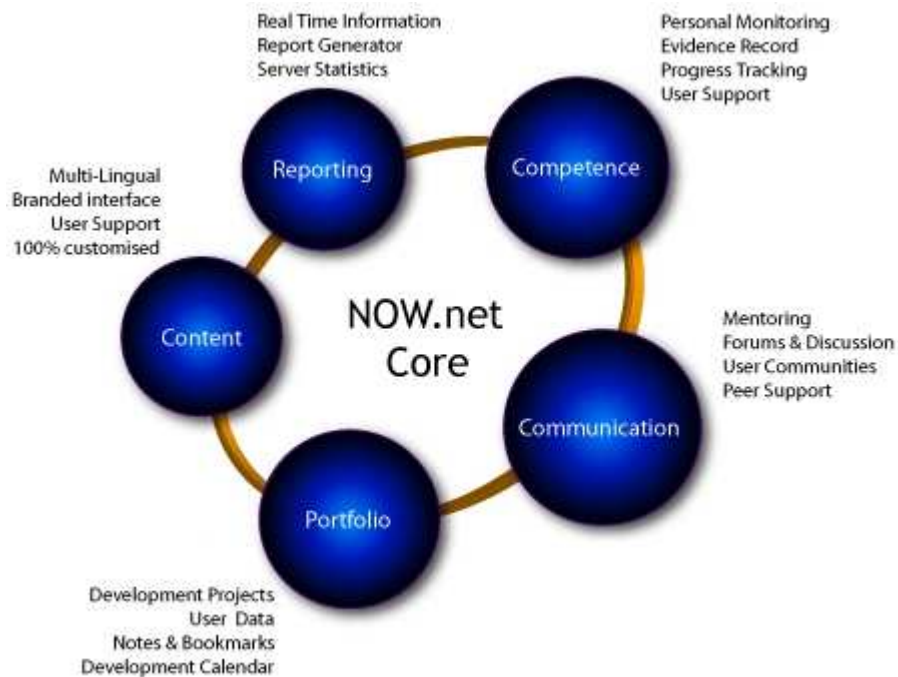


Frequently Asked Questions

What is the common architecture of Axia's products?



NOW.net solutions are built around a core of common functions that all "communities of interest" need - security, membership identification and tracking, reporting and statistics. Organizations can add bundled "tools" such as portfolio creation and tracking, online communications, and competence assessment; then use the content-administration tools to tailor those components and accompanying information to the needs of their particular group.

It enables professionals to develop an electronic portfolio to demonstrate competency, and keep up to date with current issues in their area of practice. For instance, an online meeting place allows for collegial exchange and access to peer and expert mentoring. The information services area of the application provides easy access to both current and archived information, and to directories of resources.

The hub of the application is personalized, allowing the user to record their profile of learning and career plan. The focus is on the needs of the user and includes a personalized interface to information resources and learning tools. This approach creates a place for professionals to achieve desired outcomes in a rich and meaningful environment.

About NOW.net's Career Development Tools

NOW.net's career-development components guide users through the multi-step process of identifying and strengthening their work skills and interests, matching them to information about current opportunities and workforce trends, and helping them to develop - and meet - their career goals.

What are the benefits of NOW.net Career Development Tools?

Education doesn't stop when an individual learns a skill or attains a degree: ongoing career development is critical in today's knowledge-based economy. Better-trained employees are more productive and deliver greater benefit to the customer - two factors reflected directly in an organization's bottom line. Employees who are given the chance to

strengthen and increase their set of job skills are less likely to look elsewhere for new challenges, reducing staff turnover and the cost of training new staff.

Career-development counsellors in Italy and British Columbia are using the information-sharing tools to provide information on current local job prospects.

Who can use the Career Development components?

The ability to create and maintain an up-to-date portfolio is equally useful to students seeking their first job, or to seasoned professionals looking for new challenges. Team leaders and managers can use the portfolio and action plans as part of a performance-management program, while individuals can use the portfolio to maintain an up-to-date resume and record of their career and education achievements.

How do these components work?

It begins with an individual creating a personal profile, where they'll store the results of their diagnostic exercises, action plans to reach their career goals, and a record of which learning exercises they've completed.

A series of initial exercises helps a user to identify what type of work they're interested in, and to assess their transferable skills, such as communicating with others, time management, or managing stress. The results of these exercises are then mapped against a database of job profiles, which identifies job families (such as administrative/clerical, legal services or transport) where the user may find a career which will interest them and at which they have a chance at succeeding. Detailed job profiles offer specific, up-to-date information about what a job entails, working conditions, marketplace opportunities and links to supporting organizations and further information. These profiles can include audio and video clips.

This initial assessment also identifies which transferable work skills a user may want to strengthen, and a series of exercises offer practical information and guidance on how to improve those skills. As a user completes these exercises, the results are recorded in their portfolio, creating a record of their learning path.

As part of the career development process, users are guided through creating action plans to attain their goals - whether it's finding a job, upgrading a particular skill, or launching a career in a new field. These plans can be developed individually or reviewed with a mentor, manager or career counsellor. A built-in calendar feature with "alerts" lets the user set goal deadlines, book meeting dates or record important events.

About NOW.net's Skills Assessment Tools

NOW.net's skills assessment components allow a user to identify, track and substantiate the specific skills they need to perform a particular job. Managers or assessors can track users' progress, and their findings can be verified externally to ensure that the skills requirements are being met.

What are the benefits of Skills Assessment Tools?

The skills assessment components provide an easily accessible, database-driven tool for ensuring that users have the skill sets needed to perform their work. It streamlines extremely complicated, paper-driven processes, freeing up the candidates and assessors to focus on actual skills development.

Skills assessment systems allow individuals to improve their job prospects, and provide a clear target to aim for in their own learning - a target which they know relates to the skills that industry needs. They give recognition to people who achieve excellence in their work, and allow businesses to track and acknowledge the level of expertise that their staff brings to the job.

The flexibility of the system also allows assessors to be candidates themselves, as they build up their qualifications and further their own careers.

Who can use the Skills Assessment components?

The skills assessment components are being used in the U.K. as part of the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) initiative: a system to identify, measure and quantify common standards within various industries. NVQs cover virtually every profession, from agriculture or construction to manufacturing and health and social services.

Skills assessment is being implemented for NVQs in the Care field, as well as in Information Advice and Guidance, and Cleaning. It also is helping members of other professional organizations, such as the Society College of Radiographers and the Institute of Field Archeologists, to manage their portfolios for accreditation.

The Royal College of Nursing is on a path to migrate from their current solution to the NOW.net framework, as it brings several advantages for them as an organization. The competence toolset of NVQnow will help their members match their current portfolios to competency frameworks within the National Health Service.

The assessment model also can be applied to company performance management systems or learning systems where particular skills or courses could apply to different learning certifications.

How the components work

The skills assessment component creates an audit trail of the assessment and verification process for candidates (the person building or identifying their skill sets), assessors (responsible for confirming the candidate has met the necessary standards) and internal and external verifiers (accountable for checking the authenticity of the process). It streamlines the administrative procedures around proving job competencies so that assessors and verifiers can focus on the quality of the assessments that are taking place.

Candidates can access a list of the skills they need to demonstrate to receive a particular certification. As they gather evidence - a report from a supervisor, or an example of the skill, they can record and submit it to their assessor for confirmation/approval. Candidates also can view personal progress reports and percentage of completion reports. Assessors are able to access from their home page three reports about their candidates:

1. An assessment record, which captures all the dialogue between the assessor and the candidate and indicates the elements/units that have been reviewed. The content of this dialogue is in all cases about the validity, sufficiency and currency of the evidence and its authenticity;
 2. A progress report which lets the assessor track, in detail, the progress of each candidate. They can also view all the evidence that has been claimed for a particular skill so they can assess the sufficiency and currency of this evidence; and
 3. A percentage of completion report that provides a snapshot of each candidate's progress.
- Internal and external verifiers can select specific candidates and review both their progress, and the reports from assessors, letting them confirm that the "proof of competency" being approved meets company, government or professional association standards.

About NOW.net's Online Communities Tools

The forums (sometimes called threaded discussions) in NOW.net are a powerful communications tool for online communities of interest. They allow users to engage in ongoing discussions with colleagues, mentors or experts regardless of the time or distance that may separate participants.

What are the benefits?

Online forums allow geographically diverse groups of users with similar interests to ask questions, share ideas and explore challenges without having to physically gather in one place. It supports improved standards of practice by facilitating discussion and debate. Forums give users ongoing, easy access to expert advice on specific issues, and allow them to pose general questions or concepts to an entire community or subset of the group.

Who can use these components?

Forums can be open to an entire community of interest - the entire membership of the Royal College of Nursing, for example - or to a particular subgroup which shares common issues, such as RCN pediatric nurses. Dialogues can be immediately open to everyone (unmoderated), or postings can be funnelled through a moderator who ensures the content is on topic and appropriate.

Other examples of how online communities are using forums include National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) assessors, who share their assessment practices to make sure that consistent standards are being applied. The health e-learning community at the University of Calgary uses the forums to discuss how to foster and co-ordinate e-learning initiatives between government, industry and academia.

How the components work

Users can create a new conversation by clicking on the "New Thread" link in the Forums section of a NOW.net portal. Once they've entered their message, they can control whether or not other participants can reply to it, and can choose to be notified (through a "flag" on the portal home page) when someone responds to their conversation. A list of the forums to which a user has access always appears on the left-hand side of the screen; responding to a conversation is simply a matter of selecting the "Post Reply" link below the message.

About NOW.net's Information Sharing Tools

NOW.net's suite of content administration tools gives organizations and associations the ability to provide dynamic, up-to-date information and resources to their memberships. It can be in the form of web-based HTML pages, audio and video files, formatted documents or links to approved online resources.

What are the benefits?

Centralized, web-accessible documentation ensures that everyone in an organization has equal access to up-to-date information regardless of their geographic location. When coupled with NOW.net's other components - such as threaded discussions or skills assessment tools - it allows individuals to engage peers, mentors and experts in discussing material, or reviewing it as part of a continuous learning program. And because the NOW.net portal "owner" has control over the content, application developers and IT staff do not have to be engaged to add, delete or modify material, simplifying the process and putting a cap on development costs.

Who can use these components?

The NOW.net application platform gives any organization the flexibility to match their content to the needs of their membership. Career-development counsellors in Italy and British Columbia are using the information-sharing tools to provide information on current local job prospects. Nurses in the U.K. can access information on nationally approved patient care standards. Government, industry and education representatives are using a portal to evaluate and discuss potential health e-learning initiatives in Alberta.

Endorsements

Are your products endorsed by awarding bodies?

Yes. AIM's 'forward eportfolio PLUS', developed in partnership with the Council for Administration for NVQs in customer care and management as well as Business & Administration is a City and Guilds endorsed product.