

Southern Radiology elevates performance with IBM U2 information management platform

Overview

■ The Challenge

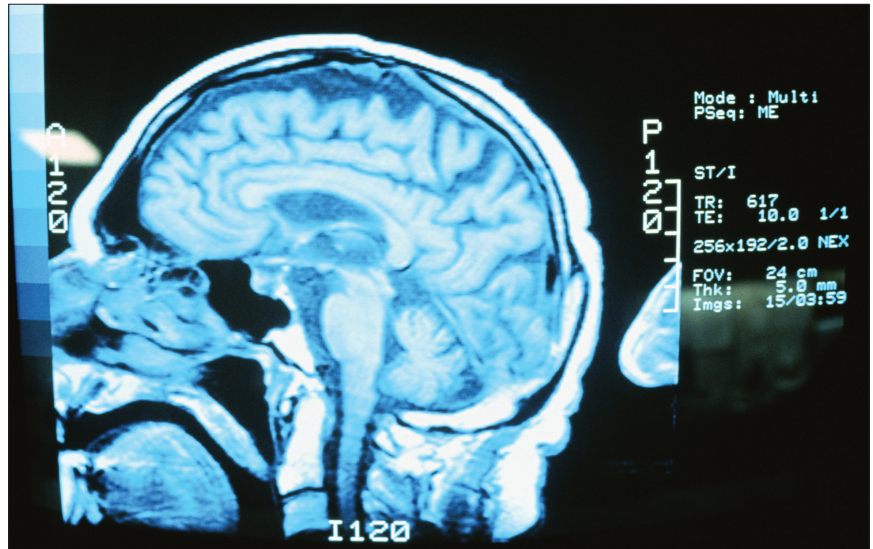
Medical imaging provider Southern Radiology lacked a centralised system to store, manage and distribute patient and financial information between its five locations in Sydney. The company also needed to manage the digital images produced by modern radiology equipment and integrate its systems with Medicare, the national health insurance scheme, to ensure rebates were received faster.

■ The Solution

Southern Radiology engaged IBM Business Partner[†] Healthinc to implement its OCCAM Radiology Information System, built on the IBM UniVerse and UniValue (U2) environment. Health Inc managed the implementation process, integrated the application with existing systems and external agencies and provided ongoing support and development.

■ The Benefits

Financial information is now managed centrally, improving reliability and speed. Patient turnaround times are faster, allowing radiologists to see more patients each day. Integration with Medicare has halved the turnaround time for rebates, improving cashflow. With the new system in place, Southern Radiology is now much closer to its goal of becoming a paperless office.



About Southern Radiology

Southern Radiology is the largest independent medical imaging provider in New South Wales. With offices at Bondi Junction, Hurstville, Menai and Miranda, the privately-owned business offers a comprehensive suite of radiology services, including general X-ray, ultrasound, computed tomography and magnetic resonance imaging.

Medical imaging provider needed to see through corporate walls

Southern Radiology is an independent medical imaging provider with practices located in Sydney's eastern and southern suburbs. Its team of six expert radiologists offers a comprehensive range of medical imaging services.

The competitive world of medical imaging hinges on providing high-quality, reliable and accurate service as quickly as possible. Providers can easily lose business if their standards don't meet or exceed those of their peers. Because Southern Radiology frequently deals with conditions that may have serious ramifications for their health and well-being, patients demand timely and reliable information.

“Information technology is a key competitive differentiator. Medical imaging is constantly evolving and many imaging systems are changing from film to digital. We need robust systems to support these new technologies.”

– Don Kelly, business manager at Southern Radiology.



About two years ago, Southern Radiology realised its existing information technology systems could not sustain the growth, rate of change and geographic distribution of its business. For administration tasks, each office had its own server running individual copies of software designed to service both general medical practices and radiology.

“Our business had no centralisation at all. If we wanted information from an individual site, we literally had to pick up the phone and call them.”

– Don Kelly, business manager at Southern Radiology.

In mid-2005, Southern Radiology decided to upgrade the business's information systems and drew up a list of requirements for the project.

“We wanted to centralise our financial management and patient data,” said Kelly. “We also felt it would improve our service if patients could book appointments at any clinic from any other clinic. Because so many of our tests generate digital results, we were also looking for a picture archive and communications system to manage digital images.”

To meet all these requirements, Southern Radiology realised it would have to consult a proven vendor with an extensive product suite and implementation partners with experience and understanding of the radiology business.

OCCAM and IBM U2 data servers increase transparency

Southern Radiology engaged IBM business partner Healthinc to deliver the technology refresh. In August 2006, Healthinc began deploying its OCCAM Radiology Information System (RIS), built using IBM UniData and UniVerse (U2) MultiValue data servers. The U2 environment stores and manages all patient and clinical data as well as billing information and appointment schedules.

The U2 platform gives Southern Radiology a high-performance, scalable information management environment. The MultiValue, or extended relational model, eliminates data redundancies and optimises performance.

The implementation – including training – took about two months. Healthinc rolled out the new technology to Southern Radiology's five practices one after the other, in order to minimise disruption to customer data and clinic workflows.

OCCAM handles a range of customer management tasks including billing and claims processes, emailing test results to referring doctors and sending patients SMS text messages with information such as appointment times. It allows authorised users to view electronic results on dedicated workstations, PCs and over the web.

Healthinc also integrated Southern Radiology's systems tightly with those of government health agencies. This includes direct billing to the Health Insurance Commission (HIC), the government agency that runs Australia's universal health insurance program, Medicare.

OCCAM was developed using IBM SystemBuilder tools – the IBM U2 SB+ rapid application development environment and the IBM U2 SBClient presentation layer. These tools make it easier to build and deploy software by allowing developers to quickly design IBM U2 data server structures and create applications without having to manually write code.

“The system is flexible, fast and robust. We’ve had very little downtime and we quickly gained confidence in its stability.”

– Don Kelly, business manager at Southern Radiology.

Healthinc provides ongoing support and continues to develop new applications. Healthinc maintains backup systems at its own datacentre, allowing Southern Radiology to switch systems with little or no loss of data in the event of an emergency.

“Healthinc is run by people who have worked in and understand the industry. Their service and support is far superior to other providers.”

– Don Kelly, business manager at Southern Radiology.

Improved cashflow, faster turnaround and robust environment

Integration with HIC has improved cashflow, halving the time it takes the organisation to receive Medicare rebates. The new environment has also helped Southern Radiology streamline its financial management.

The new system has also made a significant improvement to patient turnaround times and the overall efficiency of each practice.

“We can effectively double the number of patients our practice handles every day,” said Kelly. “It takes less time to register patients and much less time to type up a report on their conditions. The system can distribute radiologists’ dictated notes as voice files across the network, which means if one practice is very busy, staff at another clinic can take up some of their typing work.”

The robustness and performance of the new environment gives Southern Radiology confidence it has the capacity to grow with the organisation for the foreseeable future.

“We have a long-term vision to eliminate our reliance on paper across the business. With the new system we are now 80 per cent of the way there.”

– Don Kelly, business manager at Southern Radiology.

“From day one, we could view financial data from all our clinics, wherever we were. We can submit all our claims from a single point and access information about revenue from each site. It has also improved our dispute resolution and reconciliation processes.”

– Don Kelly, business manager at Southern Radiology.

To find out more about Healthinc and
OCCAM RIS go to www.healthinc.com.au

For Further about IBM

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