

Evaluating IT Capabilities

Why do information technology skills matter so much?

Gone are the days when a practice could toss demographic and charge information over a wall to the billing company. The collections and cash flow performance of your revenue cycle is now substantially impacted by the underlying information technology.

Before choosing an outsourcing partner for your billing and collections, think about their IT capabilities – the software they use, the hosting environment where that software and your data reside, and most important, the information technology skill of their staff.

In addition to evaluating the practice management system used by your outsourcing company, you should consider the capabilities of their IT staff and resources. While the specifics of the future of physician office IT are not known, it is clear that technology will continue to change and evolve at a rapid pace. And as the healthcare community becomes more connected, the IT decisions of payers and labs and hospital systems and clearinghouses, not to mention the government, will impact your practice. Since your practice will be dependent on your outsourcing partner, it is critical that you understand their ability to manage increasingly complex technology.

Below is a list of questions that will help you evaluate the information technology capabilities of your in-house operations and potential outsourcers.

- Does the outsourcer focus on just billing and collections, or can they provide a complete suite of software applications to meet all my practice management needs?
- Have they developed their own proprietary software solution, or do they use third-party software that I can keep even if I choose to change billing companies?
- Is the core application a fully Microsoft-based system with a Windows interface, or will I have to purchase and train my staff on a completely new platform?
- Does the solution include powerful reporting tools that allow our practice to do in-depth data mining?
- What is the quality of the outsourcer's IT support staff?
- Do they have Microsoft and Cisco certified network engineers continuously monitoring their operations?
- Does their contract include customer phone support during regular business hours, and is it staffed by trained personnel?
- Does the outsourcer provide the security, reliability and flexibility of offsite hosting?
- Is the offsite location where the IT infrastructure is housed in a physically secure setting with redundant power and multiple firewalls, and 24X7 monitoring by experienced IT professionals?
- Can the outsourcer significantly reduce our cost of IT ownership by including the cost of hardware and software upgrades into our monthly operating fee?
- Does the solution give our practice access to IT information anytime, anywhere through a secure internet connection?
- Is the solution portable and scalable to change and grow as your practice changes?