



Survive or Thrive, Success Strategies for Radiology Practices

An Intelrad White Paper

How to gain the competitive edge by maximizing your workflow productivity and extending your service offering

The current economic and healthcare environment presents new challenges for the radiology enterprise. Only the best-run businesses are thriving, often growing through mergers and acquisitions. This growth strategy is often coupled with a diversification of services - for instance, the addition of outpatient imaging centers to the portfolio or the introduction of teleradiology services.

Industry consolidation creates a vital need for the radiology enterprise to increase its competitive edge. This is a critical time to identify and overcome existing challenges, while striving to build a formidable competitive advantage.

Identify and Overcome Existing Challenges

While every group is different, most radiology enterprises share a few common challenges. It is in how those challenges are met - and how effectively new challenges are anticipated and/or avoided altogether - that separates the enterprise that thrives from the one that merely (or barely) survives. A concrete discussion of these universal challenges follows, with recommendations of proven strategies for success.

Challenge: How to increase efficiency?

Radiology groups that provide services to multiple hospitals and clinics are typically faced with using multiple RIS and PACS systems working in isolation from each other. Most radiologists unhappily use many different worklists, viewers, dictation/voice recognition (VR) products, etc. The need to learn and adapt to these numerous tools and interfaces renders the work environment cumbersome and inefficient, acting as a drag on productivity and ultimately, revenues.

Furthermore, radiologists must have fast and complete access to prior images and reports, which often originate at other facilities and may be recorded under different medical record numbers. Manually locating priors is time consuming and inefficient, yet necessary for a quality interpretation.

Strategy: Adopt a technology solution to streamline workflow.

Identify a technology solution that streamlines the radiologist's reading workflow. Leverage a single solution that can unite the many disparate systems and products in use at multiple sites into one intuitive and robust interface. Ensure that the solution provides fast and complete access to prior images, simplifies the reporting process, and includes support for reading sub specialty cases.

This approach can significantly decrease your report turnaround times and reduce the potential for mistakes. This increased efficiency contributes directly to the bottom line. Furthermore, job satisfaction is enhanced in a more productive work environment with fewer distractions.

For full access to prior images and reports, especially when numerous facilities are involved, consider a solution that has a master patient index capable of automatically matching and presenting relevant patient data contained under different medical record numbers.

The competitive radiology enterprise strives to improve both the speed and quality of interpretations. The right technology solution can address these often-opposing goals, resulting in a highly efficient - and more profitable - enterprise that produces high-quality results.

Challenge: How to balance workloads without compromising sub specialty expertise?

Effectively balancing workloads in a radiology group environment is very difficult when individual radiologists must travel between customer sites to do their readings. Furthermore, as the number of facilities supported by the group grows, so too does the challenge for group members to become and remain proficient on every PACS, worklist and dictation system. Optimizing sub specialty expertise in the group further complicates the task of balancing case loads.

In the competitive radiology enterprise, there is a need to reduce radiologist 'downtime', better leverage the group's sub specialty expertise, and improve service level coverage (i.e. overnight, weekends and holidays).

Strategy: Enable location independence and implement a flexible, shared worklist.

The most obvious solution to achieving optimal workload balance is to bring the work to the radiologists, instead of the other way around. This location independence can be accomplished by having a flexible remote reading solution.

Seek a technology solution that seamlessly connects all of the underlying PACS and RIS systems through a single, common worklist and viewer. Access to a universal worklist facilitates collaboration between users, allowing studies originating from any site to be reported by the most qualified radiologist, regardless of where he or she is located.

By greatly reducing travel time and downtime, this approach provides the means for balancing the workload across the radiology group and facilitates significant increases in productivity. Location independence also ensures that the group's combined expertise, no longer restricted by a single radiologist's ability to be at a given location at a given time, is available to every customer.

Challenge: Can an IT solution provide the necessary return on investment?

Difficulties with a radiology enterprise IT solution or with a customer's IT solution can prevent even the most equipped radiology group from achieving its vision and strategy. Current economic realities have pinched IT budgets, an investment in new technology to connect multiple IT solutions must provide a favorable return, reducing complexity without requiring a costly overhaul of all technologies and prior investments.

Strategy: Look for an innovative technology partner with a proven track record.

When seeking a technology partner, aim for a long term partnership; look for innovation and a company that solves real business challenges. Prioritize a vendor with proven expertise and capabilities; check references and customer satisfaction ratings. Identify a partner with a complete and quality service offering - from implementation and training to post-installation service and support.

From a technical perspective, a highly scalable, fault-tolerant, standards-based storage architecture is necessary. Ensure that your solution will grow with your needs, allowing for phased implementations and the ability to bring new sites online without interruption or downtime. For image portability and data migration, your solution should feature an open platform that strictly adheres to industry standards and the Integrating the Healthcare Enterprise (IHE) initiative. Delve beneath the surface to validate vendors' claims of compliancy.

Large radiology groups that read for multiple facilities over a large geographical area should look for a solution with a modular design that is specifically designed for the needs of multi-site environments. A distributed system design and architecture can handle data and images in a way that optimizes network bandwidth usage while avoiding single points of failure that could cause total system downtime. Overall business continuity is a priority; your technology solution must be able to maintain services and workflow during localized power outages or network failures.

Choosing the right technology and partner is critical to establishing a competitive edge, managing growth and controlling your destiny.

Challenge: How to get ahead in the face of increasingly fierce competition?

Competition in the radiology market is fierce, with threats from existing players as well as new entrants. Frequent mergers and acquisitions keep the competitive landscape fluid, and healthcare reform presents new business challenges. It is not possible to compete effectively by simply maintaining the status quo.

Strategy: Be forward-thinking and innovative.

To grow and thrive, the competitive radiology enterprise must continually innovate to find new ways to excel and to extend service offerings to meet the changing needs of the market. The following business strategies and principles are critical to success:

- Offer consistent, high quality results, covering most if not all medical specialties.
- Offer the best patient care with more specialized expertise.
- Maintain a competitive turnaround time for results.
- Recruit and retain the most qualified professionals by offering a balanced, productive, and enjoyable work environment.
- Solidify your group's position in the community - extend services to include all hospitals, large and small.
- Grow, and adopt a system solution that can grow with you.
- Offer services to imaging centers, or open your own.
- Offer new services to customers, such as long term archiving of their studies or 24/7 on-call availability.
- Help connect the community with its patients, by fostering healthcare portability and health information exchange.

Anticipate the Future

For radiology businesses that invest in the right solutions, the future is bright. The right technology and strategies enable radiology enterprises to ride out tough economic times and compete with new and existing competitors in their markets.

By increasing efficiency, balancing workloads and leveraging specialty expertise, the competitive radiology enterprise can streamline operations, enhance quality, and extend its reach. From this solid operational foundation, services can be expanded and diversified, further extending the business advantage over other players in the market.

An investment in the right solution benefits all stakeholders:

- **Patients** receive more timely treatment, with more specialized expertise - even in rural or isolated regions.
- **Referring physicians** experience improved communication with radiology groups, enabling more efficient clinical decisions to satisfy a more educated patient population.
- **Radiology businesses** increase profits, become more agile, experience fewer growing pains, and gain the ability to offer new services - making it easier to attract and retain the most talented radiologists.
- **Radiologists** experience reduced workflow complexity, simplified collaboration, balanced workloads, and lifestyle benefits that result from reduced travel and increased productivity.

ABOUT INTELERA MEDICAL SYSTEMS

Intelera provides medical imaging business solutions and services for radiology groups, hospitals, imaging centers, and teleradiology businesses. Our solutions streamline workflow by integrating systems and clinical information, and by overcoming technical barriers. Users can access the data and tools they need to operate in the most efficient way possible; images and reports are shared, distributed and archived seamlessly. Intelera has proven that its solutions excel in heterogeneous business environments that demand greater flexibility and responsiveness.

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