal for small organizations or those who want to explore a board management system without committing to a more comprehensive service offering. For a side-by-side comparison, please visit our feature matrix.

We have specific ways of doing things, a special work-flow and custom forms; can BoardDocs be customized for our needs?
Yes! BoardDocs is used by very large organizations with complex requirements and very small organizations with simple needs. We customize the service to meet your specific requirements by applying our technology to enhance your existing processes. You do not need to change the way you do things; with BoardDocs you'll just be able to do them all much faster and more efficiently.

What happens if we have trouble accessing the system after hours?
BoardDocs services feature 7 x 24, US-based, end user technical support, included with every subscription. Simply dial us toll free at 800-407-0141, press "1" and you will be connected with a BoardDocs expert that will help you with questions or any problem you may have with BoardDocs.

Our organization is legally required to disclose specific information prior to the meeting; does BoardDocs post items to the internet prior to the meeting?
Yes. BoardDocs can be configured to release parts of the agenda with designated supporting materials prior to the meeting. Your organization can select how many days prior to the meeting the information is released to the public. All information is released via your organization's Web site automatically.

Our board members are not tech savvy; how can we get them to use the system?
If they can use a email, they can use BoardDocs. We start with an easy-to-use, Web-based interface designed to reduce the number of clicks needed to access information. The most relevant information, including the current meeting, policies in production and current news are just one click away.

Once a user is logged in, there is no typing necessary to use the system.
To ensure success, our implementation specialists visit on-site and work with users to show them how to prepare for a meeting at home and how easy it is to participate in the meeting once they are in the board room. We have experience training hundreds of board members and know how to make end users feel very comfortable with the system.

We make audio and/or video recordings of our meetings; does BoardDocs support indexed audio and video playback?
Yes. Your organization can associate video files with any meeting and then manage the video tagging so users can access any part of the meeting directly from the tagged agenda item or from a video player featuring the meeting agenda. All of this is done within our 100% Web interface without the need for special hardware or expensive video hosting servers. BoardDocs also supports native audio playback of any associated MP3 file. Video and audio management and playback is available on all supported devices and requires no special plugins or browser extensions.

Are BoardDocs services covered by a Service Level Agreement (SLA), and if so, what are the basic terms?
Yes! Unlike most on-line solutions, BoardDocs services are covered by an aggressive SLA that actually provides credit for any loss of service. You can view the SLA at: http://www.boarddocs.com/Home.nsf/legal.

Does BoardDocs have restrictions on the type of data we can publish?
BoardDocs supports the free flow of information and ideas with few restrictions on what content you can publish. However, the Company reserves the right to remove any materials that, at the Company's sole discretion, are potentially illegal, may subject the Company to liability, or violate our Acceptable Use Policy (AUP). The AUP can be reviewed at: http://www.boarddocs.com/Home.nsf/legal.

Does Emerald Data Solutions provide training for BoardDocs?
We provide all training at no cost. That includes webinars, attendance to eGovLIVE (our annual user and governance conference), one on one web training, videos and onsite training. For onsite training we ask that you reimburse the travel costs of our specialist to come to your location.

What's the implementation process like, how long does it take and can your services be customized to our organization?
With BoardDocs, implementation is a very consultative process. This ensures that everything from preplanning to on-site training goes seamlessly. Our team researches your specific needs so that when we come on site to do the actual training, you get exactly what you need, customized to your organization. This entire process includes frequent communications with your staff - future users and the IT folks.

To highlight the process: a "first call" to the primary contact introduces the implementation team, gathers preliminary information, coordinates possible training dates and sets up expectations moving forward - things like how you conduct meetings, what processes are used for preparing documents, necessary approvals, agenda formats, the types of equipment you will be using, and who needs to see what particular information. Next, a series of email communications begin, outlining the training process - things the organization should be doing prior to training - both with IT and administratively.

With BoardDocs, your Support Team is brought up to speed on your specific situation, and technical specifications start getting exchanged with your IT department. Communications are also initiated with your document publisher to understand how they are doing things now, so we can best

design how they can do these things easier with BoardDocs. Here we are also sensitive to the "human" needs. For example, some clients have never even used a computer before or some may be nervous about learning a new system.

As we get closer to implementation, a call is initiated to verify that all necessary preparations are complete and address any remaining questions. On-site training is conducted as soon as feasible thereafter, based on your board, administration and IT staff availability. The process generally takes four to six weeks and begins when the End User Agreement (EUA) is completed.

Does BoardDocs support off-line viewing of information?
Because of the dynamic nature of the information on the BoardDocs system, it is recommended that users access BoardDocs on-line, using an Internet-connected device. By viewing information on-line you will be assured that you are reviewing the most accurate, secure and up-to-date information. There are also several options for viewing information off-line, when necessary.

What happens if the Internet is down during a meeting; do we get to go home?
Many things get blamed on computer or Internet problems, but with BoardDocs canceling a board meeting will not be one of them. BoardDocs subscribers can publish and save a PDF file just in case your organization loses access to the internet.

Is my current Web browser supported by Emerald Data Solutions?
Emerald Data Solutions Web applications are designed to work with the most up to date version of Chrome, Firefox, Safari, Microsoft Edge and IE. Use of a browser that is no longer supported by the supplier is not supported by Emerald Data Solutions. If you have any questions about browser support, please contact BoardDocs support by phone at 800-407-0141, option 1, or by email at support@boarddocs.com.

What kind of attachments does BoardDocs support and how many attachments can be placed in an agenda item?
BoardDocs does not restrict the type of attachments that can be placed in the system. However, we recommend attaching files in PDF (Portable Document Format) format to ensure portability across many types of devices (including Internet-connected handheld devices), readability and maximum file compression. BoardDocs offers users an unlimited number of attachments per agenda item. BoardDocs' services also support "cut and paste" and "import."

What is "Cloud" technology and why should it matter that Emerald Data Solutions is the only board management services company that offers solutions built 100% on that technology?
Cloud-based technology provides an incredibly rich user experience by seamlessly delivering custom, application-like interfaces across multiple platforms, through a browser. This eliminates the need to install and manage custom software and also provides auto-distribution of updates. Some specific examples include: the ability to right-click to get menus in a browser; allowing end users to manage custom packets; providing a platform to allow external management and collaboration on policy development; providing the ability to integrate dynamic data into existing Web sites and much more.

Our IT folks are curious about the reliability of the hardware and infrastructure behind the service.
The BoardDocs Cloud is supported by technology partners who are regarded as the best-in-class providers of their services. Application services are provided by three clusters of servers, behind seven F5 enterprise traffic managers that are connected to dual, high-speed network connections. These server clusters are hosted at three CenturyLink CyberCenters near Denver CO, Sterling VA and Toronto Canada. All feature emergency backup environmental systems for continuous 24 x 7 operation. US data is kept on fully redundant Oracle ZFS subsystems with redundant connections to Oracle/Sun servers with independent copies of the data stored on dual Raid 5+1 configured arrays at each site. Canadian data is stored on redundant HP servers with Raid 5+1 arrays. Additionally, each week night between 11:30 PM and 5:00 AM, a copy of production data is copied to a NAS-attached array. This backup is kept for one week, except for Friday's backup, which is stored for three additional weeks.

Please describe the security utilized to protect customer data.
All end-user access to information stored in BoardDocs is encrypted and handled via http for the public and authenticated users are forced to use https. The only way for end-users to access the data is through a group of load-balancers that act as web accelerators, handle all encryption and block access to the servers. All authenticated access is protected by an RC4 256-bit SSL certificate issued by Network Solutions. BoardDocs uses Firewall services from Checkpoint Firewall-1 to protect all back-office and end-user data. Emerald Data Solutions Employee/Administrator access is provided via VPN requiring both hardware authentication and a pre-shared key, and limited by IP address. The system utilizes 1024-bit 3DES encryption with a MD5 authentication scheme and expiring keys. All internal access to customer information is limited by 'need' and is reviewed on an ongoing and scheduled basis. Administrator passwords are maintained, monitored, and changed regularly.

Does BoardDocs provide a way to distribute information not associated with a meeting, like Friday packets?
Yes. With BoardDocs, the document publisher can manage and distribute information not associated with a meeting. Examples include a weekly update or news items to be released to the public. Selected library items can be added to the packet and designated for viewing by role, administration, the board and/or the public. Events, board goals, board member pages and virtually any type of document can be stored in the database.

Is there a provision to print the agenda for a meeting?
Yes. While we find that most authenticated users and administrative staff no longer print the agenda, there is an easy-to-use provision for Board members and the administration to print the agenda, any individual agenda item or the entire packet (except attachments, which can be printed individually). Both BoardDocs services provide the ability to customize the printed materials with headers, footers and logos.

Can I print the entire packet?
Yes, although without attachments. Attachments would need to printed individually. In practice, we have found that most authenticated users will focus most of their attention on one or two agenda items and prefer to selectively print agenda items and attachments rather than print the entire agenda.

I take notes on my paper packet; can you take notes in BoardDocs?
Yes, BoardDocs Pro features an integrated "annotation" function. Notes can be categorized and managed by the authenticated end user, are stored in a separate database from that of the organization, and are private to the individual user.

Do I need to have Web publishing skills to get documents on the Web using BoardDocs?
No. BoardDocs is as easy to use as a word processor. In fact, it has an interface and functionality similar to a word processor - supporting

embedded files, graphics, tables, fonts and paragraph formatting. BoardDocs supports "cut and paste" from most office applications and Web sites, and retains formatting from rich text material. In other words, you do not have to be a computer wiz to load documents into the BoardDocs database.

Does BoardDocs have a spell checker?
Yes! Both BoardDocs and BoardDocs LT have spell checkers; both services also support SCAYT (spell check as you type).

Does BoardDocs require high-speed Internet access to view information?
BoardDocs was designed to work over a dial-up modem connection. While the experience will be superior with high-speed Internet connectivity, board members and the public will be able to successfully view and navigate the BoardDocs system using a simple dial-up connection. Note that our newest product versions leverage technology that greatly reduces the amount of information that travels over the Internet, so they are faster and less bandwidth-intensive than ever. As with any service, however, dial-up users who upload or download large attachments should expect some slowness in their rate of data transfer.

Can board members and other authenticated users see the agenda before it is released to the public?
Yes. Authenticated users can view the agenda as soon as it is activated; the document publisher also has the option to allow the administration and executive readers to see draft agenda items. The public will have access to agenda items at a predetermined number of days prior to the meeting.

Who decides what the public can see and when?
Your organization has complete control over what meetings, agenda items the public can see and the number of days prior to the meeting the agenda will be made available to the public.

Can the senior staff build meetings in BoardDocs and wait to release them to the board?
Yes. BoardDocs supports draft meetings. In this way, meetings can be loaded into the database and accessed by the senior staff prior to them being released to the board.

Is there a way for the cabinet and senior staff to submit agenda items into the system?
BoardDocs Pro supports the submission of agenda items to existing draft meetings by any authorized staff member. The submitted agenda items are designated as draft agenda items until the document publisher can review and activate them. Document publishers can also enable approval processes to support virtually any type of document workflow.

Can BoardDocs be used for committee, executive or closed meetings?
BoardDocs can be used for any meeting where a formal agenda is supported. Because the document publisher controls who can access the agenda items, BoardDocs can be used for closed and executive meetings as well.

How do documents get into the BoardDocs database?
BoardDocs Pro and BoardDocs LT have intuitive user interfaces that work much like a word processor. Designated document publishers can easily attach or "cut and paste" documents into the system. BoardDocs can also be used by senior staff to submit items to the document publisher.

How do I build an agenda with BoardDocs?
Creating an agenda is easy! BoardDocs automatically creates the agenda based on the contents of the agenda items loaded into the system. Document publishers can drag and drop agenda items and categories anywhere on the agenda and BoardDocs will automatically number the items according to your preference.

Does BoardDocs track voting?
With BoardDocs, there is a provision to track the action or motion, who made the motion, who seconded the motion and how each board member voted. There is even a way that your board members can vote on-line. With ScoreBoard, the public can see the results of every vote automatically. BoardDocs LT does not support voting.

How do I generate and publish minutes with BoardDocs?
BoardDocs features a minutes generator that produces minutes based on the information in the system. After the minutes are generated, they can be modified and formatted with our integrated word processor. Once saved, minutes can be linked to an agenda item for approval as an action or consent item and placed in any future meeting. Once approved by the board, the minutes are released to the public. The minutes generator is not available in BoardDocs LT.

We currently have a Web-based policy solution; why should I consider using BoardDocs for policies?
BoardDocs can be configured to link to your existing policy solution. Because of its many features, however, most organizations prefer to use the BoardDocs solution exclusively. BoardDocs features a comprehensive policy development, maintenance and publication system that is tightly integrated with BoardDocs. Unlike many on-line policy services, BoardDocs allows you to publish and manage the on-line database of policies, so policies are in the manual as soon as they are approved.

Do we have to purchase laptops or computers for all of our users - for instance, board or council members?
Not necessarily. To support a fully paperless governance solution, board members will need Internet-connected computers at home and in the board room. The board room computers can be set up prior to each meeting or board members can bring assigned computers to the meeting. BoardDocs does not require state-of-the-art computing power, so laptops can be recycled from other uses. For a low cost and compact solution, BoardDocs supports the Apple iPad and other tablet devices. For information on other low cost solutions for board member computers, just click here.

We are currently sending agendas, minutes, board briefs, news releases and policies to the IS department for posting to our Web site; do we still need to do that with BoardDocs?
No. With BoardDocs you can choose to post meeting agendas, a list of upcoming meetings, minutes, policies under revision, the policy manual, the procedure manual, board news and all archived documents to your organization's BoardDocs site. There is no need to send documents to IS, IT or the Web Master for further processing.

How do the public and the press see the information in BoardDocs?
During the meeting, the public will be able to follow the agenda, documents and the results of all action using BoardDocs' ScoreBoard. Prior to or after the meeting, the public and the press can access all public documents via the organization's Web site. By simply clicking on the appropriate link, all stakeholders have access to the BoardDocs public interface for your organization.

Our policy manual is HUGE; how do we get all of that data into BoardDocs?
If the policy manual exists in electronic form, such as word processing documents, it is very easy to "cut and paste" the information into the system. Your organization's staff can load the policy system into BoardDocs or Emerald Data Solutions can do it for a small fee. Policy manuals that exist only on paper can be scanned and loaded into BoardDocs or re-typed from scratch.

What do we do about documents that come to us on paper; can they be scanned into the system?
They can be scanned to a PDF format and attached to agenda items, news stories or policies.