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Interoperability Appliance Offers Secure Exchange of Information, Plug & Play Simplicity

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Could solving healthcare's interoperability challenge be as simple as installing a plug-and-play device in a physician's office?

The answer is "yes," says Marc Willard, CEO of Certify Data Systems, whose San Jose, CA-based company has developed a solution that enables the secure electronic flow of clinical data between hospitals and physician practices, regardless of the EMR system being used.

The solution consists of HealthDock, a plug-and-play appliance that works in concert with Certify's Gateway, enterprise-class software that resides in the hospital's data center. HealthDock allows disparate IT systems to securely exchange clinical data, such as laboratory results and orders, radiology reports and orders, discharge summaries and other critical patient information.

And most importantly, according to Willard, it doesn't interfere with a physician practice's workflow.

"The biggest inhibitor to meaningful deployment of technology is change resistance," he says. "If you keep telling people that a particular piece of software is great, but that in order to make it work, you need to change your workflow, physicians and nurses will never use it. One of our principles in developing this product is that we weren't going to force change – our goal was to develop a product that would emulate the way the work is currently being done."

To do that, Willard looked to his roots. During his tenure as an Entrepreneur in Residence at Ricoh Innovations, his mission was to develop a method of processing unstructured data and in doing so, he saw a number of similarities between the insurance and healthcare industries. "They're both basically lots of little companies dealing with big companies – i.e. doctors and hospitals, brokers and insurance companies," he says.

Willard says that at the time, breaking into the healthcare market was difficult, so he focused his attention on the insurance industry, knowing however, that the biggest and best opportunity still remained in healthcare. "We basically proved out the technology in the insurance market. We developed it, we sold it to a number of

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very large carriers, proved the technology worked well, got the research and development side working perfectly and then in 2006 began focusing entirely on healthcare.” Certify’s product was released in 2008.

Certify’s focus on the healthcare market is beginning to pay off. Cerner Corp. recently announced that it would be offering HealthDock as part of its Cerner Hub connectivity services. And, Certify recently announced an agreement with Tacoma, WA-based MultiCare Health System.

According to Willard, the cost for HealthDock is modest. “It works out to about \$500 per physician for a subscription fee to the product. The HealthDock appliance costs \$600. Only one appliance is needed, whether the practice has five doctors or 500,” he says

How it Works

Willard likens his company’s HealthDock appliance’s simplicity to TiVO. Since it is an appliance, it doesn’t involve any software installation, maintenance, or IT expertise. “I don’t know anyone who’s had formal training on TiVO, yet everyone can use it,” he says.

MultiCare, for example, selected the Certify solution to help meet the connectivity needs of their affiliated physicians who weren’t using the hospital’s EMR. A large volume of clinical information was being distributed to these physicians via paper which required physician office staff to manually scan or re-key the information into their EMRs, increasing both labor costs and the potential for medical errors.

“Our nurses were spending two days a week re-keying the hospital’s lab results into our EMR,” says Robert Middleton, MD, a cardiologist at Cardiovascular Consultants, part of the MultiCare system. “Now they focus that time on patient care. The amount of time this has saved our physicians, nursing staff, and medical records team has been significant.” ■