



Case History

ImageTrac scanners help athenahealth expand services

The business side of a medical practice is a constant headache of endless paperwork from insurance claims and reimbursement, billing and collections, patient schedules and records, EOBs and more. Over 8,500 medical providers in 33 states have found a cure for paperwork that lets them concentrate on patient care, while their office workflow efficiently generates revenue. These physicians rely on athenahealth, Inc. to help manage their practices and radically improve control over billing and clinical operations.

athenahealth offers time-saving services, web-based software, and specialized knowledge that together bring streamlined administrative efficiencies to medical practice billing and collections. Customers are physicians in non-hospital medical practices ranging from one or two practitioners to a 400-physician group. As one of the largest providers of revenue-cycle services for office-based physicians in the nation, athenahealth manages nearly \$2 billion in client revenues annually. The company routinely ranks at the top of major industry surveys.

Their core product, athenaNet®, helps manage front office workflows like patient registration, scheduling, insurance records, and reimbursement. Services are delivered via the web, and athenahealth hosts the application, so medical offices don't worry about installing or maintaining software. But paper is still very much a part of the workflow, and for processing the tens of thousands of documents received daily, athenahealth turned to the ImageTrac III scanner from Imaging Business Machines, LLC (IBML).

A UNIQUE COLLABORATION

athenahealth first learned of IBML in the course of researching an OCR project. "We have been pleased and impressed from the beginning," said Matthew Considine, athenahealth's Director of Claim Resolution. "One of the things that sold us was a factory visit in Birmingham and seeing the work, people, technology and sophistication behind every system. Each machine is essentially custom-manufactured. We have forged a collaborative relationship with IBML, and as a result, we have gained mutual insights that have improved our understanding of market needs."

Today the ImageTrac is a key part of athenahealth's remittance processing operation and other services. On behalf of customers, athenahealth submits claims to insurers, receives remittances, and handles EOBs. Documents are scanned, data is extracted, and items are posted for payment. With a digital workflow, it is possible to link every posted payment to the source document for easier tracking and follow up. Information from insurance plans is processed and converted to electronic images, and the ImageTrac transforms paper-based information into the digital workflow quickly and easily.

MEETING NEED FOR ROBUST SCANNING

athenahealth had been using another manufacturer's scanners, but the devices were maxing out and couldn't keep up with rapid growth much longer. "Robust scanning is important, so we can immediately serve up images that drive the revenue processes," explained Considine.

Adding more of its then current scanners wasn't an option, because athenahealth was simultaneously going in a new strategic direction,



one the old scanners couldn't support. For one thing, the scanning infrastructure had to recognize live checks at input, but the current scanners couldn't distinguish different types of documents. Secondly, a true workhorse was essential because fast-growing athenahealth needed the option of multi-shift scalability. Thirdly, the scanning equipment had to handle complex and varied documents from insurance companies, lockboxes, banks, and patients. "We receive remittances from hundreds of insurance plans, and they all have their own format, type and size of paper," said Considine.

The ImageTrac III scanner easily met all these requirements, with room to grow. With the ImageTrac, athenahealth was able to migrate to a higher quality imaging platform and greater flexibility in scanning speed and scheduling.

"The ImageTrac is pure muscle, and throughput has vastly improved," said Ralph Catalano, athenahealth's Vice President of Claim Operations. "The ImageTrac can run longer and faster, and it's easier to operate. Jams are easily cleared, and we quickly get back to work." And he ought to know, as his teams are responsible for processing the 250,000-300,000 documents a week or 1.2 million a month that come into the Watertown, Massachusetts headquarters. "And we're growing rapidly every month," Catalano explained. "We're pretty confident our ImageTrac can scale to incredible volumes."

Fast turnaround is important. "Our customers need to know what

insurers have paid and what they need to bill patients, so we must turn work quickly to drive cash flow. Medical practices are moving to a physician compensation model based on how much income doctors generate, so we have to get items posted fast and also meet our SLA for timeliness of processing." More data is now available for reporting and to analyze how to better process the workflow.

ENABLING NEW SERVICES TO DRIVE REVENUE

Over its nine year history, athenahealth has experienced double-digit percentage growth each year. Still, they have less than one percent of the market. To gain market share and grow the share of existing customers, they must introduce new services and add more value. Their newest tool, athenaClinicalTM, manages active patient records for the clinical side of a practice. This includes visits, diagnosis and treatment documentation, lab orders and prescription refills.

The new clinical product introduces an even greater variety of documents into the scanning workflow, like prescription forms, lab results, and other documents printed on very thin paper. The ImageTrac can flawlessly handle these materials and positions athenahealth to process other types of documents that might be required for future services.

ONE-STOP SERVICE INCREASES CONVENIENCE

Historically, medical practices have used banks for lockbox services, check deposits and copies, which

adds an extra layer of processing. However, Check 21 legislation validated the use of electronic images as checks, and thus created new service opportunities for athenahealth. To expand one-stop convenience for medical practices, athenahealth built the athenaMailbox service, a lockbox-like processing unit, so customers wouldn't have to purchase separate check processing services from a bank.

Now electronic cash letters can be generated for clients by using the ImageTrac to image the front and rear of checks and sending that to the bank for the deposit. "This speeds up available cash, posting of payments and improves deposit security," Catalano said, stressing the importance of image quality, "Quality is key, especially for checks.

"As soon as checks pass through, we can pocket them separately. This is a huge time and labor saver, since operators don't need to fish them out later. The ImageTrac can sort it all as it receives it," noted Catalano. The extra handling and prep work the previous solution required has been eliminated, freeing staff for other jobs.

Now athenahealth is truly a one-stop shop, but this wouldn't have been possible without the ImageTrac scanners. "We wouldn't have been able to launch the new revenue source without the ImageTrac," declared Considine. The new services have put more demands on their scanning infrastructure, but so far nothing has affected ImageTrac performance. It remains the picture of scanning health.

