

Talking Technology Software: Creating the paperless office for MD's practice

By Steve Burns, Capital News contributor

Larry Gray and Dr. Tom Kinahan co-founded OptiMEDirect Corporation in June 2001 in response to the need for a comprehensive Web-enabled software solution to manage Dr. Kinahan's urology practice.

Gray is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the company, while Kinahan continues to focus his efforts on practicing as a pediatric and adult urologic surgeon and as chief of surgery at the Kelowna General Hospital.

Kinahan provides guidance as the chair of the company's advisory board.

The company's software, named Accuro, has been developed extensively over the past two years . It is designed to assist physicians and medical practice professionals in managing a growing practice.

Critical issues such as scheduling and billing are not well handled by many existing solutions, many of which are older DOS-based systems.

As Gray explains: "What we find is that physicians and medical practice professionals require a comprehensive solution that meets all of their needs, from scheduling and billing to access to confidential information over a secure network.

"We help to better manage a practice by increasing the practice's efficiency through better scheduling and managing of the physician's time and the creation of paperless Electronic Medical Records, increasing the accuracy of the practice's billings and increasing the control that a physician has over their practice's critical information.



Larry Gray, cofounder of OptiMEDdirect Corporation (left) talks about wireless software technology with Dr. Steven Krywulak of Kelowna. Shelley Luciw, receptionist for a Kelowna medical practice in the Mission, enjoys the wireless technology concept created by OptiMEDirect Corporation employees (from left) Brian Ellis, Lisa St. Laurent, Craig Skelton and Mike Checkley. Photos Barry Gerding

"Our software can also be used for clinical trial research."

The company has more than 30 installations in British Columbia and Alberta and expects to have more than 2,000 client practices using its software within three years.

The company employs four full-time personnel and utilizes the services of eight contractors.

Differentiation

According to Gray, selling practice management software is a competitive business.

However, in order to ensure that their company knows exactly what their customers are looking for they have carried out extensive market research with physicians and medical practice professionals.

According to the research, the company has the only integrated practice management solution that is targeting Western Canadian physicians and medical specialists.

The market research has indicated that physicians are looking for a complete solution that provides all of their needs in one package at a reasonable price.

As Gray points out, they are able to provide the physician with exactly what they are looking for at the price that provides them with a quick return on their investment.

"We work with the medical office assistants and physicians to identify areas for improvement in their practice. One of the common areas is in billing, where we often can assist the practice in improve the processing and accuracy of their billings."

The competitive research also indicates that balance is required. While customers appreciate a practice management solution that is developed by physicians for physicians, the research indicated that physicians do not want to be targeted or pressured by their colleagues to purchase the software.

"We have purposely set out to not leverage the relationships that our advisory board members have with other physicians in their respective medical communities," Gray said.

"We want the solution to sell itself, not to take advantage of the professional relationships that have been developed over many years by these respected professionals."

The market research also indicated that one of the critical factors impacting a physician's decision to purchase the software is the corporate stability of the software vendor.

According to Gray, "OptiMED is here for the long term. We are backed by a small group of angel investors that are committed to our long term stability."

Physicians and specialists want remote access to medical records, such as from home, but do not want to do so at the expense of the confidentiality and privacy of their patients' information, Gray said.

"We have developed a secure, encrypted solution that addresses this critical concern. We have partnered with Rogers AT&T wireless to provide access anytime and anywhere."

Entrepreneurship

When asked why he became a technology entrepreneur, Gray said that life is all about choices.

"I chose to live in the Okanagan Valley as I believe it is the perfect place to operate a technology business. Where else can you live where you have the opportunity every day to not only deliver a valuable software solution but also improve your lifestyle and create employment?"

"In many ways I am like many technology CEOs in the Okanagan—if I don't create my own gig, then I simply couldn't live here."

Key challenges

The key challenges that OptiMEDirect faces are related mostly to the issue of the adoption of its technology.

"The marketplace is starting to recognize the value of a practice management solution to assisting in managing a busy practice.

"However, adoption of this technology is still relatively low, which we see as a great opportunity for us. We continue to be successful in convincing the marketplace of the cost/benefit of our solution, how easy the system is to learn and use and overcoming the risk of becoming an early adopter."

Market developments

Gray is very excited about the new market opportunity that the company has in Alberta

"We have recently become an approved vendor for the Physician Office System Program (POSP) in Alberta, which is a joint initiative of the Alberta Medical Association and Alberta Health and Wellness.

"In the program, over the next three years, participating physicians in Alberta can implement practice management technology and receive a subsidy of up to \$10,000 per physician."

Most vital decisions

Gray said there were two critical decisions that have proven extremely valuable to his business.

"First, earlier on in the development of our product, we leaned heavily on Okanagan University College. We hired three full-time personnel from the Computer Information Systems diploma program, which enabled us to fast forward our product development.

"Without these highly skilled individuals, we would not have been able to get our product to market as quickly.

"Second, the fact that we were able to start selling our product ahead of our plans, enabled us to focus our efforts externally on our marketplace rather than internally. Ramping up our sales and marketing engine continues to be a primary focus of the company."

Doing things differently

"If I could change anything about how we went about launching our business, I think I would have utilized the expertise available in the Okanagan sooner than I did—at the idea stage," reflected Gray.

"Approaching the National Research Council (NRC) sooner would have helped us shape our company. We continue to work closely with the NRC's Laurel Douglas and Maureen Hatanaka, who are invaluable resources for any technology entrepreneur."

Advice to entrepreneurs

Gray has crisp advice for entrepreneurs:

Get connected: "I think I would have given up a long time ago, had I not had the support from the Okanagan Science and Technology Council (OSTEC). In particular, OSTEC's networking events provided me with the opportunity to meet other technology entrepreneurs and learn from them."

Have mentors: "It is important to surround yourself with a mastermind group of mentors that you can bounce things off of who will not be sending you a bill for their time. Having strong mentors helps keep you focused."

Sell, sell, sell: "Too many technology entrepreneurs focus entirely on spending a fortune in development before taking their product to market. I would say that you need to balance the development effort with the need to focus on generating positive cash flow for your business. In the end, without sales and sufficient financing, your technology venture will be nothing more than a good idea."

Next Week: Inside Airtreks Technologies Inc.

Steve Burns, CA, CMC, CFP, is the president of Steve Burns Consulting. If you would like your technology company profiled in the column, contact Steve at 763-4716 or e-mail:

steve@steveburnsconsulting.com

[Short story](#)

