

X-RAY & MAMMOGRAPHY

► X-ray Storage and Delivery on Demand

Bridging the physical and digital radiology divide, Starpoint Global Services, Chapel Hill, NC, has introduced a solution that allows for physical off-site storage of patient films and digital retrieval.

Through X-ray On Demand, radiology departments and practices can request films stored at the off-site Starpoint Information Management Center via telephone, fax, or a Web portal called RSWeb. The films are digitized and formatted into a DICOM, which can be read and archived by standard PACS, regardless of the vendor.

The digitized image is window leveled, and it can be combined with an indexing of patient demographic and exam information. Using a secure Virtual Private Network, films are sent directly into a hospital's PACS, where they are available for analysis and comparison with existing digital images.

Matt O'Brien, national solutions engineer for Starpoint, said the company began in the records management industry in the same way their competitors started in the market: storing boxes and files, and physically delivering those requested. For this service alone, there is a significant demand in the health care space, he said.

"Records are misplaced and lost, and space is always at a premium within hospitals and centers," O'Brien said. "Through our process of bar code labeling each patient's jacket, we provide real-time tracking of all files under our stewardship and greatly reduce inefficiency and liability."

When Starpoint began to see a trend toward PACS, the company decided to follow its customers' lead and pursue more efficient technology.

"As opposed to our health care clients, who were aggressively pursuing more efficient technology, records management companies were more than content to sit idly by with a 'business as usual' attitude," O'Brien said. "We took a chance and hit a chord with the industry by investing in Kodak film digitizers, upgrading our IT security and increasing our data transmission capabilities."

Later, Starpoint reinvested in additional Vidar digitizers with mammography capability, permitting its clients to obtain full-field digital mammography and select the image-acquisition device of their

choice: CCD versus laser. O'Brien said clients appreciated the ability to work in an all-digital reading environment instead of interpreting from a computer screen and comparing to a light box. The largest benefit of the service is increased speed, productivity, and efficiency of departments and radiologists, according to O'Brien, who points out that Starpoint offers 30-minute guaranteed delivery of any study.

Roy Leyva, radiology coordinator at CHRISTUS Spohn Hospital Kleberg in Kingsville, Tex, agrees. Before utilizing the X-ray On Demand service, storage of archives at his facility was not easily accessible, especially after hours, he said.

In the hopes of finding a particular file, clerks were forced to rummage through files in four or five different areas. Even more, when removed from the department, patient films were not in temperature- and humidity-controlled environments. Since acquiring the Starpoint solution, workflow processes for Leyva have significantly improved.

"I can ask for a copy of film or a digital compressed e-file of data, or a light-speed transmittal of elected data onto my servers for instantaneous lookup and see," he said. "The team at Starpoint is very customer friendly

and offer presidential attention, regardless of my facility's 'small size.' "

Another benefit Leyva has enjoyed is the cost of managing films. Storage space at his facility is at a premium. In 5 years, millions of films would have to be digitized at a rate of what he estimates as 25 cents per film, plus the cost of equipment. Completing this monumental task in a timely manner would require much effort from personnel. For Leyva, Starpoint "was the only logical and cost-effective solution." The pricing structure consists of three rates: a one-time fee to intake; a monthly fee per jacket; and a film digitization fee per sheet.

O'Brien added that Starpoint also integrates libraries of outside clinics that are connected into the hospital's PACS, providing immediate seamless coverage to a network of institutions. The company also offers initial bar code labeling of jackets, keying medical record numbers, names, dates of birth, and last dates of service into the system upon inception of each film library. With Starpoint handling storage, facilities can reclaim space for new equipment and increase ROI.

Starpoint operates three sites, in Dallas and Chapel Hill and Wilmington, NC—"but that leaves a lot of miles between Starpoint and most of our clients," O'Brien said. The company faces a perception challenge, with potential customers concerned about having their films stored in a completely different state.

"What we demonstrate is that geographic boundaries are no longer significant in today's digital health care environment," O'Brien said. "We have a lot of bandwidth coming into our sites with multiple T1s that allow us to digitize and transmit images within 30 minutes at any time, guaranteeing immediate service regardless of distance."

"Also, as a long-established records-management business we have environmental mediation strategies and systems that guarantee uninterrupted service even in the event of natural disasters."

—Elaine Sanchez

