

Hiring the Right Enterprise Imaging Consultant the First Time

Overcoming the Seven Stages of Implementing an Enterprise Imaging Platform

By Trent Conwell, IT Director, Sentara Healthcare

Technology expertise within the IT department is not a sufficient skillset to ensure successful implementation of an Enterprise Imaging Platform. IT not only needs to understand the underlying technology of the vendor product, but how that technology will integrate with every other technology within the organization. Add to this the need to understand the impact on clinical, operational, and technical workflows, tight timelines, and no tolerance for budget overruns and you have a very complex environment to manage.

Sentara started exploring Enterprise Imaging and Vendor Neutral Archive (VNA) strategies in 2009. We went out on our own to find the right solution and the right vendor because that process had always worked in the past. Our initial effort ultimately failed, primarily due to our approach of treating this selection process, as we always had, as if we were buying a new software application. We learned that above and beyond a technology solution we needed to understand what our strategy was going to be. We wanted to address radiology PACS, of course, but we also wanted to address other “ologies” that were producing images. And long term we wanted to build relationships with software vendors and a consulting vendor that would allow us to define and design an HIE platform specific to imaging.

On our second attempt, we brought in a consulting vendor with expertise in the area of VNA technology. But again, the result was failure. This was due in part to our narrow focus on just the technology and in part to the vendor landscape. During this time period the “Neutral” component of the VNA vendor solutions did not quite exist. Generally, VNA vendors provided the archive and the viewer and were in a partnership with a storage vendor to provide the needed storage. The nature of this approach made it difficult to produce a positive ROI on the TCO for the project.

I didn't see this coming.

Before making a third attempt, we had many internal discussions to determine what we needed to change in order to make this attempt successful.



I thought we were equipped to deal with budget constraints, a small staff, complex technologies, intricate integrations, enterprise-wide impact and an ever-changing vendor landscape. But because of the first two failed attempts I began to realize we had to deal with something I don't like to admit I possess.

Emotions! Not just mine but those of just about everyone involved in this complex project. Identifying, understanding, and managing our emotions was going to be a necessary step in order to move forward successfully.

Most of us, at some point in our lives, have become familiar with the Kübler-Ross model describing the five stages of grief. After going through an Enterprise Imaging Platform implementation, I defined a similar model that I call the **Seven Stages of Implementing an Enterprise Imaging Platform™**.



1) Ignorance

While most of us refuse to admit that we don't have enough education on the subject, the earlier that you come to this conclusion and seek help, the more successful your project will be.



2) Frustration

If you went through an education phase, your frustration is normal and stems from the fact that you did not understand how complex this project was going to be.



3) Confusion

This is generally the point in time where you start talking with vendors. Some vendors may cause you to question the value of the education process you went through.



4) Overwhelmed

As you start to sift through the Confusion Stage, you immediately enter the Overwhelmed Stage. This stage is much like the Frustration Stage; the difference being education leads to understanding the true complexity of the project, and thus overwhelmed.



5) Frightened

This stage is directly related to contract signing. I call this stage: where hope meets reality.



6) Hopeful

There is actually a fork in the road when you get to this stage. While I have chosen to be positive, it is entirely possible that stage six is Dreadful and not Hopeful. Generally, you will know based on how the testing efforts are proceeding.



7) Success

Once again, I have chosen to remain positive, because as we all know the alternative is Failure.

There are many individuals and groups that influence the degree to which you experience each stage. In my experience, I found that I was the biggest influencer in many of the stages. However, you will be influenced by members of your internal organization, existing vendors on whom you must rely and, of course, new prospective vendors who will influence you every step of the way.

Understanding the Seven Stages of Implementing an Enterprise Imaging Platform allows you to better understand the type of help you will need to be successful. For many who are seeking consulting help, their first thought is to find technology experience. Actually, my first thought was to seek a staff psychiatrist. Although this might have made me feel better along the way, it probably would not have made our project more successful.

What's so complicated about Enterprise Imaging?

The process of vendor selection for an Enterprise Imaging Platform should be overwhelming. If it is not then you probably

are not considering all factors in your decision (see Ignorant phase above). While I am not necessarily proud of the fact that it took three attempts to get our business case approved, what we learned in the first two failures was quite valuable. First and foremost, had we been successful in either of the first two attempts we would have made the wrong vendor decisions. For us, failure was humbling. It forced us to reevaluate our process. When we could not find any major flaws in our process, it was then that we realized we needed help. Remember earlier, when I discussed the Ignorance Stage, and how you may not realize that you are in it? That was us. So, to answer the question of "What's so complicated about Enterprise Imaging?" the answer is not realizing how complicated it is.

FIRST AND FOREMOST, HAD WE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN EITHER OF THE FIRST TWO ATTEMPTS WE WOULD HAVE MADE THE WRONG VENDOR DECISIONS.

Getting out of the Starting Blocks

Consulting engagements don't always get the desired results. I am sure many of you are reading that and saying: "That's an understatement."



We needed a consulting firm that understood where we were going and could get us there successfully. The answer for Sentara was Ascendian Healthcare Consulting. Ascendian came onsite and spent several hours with us over multiple days to understand our objectives, constraints, and concerns. Within a week of those visits Ascendian provided a statement of work document that read like a book. The table of contents took us through each phase of the project. As I look back at my Seven Stages I realize that I went directly from the Ignorant Stage to the Overwhelmed Stage, completely skipping the Frustration and Confusion Stages. I gained confidence that Ascendian was going to meet my expectations and provide a level of value that I was just starting to understand was necessary.

Gaining Momentum

Ascendian started with an extensive education process. We discovered details we would have never known we needed to learn. While I thought that we had skipped the Frustration and Confusion Stages, I discovered early in the education process that I was wrong. However, with the knowledge we gained during the education process we then had the knowledge to eliminate much of the frustration and confusion we dealt with in our first two attempts. Additionally, we had a team in Ascendian that would help us cope with the frustration and confusion that was to come.

Many Forks in the Road

Building an RFP is a daunting task. You are creating a legally binding document in which the prospective vendor must answer each of your questions. If you think about it, in order to get all of the information you need, you must be quite knowledgeable in every aspect of the RFP. While this may seem somewhat obvious, a well-written RFP must force every response to be clear, concise, complete, and unambiguous. The only way to know if your RFP is well written is to send out the RFP, interpret the answers you receive, and determine if each answer is clear, concise, complete, and unambiguous. But, since this is not an episode of Jeopardy, where you get the answer before formulating the question, we needed the expertise of Ascendian. One of the strengths of the Ascendian team was their experience in writing RFPs. What I did not expect was the unique and robust process that Ascendian used during the entire RFP process. It was interesting to hear from multiple prospective vendors that an Ascendian RFP will be the most thorough RFP requiring a detailed response.



The Ascendian RFP process allowed us to eliminate many of the forks in the road, several of which we didn't know existed.

We've eliminated the forks, but now we have road blocks.

The Ascendian RFP process resulted in a shortened list of vendors that we had confidence would allow us to make correct vendor choices. Having eliminated many of the forks in the road we were now starting to encounter more roadblocks, many of which were internal.



At this point in time, we were building our business case, a business case that would have to provide a significant ROI, because a large portion of the project expense would be for technology below the water line. I believe this is where the Ascendian expertise provided the greatest benefit. Ascendian had worked so closely with Sentara that we were able to sit down and define tangible leverage points that would ultimately lead to the approval of our business case and the signing of contracts with our selected vendors, Mach7 Technologies and Client Outlook.

I see a light. Is it the end of the tunnel or a train coming?

Enter the Frightened Stage. Mixed emotions are generally felt right after signing a contract. This is the point in time, as I mentioned above, where hope meets reality. However, I can say with complete honesty that, with the help of our consulting

partners, I was quite comfortable with our vendor selections. The thorough RFP process and the relationships we built with Mach7 and Client Outlook were minimizing the effects of the Frightened Stage.

The initial SOW with Ascendian did not carry beyond contract signing. But it was clear that the teams from Mach7, Client Outlook, Ascendian, and Sentara worked so well together during what could have been very trying times, we should continue to use Ascendian during the implementation. This is not to say that our two vendors were not completely capable of getting us to a successful implementation, it is to say that Ascendian has become part of the Sentara team and offered additional perspective related to the operational impact of deploying enterprise imaging technologies.

Final Thought

Technology should always be at the forefront of your decision-making process. But, there are many additional factors to consider when developing your Enterprise Imaging Platform strategy. Using Ascendian Healthcare's services was a critical first step in finding the two vendors, Mach7 and Client Outlook, and to reaching the decision that would allow Sentara to realize success implementing our Enterprise Imaging Platform.



About the Author

Mr. Conwell is an IT Director at Sentara Healthcare responsible for Technical Services in imaging, laboratory, patient identity, and EMR Integration. He has been in Healthcare IT for over 25 years, 19 of which have been at Sentara Healthcare. Trent's years of

experience in integrating clinical systems across the enterprise and knowledge of the patient identity strategy give him the necessary background to develop an enterprise imaging solution that meets Sentara's needs. He also holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Information Systems.

For more information on the companies referenced in this Executive Brief, see the following links:

Ascendian Healthcare Consulting: www.ascendian.com

Client Outlook: www.clientoutlook.com

Mach7 Technologies: www.mach7t.com

Sentara Healthcare: www.sentara.com