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Reducing the Labor Pains of Healthcare Payment Processing

By Scott Maurer

Olivia Newton John, perhaps the greatest singer of all time, put it best when she belted out the words, "Let's get physical." For in healthcare payment processing as in most other things, it all begins with the physical – paper in this case. Many have written and will continue to write about the workflow from the electronic standpoint. They will pretend that it all begins after nice neat stacks of paper, ready to be fed through high speed scanners, have been converted into images that now are routed to peoples' desktops.

The truth, however, is much uglier than that and begins way before that point in time. The physical workflow actually begins in the mailroom with trays and tubs and sacks of mail being delivered by our friends at the United States Post Office. They seem to never tire of bringing more work, more challenges every day but Sunday. The point is, the work that comes rolling in is not in clean, prepped piles but rather in envelopes.

Each envelope is like an oyster containing a pearl inside. The envelope must be handled in an efficient way or the number of pearls one can harvest is significantly limited. So it is here in the mailroom with the envelopes, that the journey actually begins. It is here, that you have the greatest certainty of what composes a transaction.

Chances are, if it came in the same envelope, it belongs together with the other pieces in that envelope. There really is no other prep necessary to determine what pieces go together. Why would one add steps to determine transaction boundaries? Why would one insert separator sheets? Why would one separate the contents of the envelope

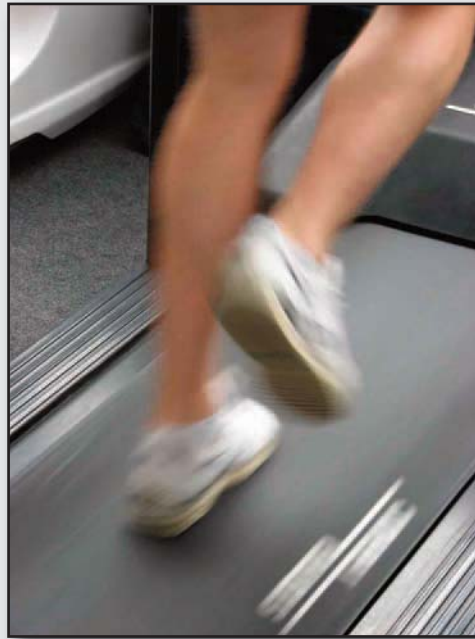
to process one part of the transaction through one piece of equipment and another piece of the transaction through another piece of equipment? Is this some evil social experiment to determine how the separation affects the related pieces? Sure, in most cases they come back

together; but what if this is not accomplished without additional steps and time? How does that affect the workflow and the efficiency of the overall operation?

I personally like to add as much complication and introduce as many chances for error as possible into everything I do. This allows me to feel triumphant when I overcome all of the self imposed hurdles. After all, what is success if it doesn't almost kill you? Some would say, "Sweeter."

Yes, most people like to do things in the most efficient and effective way possible. I say, as do many suppliers who require onerous prep steps to get from the envelope to electronic image, "Where is the fun in that?" Isn't the real fun in watching your clients struggle with learning all the new steps and then having a laugh as they have to try and track down that one piece that fell out of the stack on

the way to the scanner. It seems some of the physical paper workflows that are out there were developed by the Marquise de Sade rather than a kinder, gentler person – a person that wants what is best for the efficiency and effectiveness of their customers. Taking detours only serves to introduce risk and uncertainty into the process. The most direct route from envelope to electronic image is the one that converts images as early in the process as possible and goes directly from



envelope to image. This is something that OPEX has done for years. It began with the Image Export Module on our high speed extraction equipment and continues today with our AS and DS Series scanners. Designed to eliminate the prep steps necessary with other products, our document scanners allow you to remove contents directly from the envelope and place them on a drop feeder for immediate scanning – no in between prep steps, no separating of material into different physical workflows, no handling by multiple people and best of all – no delay in converting from paper to image.

The often ignored front end paper workflow can make or break a return on investment. If the software solution cannot work with a simplified input workflow, perhaps it is not as sophisticated as it is purported to be. At OPEX, we realize that this is sometimes the case and that is why we have built incredible intelligence into our scanners. It's intelligence that allows for real time human intervention when necessary.

Question: which seems the more direct route from envelope to image? One person extracting from the envelope and dropping directly onto the scanner feeder or one person extracting, performing a preliminary sort, stacking the contents, then handing the stacks off to a second person to transport them to the final prep area for final sorting and prep (including separating contents into like entities, insertion of separator sheets, batch header sheets, and whatever else it takes to make sure transaction integrity is main-

tained by a third person). This third person then hands the stacks off to a fourth person to transport them to the scanner, the scanner operator. This fifth person in the chain of custody, then jogs them and puts them on the scanner for scanning (remember, different parts of the

transaction may have gone to different scanners). After scanning is completed any necessary re-association of transaction parts is then performed.

While the later workflow does help to employ more people, it does nothing to keep the cost of the process in line with where it could be by employing the former process. So, let's get physical in an intelligent way that slims down the process and fattens the bottom line. After all, the important measurement is not how fast the scanner gobbles up the paper, it's how fast the paper can be converted from envelope to image. Our solutions have provided the answer to that question in thousands of mailrooms across the nation and around the world.

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