Inside Perspective
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Bluewater Health implements offsite disaster recovery solution

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Implementing electronic medical records systems is one of the most important initiatives that hospitals today can undertake towards improving healthcare delivery and patient safety. From an IT perspective, it is also one of the more challenging solutions to deliver.

Bluewater Health is a modern, 320-bed MEDITECH hospital spread over three sites in Sarnia, Ontario. As CIO for the hospital, I recognized that our IT infrastructure would need a major overhaul to support the data availability and recoverability requirements of an electronic medical records (EMR) initiative. While most everyone understood the value of EMR, it was imperative that senior management, doctors, nurses, and all other employees had confidence that the system would work as planned and electronic patient information would always be readily available and recoverable in the event of a disaster.

Nearly five years ago, we developed an infrastructure renewal plan that would serve as the foundation for our EMR system and future initiatives. The key stage of the plan was to develop and implement an enterprise storage consolidation and disaster recovery strategy. This phase of the project involved our data storage devices, application servers, and desktop systems – essentially all of the key components of our infrastructure. We decided on JJWild's Integrated Disaster Recovery solution, specifically designed for MEDITECH. The solution involved new primary and secondary enterprise data storage solutions at two different sites and was implemented in a manner that provided our data with enhanced recoverability.

Our goal was to upgrade our existing MEDITECH infrastructure and provide a scalable disaster recovery design, given stringent budgetary and technical constraints. We required a solution that could replicate both MEDITECH, enterprise, and PACS data to a secondary data center with limited high speed data connections, and yet remain flexible to accommodate new future technologies when available to reduce our Recovery Point Objective (RPO) and Recovery Time Objective (RTO). The disaster recovery site would also have to factor in construction of a new hospital while maintaining application availability.

I built a business case for the infrastructure renewal project that focused on upgrading the hospital's IT infrastructure service levels to be in sync with our evolving healthcare delivery goals. It was critical that I demonstrate that an upgraded infrastructure coupled with detailed procedural documentation would ensure data survivability and recovery in the event of a minor or major disaster. It was also important for senior managers to recognize that this project was just one important component of our overall long-term IT strategic plan that would provide a robust, scalable infrastructure and would support our future healthcare initiatives.

Before we began the RFP process we started working with MEDITECH and various vendors to gain a thorough understanding of budgets, constraints, and requirements to accomplish the project. I also recognized the need for strategic support that could help implement the project while sharing an enterprise-wide vision of our long-term goals. It took about a year to get the project approved and another year to work through the RFP.

At this time, I turned to JJWild for their demonstrated expertise in implementing disaster recovery solutions with MEDITECH hospitals. I felt that their close relationships with BridgeHead and EMC, as well as their participation in the product testing and certification efforts, would help mitigate risks in planning and implementing our solution. I also felt strongly that if and when we needed support, JJWild's familiarity with all elements of the solution would be critical.

JJWild's technology consultants helped us review our storage architecture and map out a logical disaster recovery plan. They played a major role in educating users and others that would be affected by the project which helped to smooth the adoption process. I also relied on the JJWild project management team to act as the key liaison with our staff and all of the technology vendors. It was obvious to me that the project participants from the various vendors had experience and trust working together. Because the project managers were involved in every aspect of the implementation, from planning and site readiness

through documentation delivery, our internal IT team was free to focus on their piece of the project. This coordinated effort significantly reduced implementation time and reduced the risk of errors throughout the project. In fact, there was not a single change order required after the solution was implemented.

Our offsite disaster recovery solution is now up and running and our managers and users are confident that our infrastructure renewal project will support EMR and future initiatives geared toward improving Bluewater's healthcare delivery. And, to ensure that we continue to meet our service level commitments and our customers' expectations, our ongoing plan includes periodic testing of the disaster recovery solution, for which we also contracted with JJWild.

JJWild's technology experience and leadership throughout the project were major reasons why the project was completed smoothly and on budget.