

# Inside Perspective

Helping you unleash the full power of MEDITECH

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## What's your plan?

Joe Grinstead, Managing Director of Consulting

There is no energy shortage in today's MEDITECH world. The words you hear are "upgrade," "Client/Server," "5.6," "6.0," "Virtualization," "Disaster Recovery," "Advanced Clinicals," and on and on. If you happen to manage an IT organization, it's tough to figure out what to tackle first.

Of course, you could do nothing and hope it all sorts itself out down the road. But if that's your approach, you also might want to make sure the resume is up to date, and start repositioning the funds in your 401k. All of the buzzwords above are real. They're happening today, and no healthcare IT organization can afford to sit by and not engage.

It might not happen overnight, but the passive IT head can assume a couple of outcomes. First, the organization will progressively marginalize the IT department, and decide they don't bring any value to the organization. They'll reduce funding or avoid investment and ultimately determine that they need something—and someone—else. Second, the organization will impose IT projects on the IT department without any thought to logical order, infrastructure capabilities, and integration. Of course, the results will probably not be what they're looking for; satisfaction with IT will wane, and eventually there will be changes made, starting at the top.

Fact is, you need to do something to chart a course that ensures that your IT organization will remain responsive to the strategic needs of your organization. And that takes planning.

### It all starts with a plan.

A plan creates and outlines a vision. This vision is key to getting the larger organization to accept a common destination. For example, the arrival of MEDITECH Client/Server 6.0 is one catalyst prompting organizations to map out their long term plan. Another is a possible MAGIC to Client/Server conversion. Once everyone agrees where they are going, you can help decide how to get there—and this is where it gets interesting.

There are several characteristics to look for in a successful strategic plan. A good plan is:

#### **Realistic.**

Everyone may have grand visions, but the ultimate plan must be grounded in reality. Limitations on time, resources, and technology have to be factored into the plan, both in terms of scope and timing.

#### **Specific.**

A well-developed plan has specific, measurable objectives. You need to know exactly what you are going to do, whom it will affect, and how it's going to change the organization.

#### **Aligned.**

IT's main job is supporting the delivery of healthcare; the plan must be aligned with the objectives and challenges of the healthcare business. As a geek at heart, I love new technologies like super-fast networks, fast servers, and cool handhelds. But technology only has value to healthcare if it helps healthcare workers do their job better, faster, and easier. To receive management support, a plan should be developed as a collaborative effort among operational leaders, physicians, and other stakeholders. Whatever you do, it should help everyone else do their jobs.

#### **Challenging.**

If you're only going to do the easy stuff, don't worry about a plan. But most of what needs to be done in healthcare is hard work. The objectives in the plan should stretch the organization to deliver real additional value.

**Comprehensive.**

The plan should serve as the major playbook for the entire IT department over multiple years. It's not just about Nursing Documentation, or some other hot button. Think about the not-so-hot issues like revenue cycle, supply chain, and decision support. (Who knows, there might be enough money in the revenue cycle to help fund that conversion to Client/Server!)

**Governed.**

The plan should outline how its execution will be overseen and managed. This is best led by a senior executive in the organization with the credibility and influence to push change and remove barriers.

One major advantage of a good plan is that it helps everyone see the big picture and understand the overall investment needed. Ideally, the organization will commit multi-year funding to the plan in the interest of making long-term progress.

Another key advantage is that the plan will help IT stay focused on the bigger picture of efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and integration, and stay out of the "cool application du jour" hamster cage. When a department shows up on the IT doorstep with Bob's Great Departmental Application, it needs to fit into the plan and the vision, or it shouldn't get funded.

Always keep in mind, getting to the Holy Grail—whatever it is for your organization—won't be a sprint. Treat it like a marathon. Pace yourself, plan well, and enjoy the road!

*Joe Grinstead has over thirteen years of healthcare experience with a focus on MEDITECH. As a former regional CIO of a four hospital system in San Antonio, he has a broad understanding of the IT issues across the healthcare continuum. Joe's areas of expertise include IT Strategic Planning; implementation project management; administrative, financial, and clinical management; and technology infrastructure and networking.*