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WHITEPAPER

WHY PURCHASING A PACS WITHOUT SUPPORT IS A WASTED INVESTMENT

& other ways to disqualify PACS vendors

According to a recent Health Imaging [article](#)¹ on trends in radiology, health systems are refocusing their IT department efforts on improving staff efficiency and workflows. This shift in strategy comes at a time when they're also battling financial issues, staffing shortages, an onslaught of cybersecurity threats, and ever-evolving technology advancements to keep track of.

As health systems turn to technology to aid in their efficiency improvement efforts, the PACS can play a key role. However, PACS shouldn't be viewed as simply another bundle of hardware and software.

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The truth is that PACS is a practice-based business tool that uses a *solutions-based* management approach rather than a piece of hardware or software. Sure, there are minimum standards of features, functionality, and performance. But, focusing merely on these attributes rather than on the way a given PACS solves operational needs, particularly after the purchase, is one of the primary reasons for radiologist and administration dissatisfaction with a given PACS.

Once minimum standards for PACS business performance have been established, it is important to realize these are only potential standards. The training and support that a vendor provides is just as important as the infrastructure that houses a PACS. Together, these are the key to unlocking the PACS' full potential, transforming the software into a meaningful business solution that increases operational performance and profitability.

Systemic Drift: PACS and radiology in motion

Features and functions, hanging protocol definitions, and workflow through-put; these are all important aspects of distinguishing one PACS from another. But, regardless of which PACS is selected, the value of these *hardware/software-based* factors is a fixed variable in time. PACS performance is initially about learning everything a given PACS can do for your radiology staff and department and then having a facility's staff or department achieve a comfort zone with the PACS model and how it will help them achieve their investment objectives.

The PACS itself is not fixed in time. Neither are radiology facilitators or department operational procedures. Nor is the community or market that the facility or department serves. Everything in a healthcare environment is in flux. Systems change, they are upgraded, and new features must



be assimilated and used appropriately. Through time, a facility or department adds new modalities, operational policies and incorporates new staff.

In growing communities, more competition enters into the business equation of profitable radiology imaging. We call this phenomenon systemic drift. The original comfort zone has to be refreshed with additional training and support, and with regular communication conduits between the radiologist, the tech, and the PACS vendor.

Support is the key to managing Systemic Drift

The tools provided by a PACS are only one part of the efficiency equation. The other part of the equation is top-notch vendor support. So, in selecting a PACS vendor, look at service and support as much as any other aspect of the PACS.

Questions to ask regarding service and support include:

- What percentage of support calls are answered in the first day?
- What is the percentage of calls answered per day that are answered the same day?
- How often are the PACS updated or upgraded?
- Is there downtime involved with upgrades?
- Are user groups available?
- Is there any on-going training available as the product changes and evolves?
- Does the provider guarantee to have a support staff member on-site if necessary?

Promptness of answering PACS support calls, quality of support answers, availability of support 24/7, whether the support is outsourced overseas or available within the US, professionalism of the support staff, etc. are all important considerations. More than just being a technology support issue, poor support in itself is a quality of care and practice operation concern. As burnout continues to be a problem in radiology – 51% of respondents in the radiology specialty report being

burned out according to a recent Medscape² study – it's important to make radiologists' jobs easier, and knowing they have reliable vendor support on stand-by is a great way to do this.

Ideally, choose a PACS provider that will be able to adequately address all kinds of post-implementation questions and issues that will inevitably arise. Issues range from simple troubleshooting to data breaches, which can occur even with the most secure software due to human error and the ever-evolving tactics of cyber criminals.

Data breaches cost healthcare providers an average of \$9.8 million³ in the first half of 2024. Downtime, whether from a cyber attack or minor technical issues, can cost health systems more than \$5 million per hour,⁴ which is why it's crucial to have reliable vendor support to work quickly to get systems and processes back up and running smoothly ASAP.

Beyond the usual support issues and capabilities, a provider's commitment to customer support can be gauged by the other communications options they make available.

Ideally, invest in a PACS that offers not only the usual telephone support, but also useful ancillary venues of communication such as: live chat which allows for direct access to the support services, or user group events where customers, product enhancement, and support team members can learn helpful tips, share ideas about product improvement. There is a lot of value in learning from the inquiries and experiences of others.

It's also important to note that outdated, legacy systems may not offer the same reliable support as they once did. Compounded with the fact that outdated systems are likely to be less efficient and require more support, sticking with what you've got can be a costly mistake.

What is standard vs. superior support?

Support is the key multiplier which creates a *genuine solution and practice tool* out of any given PACS. Return on investment and efficiency rises exponentially as the quality of support rises.

Standard support likely results in a standard PACS. **Superior support results in superior PACS results.**

For many customers, industry standard PACS results might seem just good enough. They are certainly better than results that are sub-par due to equipment downtime. But, in today's competitive health care market, being *standard* might not be good enough if a facility or department wants a competitive edge or to establish itself as more than a healthcare provider⁵ to help ensure profitability and future growth.



With imaging centers, hospitals, radiology groups, and clinics all competing for a health image market that is coming under assault by government regulations, and possible future rationing of reimbursable radiology studies it is clear that not only are the pieces of the image market pie growing smaller, but the entire pie may begin to shrink as well.

Future success in the business of radiology demands that facilities and departments distinguish themselves as *superior* rather than *standard*. The superior PACS is the one that is adopted with a solution-based model, rather than a hardware-based model. The support component is vital to avoiding the pitfalls of a purely hardware-based approach.

How does Novarad South support measure up?

Here are some basic percentages of how Novarad South customers rate NovaPACS, training and support.

Support tickets are organized by three categories:

- system operational functions
- training/knowledge issues
- customizing the solutions for Radiologist & staff preferences

The first two are considered within the direct control of our support team.

Customization can occur at the user level and can also result in a future enhancement request.

Two things are worth mentioning about these statistics. First of all, Novarad South places importance on monitoring new system installation training as well as on-going customer satisfaction. Most PACS providers don't do this.

Secondly, customer satisfaction with the PACS is one of the critical areas for consideration in the process of acquiring a PACS. With such a diverse marketplace, there is no longer an industry standard to vet vendors against. Inquiring about satisfaction performance should result in data. **Not being able to report on the satisfaction of a potential vendor's clientele is a red flag.**

Satisfaction Scores

Source: Novarad South Spring 2024 Customer Satisfaction Survey

Prompt attention
98%

of existing Novarad South Customers say their support calls are answered promptly.

Issues resolved
97.9%

find their PACS support issue are answered to their satisfaction.

Immediate issue resolution

74.9%

all support tickets are resolved immediately on the first call

Issue resolution within 72 hours

85.8%

of all support tickets are resolved within 72 hours of creation

Knowledgeable support team

91.7%

of customers are satisfied with the knowledge of the support staff

Professional & courteous support team

100%

of customers agree NRS support team is professional and courteous

Meets departmental needs

98.5%

of respondents agree Novarad meets the needs of their department

Impressed with communication

98%

of customers rate communication with support Excellent or Satisfactory

Conclusion

Satisfaction with support and training is at least as important as the various features and functions of a given PACS. What a PACS is designed to accomplish is only as important as the ability of a given radiology facility to understand the design, maximize workflow efficiencies, and remain in communication with the PACS vendor as the product changes or as staffing at the facility changes.

Choosing a provider that proves its concern about what its customer-base thinks through regular surveys and other forms of communication is taking a step toward investing in a PACS solution, not just PACS hardware.

About Us

Novarad South is a leading strategic advisement firm serving the southeastern United States. Since 1998, NRS has helped healthcare providers manage costs, increase productivity, and drive sustainable growth and profitability. We specialize in medical workflow analysis, business model revitalization, and maximizing revenue capture opportunities in Radiology and Enterprise Imaging.

NRS is uniquely qualified to provide strategic and tactical advice that will produce measurable value and prolonged results that are consistent with client expectations and goals. We are focused on assisting providers in successfully navigating their toughest issues and providing them with the tools they need to thrive.

Sources:

1 <https://healthimaging.com/topics/health-it/enterprise-imaging/key-trends-enterprise-imaging>

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3 <https://www.ibm.com/reports/data-breach>

4 <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbestechcouncil/2024/04/10/the-true-cost-of-downtime-and-how-to-avoid-it/>

5 <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesbusinesscouncil/2022/04/08/healthcare-is-a-finite-commodity-how-providers-can-differentiate-themselves/>

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