

Hybrid Practice Management Technology Saves Medical Offices Time and Costs in Economic Downturn

A CollaborateMD White Paper



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Executive Summary

In the current economic downturn, medical practices and billing services need a practice management and medical billing solution that offers speed, power, flexibility and convenience at an affordable price. The hybrid SaaS model does exactly that. Find out the "how" and "why" in this white paper.



Medical Organizations Face an Economic Shift



The most important aspect of medical billing is facilitating timely payment of providers, and yet the process for reimbursement is one of the most cumbersome in the health care industry. Electronic billing cuts this month-long paper process down to roughly seven business days by quickly returning clearinghouse and payer-generated reports, but the rising costs associated with getting paid are far from negligible, and choosing affordable practice management software is now a pivotal function of medical offices seeking long-term success.

A few short years ago, physicians and medical billers could afford to have only a general understanding of server-based versus Internet-based software that would aid them in both managing their medical practice and electronically submitting insurance claims. Unfortunately, the new economy dictates a vastly narrower grasp of these two core billing software platforms, their respective sub-classifications, the costs associated with purchase and long-term use, and the key elements of speed and flexibility each offers.

This white paper will not only discuss the differences between these two iconic platforms, but will delve deeper into two Internet-based sub-classifications: browser-based—more recently branded as Software as a Service (SaaS)—and its newer counterpart, the hybrid SaaS model. These two subsets hold the key to keeping money in the pockets of medical billers and physicians in the current economy, but only one does so without sacrificing a rich user experience.

A New Paradigm for a New Era of Medical Billing



Simply stated, the old way of thinking—that is to say, the commitment to making a large capital investment with server-based software to get started billing electronically—is just that; it’s old, outdated, and costly. There has been a recent change in the way physicians and billing departments think, and the growing trend is toward *finding innovative ways to save money while introducing greater flexibility and speeding up the payer payment cycle*. This trend has lent itself easily to the advancement of Internet-based software solutions over the past decade, but at what expense?

Many software users who invested heavily in a server-based solution years ago have found that IT and other hardware costs, not to mention the upgrade and new release costs associated with maintaining the software, have multiplied their initial investment cost without producing any return on investment. Others have chosen to sacrifice the speed and power of server-based solutions for a more affordable, though slower, Internet-based software. With this choice comes greater flexibility and convenience along with concerns about security, HIPAA compliance, and monthly license fees. Though these concerns are valid, they are not characteristic of all Internet-based software.

In years past, the decision for most medical practices and billing services came down to a few key factors: cost, speed, flexibility and security. Proponents of server- and Internet-based platforms will argue their strengths in most, if not all, of these categories; it’s the long-standing battle of the “you get what you pay for” mantra of many server-based software providers versus the “convenience and flexibility” sell of Internet-based solutions.

Ultimately, in this new economy, the decision for many comes down to cost. Clearly, Internet-based software is typically the more affordable option; many software users, accustomed to the speed and power of their server-based solution, have re-prioritized their needs to fit their pocketbooks. But as with every paradigm shift, there will be new knowledge and new thinking, with new products and new solutions to quickly follow.

The Emergence of the Hybrid SaaS Model



Despite attempts by many economic experts to paint a picture of despair, there are creative software solutions that seek to provide high quality without high cost. More specifically, there is a great deal more to the Internet-based software solution than many initially realized. For instance, while the majority of Internet-based electronic medical billing solutions are browser-based (SaaS model), another option exists that merges the best of both worlds: a **hybrid solution**. It combines the convenience and flexibility characteristic of most browser-based applications with the speed, power, and rich user experience credited to many server-based, locally run applications.

Unlike with a browser-based application, hybrid SaaS users install a small application onto their computer. Once the program is running, it appears to the user as a normal Windows application; however, all data requests travel over the Internet to the software providers' data center. One of several unique advantages to this application includes its access to the user's local hard drive for real-time data caching. This proprietary data caching, not available in browser-based programs, allows the program to locally store commonly used data for instant retrieval of information without delays caused by Internet traffic, resulting in increased office efficiency at significantly lower costs.

Another key advantage to the hybrid SaaS model is greater speed. When accessing patient demographics, a hybrid SaaS model pulls only specific patient data from the software provider's secure server. With a browser-based solution, however, your software would also have to fetch all of the graphics required to render the new screen—despite the fact that they rarely change—each time you send a request to access your patient information. The benefit is most measureable within features such as messaging and scheduling, in which the time it takes to load the new data is shortened by nearly 50 percent.

Along the same vein, a third hybrid SaaS advantage is the one-click execution of seamless software updates. Because this process occurs behind the scenes, most laymen would not recognize this strength or appreciate its benefits, yet they are equally great. For instance, a user needs to click only a single update button in order to begin utilizing the latest features released by the software provider. This allows users to remain in control of their software—a luxury that traditional SaaS models do not afford, since upgrades occur at the software provider's insistence rather than the user's convenience.

If increased efficiency, speed, and control are not sufficient to persuade a SaaS customer to test a hybrid SaaS model, perhaps the lower bandwidth usage, and therefore cost savings, would do the trick. As previously discussed, a hybrid SaaS model requires less bandwidth to gather the

same information as a traditional SaaS model because it pulls only actual field data and not the complete graphical screen. This translates into a lower monthly Internet bill for those users who pay for Internet in proportion to the bandwidth they consume. Stated another way, an office utilizing hybrid SaaS medical billing software can, without incurring any additional cost, employ a higher number of simultaneous users working heavily on its system than if that same system were weighed down by the comparatively higher volume of data caching common to browser-based solutions.

Hybrid SaaS Indicates Strong Shelf-life



Though the great hope is that the current credit crunch will loosen in the foreseeable future, the sustainability of the hybrid SaaS model offers a long-term safety net to physicians and medical billers nationwide who seek an affordable alternative to traditional server-based and Internet-based solutions without sacrificing the respective speed and power or convenience and flexibility they've come to expect from these less comprehensive models. As it becomes more widely adopted in the future, the hybrid SaaS model will serve to buffer software users from rapid economic declines while still providing the benefits they require from an electronic medical billing software solution.

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CollaborateMD offers the health care industry a HIPAA-compliant, hybrid SaaS practice management and medical billing software application that is extensive and feature-rich, but also affordable, very easy to use, and comes with free customer support and frequently released updates.

The software is tailored to meet the growing needs of more than 3,000 users nationwide, including physicians and their staff, hospitalists, and billing services. Utilizing its unique hybrid SaaS model, CollaborateMD combines the convenience and flexibility of a browser-based application with the speed and power of a server-based program. This combination shortens payer payment cycles, offers more freedom to providers, and delivers the highest level of security and data protection at the lowest possible price.

Dedicated to helping medical practices and billing services save time and money since 1999, CollaborateMD clients choose this software because it is affordable and easy to use, but they remain loyal for years because the solution immediately increases office efficiency and continuously gets doctors paid faster.

For more information on practice management packages and pricing; new ePrescribing products; EMR and HL7 interfaces; data conversions; and other CollaborateMD services, please:

- Visit CollaborateMD.com to download a free trial or obtain information tailored to solo practices, group practices, billing services and diagnostic facilities or labs.
- E-mail Sales@CollaborateMD.com
- Or call 888-348-8457.