



## **Planning is Key to Your Future Success**

### *Establish your beachhead for a speedy recovery*

*By: Ward Keever, CTG HealthCare Solutions Executive Director of Executive Services*

Well, here we are: right in the middle of a full-fledged recession that includes reduced revenues, increased free care and accounts receivable (due to an increase in slow payers), and an all-out effort to conserve capital and reduce operating expenses. It's certainly not a fun time. So what is a CIO to do? (Besides wait for spring!)

Let me suggest that one possibility is to begin planning for the upturn and recovery. Don't blow this idea off because you're spending your days fighting immediate fires and burning issues caused by the economy. Consider that this could be your best defense against becoming another cost center that needs to be reduced along with marketing. There's no consensus on when the recession will end or when federal funding of health initiatives will materialize, but what's certain is that they will. And when they do, you need to be ready: get yourself in position as an optimistic team player with a few suggestions to improve the future of your organization.

#### **Preserve your future**

As you optimize and cut costs, you need to know where you're headed. The last thing you need is to make decisions that address the immediate issues, but end up crippling your organization in the future. You must have a grip on what's vital to your business. To ensure that any cutbacks you make won't inhibit future initiatives to build and grow, you need a plan!

Strategic planning used to be in vogue, but seems to have gotten less attention in the past few years. CIOs, with more on their plates than they could comfortably handle, wondered if it was necessary to plan for more. Now is the perfect time, with new projects being deferred and unassigned resources available, for the strategic planning "trend" to come back into fashion. Consider undertaking an IT planning exercise now to build a case for obtaining capital funds and operating budget when we start coming out of this morass. Match the applications in your current portfolio to business and clinical capabilities for the future, so you know which existing capabilities are truly enabling and which ones do not have a prayer.

*Now is the perfect time, with new projects being deferred and unassigned resources available, for the strategic planning "trend" to come back into fashion.*



*What you'll get out of the IT strategic planning effort are the key business and clinical objectives that IT can enable to support your enterprise initiatives.*

## ***What's the big picture?***

If you decide to consider this advice, you'll first need to identify and understand your organization's strategic initiatives. So if your organization already has stated strategic initiatives, your plan must show how IT supports them. If not, let me suggest a few for your management team to consider:

- **Service excellence:** Make your organization the provider of choice within your geographical area by building healthy, long-term relationships with patients, referring physicians, payers, and employers
- **Network development:** Develop complete and regionally-dispersed healthcare networks to patients via referrals from clinicians in the surrounding geographic region
- **Health system integration:** Create and promote healthcare networks that leverage your organization's knowledge and capability to improve patient care and service, e.g., manage risk-based contracts successfully via best practices protocols
- **Financial strength:** Grow revenues while driving down costs to ensure competitiveness and long-term financial strength
- **Research and clinical best practices:** For those of you who are in academic organizations, achieve academic excellence through innovation and evidence-based learning by accelerating fact-based disease management protocols and educational reform

## ***Where do I fit in?***

Once your leadership team agrees on the corporate strategic initiatives, you can develop your supporting IT initiatives by addressing the following four guiding principles for your enterprise:

1. **Structural integration:** Unifying the organization's corporate mission with its business objectives, clinical strategy, and management structure
2. **Operational integration:** Streamlining business and clinical processes that help organize the entire enterprise
3. **Clinical integration:** Aligning care delivery to ensure that a patient or member receives the same clinical care or advice, independent of where they are seen within the health system
4. **Information integration:** Creating an information infrastructure that enables any authorized user in any location to access clinical and business information, regardless of where that information was created or stored

The primary focus of the IT strategic plan is to identify key business and clinical initiatives and the organizational structure required to support the above listed goals with emphasis on information integration across the health system. Such key initiatives to address in your IT strategic plan might include:



*Ward Keever serves as Executive Director for CTG HealthCare Solutions' Executive Services. As a former CIO, he has over 35 years of experience in the healthcare IT industry, with a strong background in strategy development and implementing strategic and tactical IT systems in large health system settings and specific solutions for applications within the healthcare industry.*

*For more information, contact:  
Ward Keever  
ward.keever@ctghs.com*

- Establish identifiable, single accountability for information services
- Provide a means for individual patients to be uniquely identified throughout all care settings
- Give care providers access to all patient information at all points of care
- Coordinate the registration process across the enterprise, i.e. single registration and update of demographic information
- Make insurance eligibility and coverage information accessible at all points of care
- Maintain a single unified problem list for each patient, with direct input from all caregivers
- Schedule multiple services by different departments and/or settings in a coordinated way
- Produce information to meet payer requirements as a by-product of care delivery and documentation
- Enable physicians and other care providers to analyze costs and outcomes of care episodes that span multiple settings
- Allow risk managers to analyze utilization of services throughout the integrated delivery system by discrete member populations
- Achieve and document improved standards of care (not just standardized care)

Note that your IT strategic plan is not a list of new IT systems and replacement systems. That comes later. What you'll get out of the IT strategic planning effort are the key business and clinical objectives that IT can enable to support your enterprise initiatives. This will allow you to identify existing IT systems' capability requirements—and will also reveal any functionality gaps.

If you think it makes sense to plan for the upturn and position yourself as an optimistic team player who can contribute to your organization's future growth, take a look at past issues of *Insights* beginning with February 2005 [www.ctg.com/healthcare/insights.htm](http://www.ctg.com/healthcare/insights.htm). These back issues offer additional suggestions as you consider your path forward.

Tally Ho!

Ward