

ASP for your Billing Service? Think Again!

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ASP or "Application Service Provider" technology is really making a push in many industries. But you'd better think twice, then never again - about utilizing it for a medical billing business.

ASP applications are available for practice management systems, EMR systems, customer relation management systems, and even bookkeeping and payroll systems. An ASP for a doctor's office makes the lives of the doctor's staff easier, especially for those without an IT person. There are many ASP medical billing applications now, and they serve a good purpose for many doctor's offices - and that's exactly what they were made for, but these vendors also see a lucrative potential in pushing these apps to multi-client billing services - due to the fact that their money is made primarily via per-transaction fees, and per-user fees. With billing services, there's great transaction volume and people accessing the application.

But, what is the difference between an ASP application and a server-based application for a billing business? There are many, and they are critical! With an ASP, you are accessing your business lifeline, your most important tool, and your client data via the internet. The practice management system is housed on the internet via large servers at the vendors chosen location, and you, your employees and your clients access the data via a web browser or through a remote desktop.

The internet is much more reliable these days than in years past, and outages or down times are fewer and farther between, but they do happen. Imagine having 30 clients in your billing business and your internet connection, or that of your host going down due to a storm, or for maintenance work. We're quite certain that if you started out on an ASP, you would have already given it up at this point in your growth, but let's make the illustration anyway. It's month-end, and you have 20 employees sitting at their desks, already punched in on the time clock, and whoosh! It all goes down. What do you do? Let's imagine your 20 employees make an average of \$12.00 per hour. As a loyal and dedicated employer, do you keep your employees on site, paying \$240.00 per hour for zero productivity, losing big money with every tic of the clock. Or, do you send them home to make nothing for several hours or for the full day? Either way, not good! How many times in a year are you willing to pay your employees for doing nothing - or risk losing them by interrupting the wages they need to earn? It's not only internet downtime that you need to worry about, but also being turned off due to a lost or misapplied payment. Even the best accounts payable clerks run into little mistakes and oversights.

Down times and outages are detrimental to a billing operation, but even more important, and even much scarier, is the chance of something happening to the company that has almost god-like control of your lifeline - your client data. As a billing service, you invest huge sums of money to pay employees to enter data into your client databases. Each day of data entry makes the database more and more valuable as more and more information is accumulated. Are you sure you want to give control of this precious stuff

over to someone else?

Allow me to share a true story with you. A couple of years ago, on what started out as just a normal work day at Synergy, our phones started ringing practically off the hook. For days, we received calls from users of the ASP based system called Island Automated Medical Systems (IAMS), a company that had been around for a quite a long time. For these users, IAMS was there yesterday and all seemed fine, then they were gone. They filed bankruptcy, their owners were being prosecuted and all operations were ceased. None of these callers had any advanced warning of impending doom. Why were these callers in a state of shock and panic? Because in a split second, their businesses were gone! Along with IAMS went all their data and their most important business tool. Do you think that the owners were concerned at all about their clients businesses as they were being led out in handcuffs? They weren't. In the end, and even though we tried, there was nothing we could do to help these IAMS users get their data, and many of them folded. It was a sad day.

For a person looking into starting a medical billing business, the ASPs salesmen take advantage of your as-yet lack of knowledge and your willingness to invest less up front to get your business going. But the costs -and risks - eventually become outrageous for a billing operation.

The ASP vendors - not only the company that designs and sells directly, but also resellers - give what seem to be plausible arguments for utilizing them, but for a billing business, the arguments fail:

"Your clients will be able to view their data in real time", they say. OK, good. But, real-time data viewing is easy without going ASP. Almost everyone with a billing business runs at least Windows XP. Windows XP has the "remote desktop connection" features that allow your clients to access their data in real time. Want to see it for yourself? Click on your "start" button on the lower left of your monitor. Highlight "All Programs", highlight "Accessories", and highlight "Communications", now you will see "Remote Desktop Connection". This is the function that allows you, your employees and your clients to access the application in real time. Want to work remotely while out of town, no problem. Want to hire a couple of work -from -home employees, fine. Want your clients to use Front Desk Scheduler or run reports from any internet browser- it works! Why didn't the ASP vendors tell you??? Well, I'll let you make your own guesses on that.

"Free upgrades to the application", they say. OK, good. But, exactly what is free? My friend, let me tell you, in this day and age nothing is free. This just means that they're making their money in a different way. If you're not directly paying for a programming upgrade, you're paying for it in another way. And I'll tell you, if I'm a billing operation and paying a subscription of at least \$200 per database per month, and never owning anything. I'd better get fixes and upgrades at no additional cost!! ASP vendors keep their costs down by customizing nothing to fill the special needs of you and your operation. If it's not needed across the board, you're not going to get it. Everyone gets

the exact same system, which means they do not have to distribute upgrades for ownership, and they do not have to support different, customized applications. Smart for them, but oh-so inconvenient and tedious for you.

"We back up your data every night", they say. OK, good. But, do they? How do you know? How do you know for sure? Fact is, you don't. You do not know for sure. Again, you- do- not- know- for- sure. What you can do yourself in minutes with a \$10.00 flash drive is not worth the risk of utilizing an ASP because they "back up your data" for you. Backing up data is easy!! And doing it yourself gives you the peace of mind of knowing for sure - plus - you have your data, not someone else. And guess what. If you grow to be quite large and want to back up your data twice a day, like many large billing centers do, you can.

"No annual tech support charges", they say. OK, good. Go back to my comments on "nothing is free". This just means that the excessive subscription prices and/or per-transaction prices, and/or per user prices they charge, already cover this cost. In other words, make no bones about it, you ARE paying tech support prices, you're just paying them whether you need it or not.

"We'll talk to your potential clients for you", they say. OK, good. But after the ASP vendor "talks" to your potential client, showing them all the ease-of-use and wonderful functions and features that will save them time and money, what's to keep your potential client from becoming "their" client instead? And if the ASP application is so easy to use, your potential client will ask why you need the vendor to explain and demonstrate it for you. By telling you that they will "speak to your potential client" for you, they're trying to say they'll help you get a client. This "perk" will not help you get a client! But, it just might help you lose one.

"We'll submit your claims for you to the clearinghouse", they say. OK, good. How do you know they did? Can you control how often? What if you have a very large operation and want to submit more than once a day? Or a very small or specialized operation, and want to submit only once a week? You have no control, no control, no control. Also, you are stuck with the clearinghouse of their choice, not yours. AND, if that's not enough, with most ASPs, you get to pay two and three times the normal amount for each transaction you send or receive. This is just one of the "other ways" they get you. And guess who receives and has control of those ever-so-necessary submission reports. Not you. The ASP vendor gets them, then you get them when they get around to sending them to you.

"If a vendor tells you that ASP is not the way to go, it's because they don't offer it", they say. Well, we tell you it's not the way to go, simply because it isn't. Synergy will soon be rolling out PMX3 On Demand for doctor's offices to access via internet. PMX3 On Demand will offer subscription based service, with no upgrade costs or installs, and no additional tech support costs. We'll also backup data every night and submit claims for the subscribers. Will we recommend PMX3 On Demand for billing businesses - no way!

This is the extreme short list, but I believe it's all you need. I could go on and on with more and more reasons why an ASP is totally insufficient for a billing operation, but I'm sure you clearly see the light by now. The truth is Synergy's Practice Manager X3 for billing businesses, soon to be called "PM Md Professional" (Practice Manager Multi-database Professional Edition), is the only software application designed, programmed, and maintained specifically for the needs of a billing center operation - not a doctor's office - and not in a way to just make it easy on us. This highly acclaimed system includes the robust features and across the board functions necessary for billing operations to streamline workflow and save precious time and money. Our Synergy Family of Medical Billing Center clients have a say in programming, always giving input and ideas on how to save a billing center time, trouble, and money. We listen to you, the billing center owner or manager, and customize features and functions to your needs - not everyone's, and not ours. Do you pay a little more up front? Yes, but you own it, you maintain control and you get the products, services and support you need.

Are you the IT manager of a chain of clinics looking into a centralized billing operation? PMMd Pro is for you. Are you the owner of a medical billing business, utilizing a tedious or expensive doctor's office software or ASP? Take a look at PMMd Pro and you will never look back!

Are you a person with an entrepreneurial spirit and desire to have your very own medical billing business? Synergy packages PMMd Pro into a comprehensive business opportunity package which includes software training, an online 7 chapter medical billing instruction course with a "Certified Medical Biller" designation and frame-able certificate at completion. This course teaches you the basics of what you need to know to perform the day to day operations of a medical billing business. One chapter also gives you hands-on instruction, utilizing PMMd Pro to enter practices, providers, patients, charges, payments, and other transactions, directly into a working copy of PMMd Pro, just as you will in your business. You can also choose to include our highly acclaimed Marketing Support and telephone coaching. Synergy's trained professionals will walk you through all phases of setting up your business, naming your business, establishing your business entity, and most importantly, coaching you on marketing efforts to get clients for your business. With Synergy Marketing Support, you don't just get fancy mailing slicks that will be discarded - or old, stale processes that no longer work, you get solid information and instruction on what works now! How do we know what works? We do it everyday.

Synergy Medical Information Systems is dedicated to the success and development of our partners and clients. For over 25 years, we have helped more entrepreneurs achieve a successful, lucrative medical billing business than anyone else! At Synergy, our success is measured by your success, and we take that measurement seriously - ALWAYS.

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