

Building with Digital from the Ground Up

Case Study - *MedExpress Urgent Care, Florida*

By Troy Steckler, Clinical Director

MedExpress currently operates in three locations. By the end of 2008, there will be ten more. Digital imaging archiving and communications is accomplished with a centralized MIDAS PACS server by AMS.

Urgent care centers are an emerging resource for healthcare. They are designed to provide patients with a quality, affordable and timely option for care when life's unexpected illnesses and injuries occur, while helping take the strain off overcrowded emergency departments and physicians' offices.

At MedExpress

Urgent Care, patients can be seen and treated for such ailments as common colds, flu, sore throats, earaches, bronchitis, asthma, headaches, back pain, skin infections, rashes, and bladder infections, just to name a few. Further, MedExpress performs x-rays and sutures in house, and can thus treat common injuries such as sprains, fractures, lacerations and animal bites. School, sports and work physicals are also available.

MedExpress Urgent Care centers differ from regular doctors' offices in several key aspects: The centers offer extended evening and weekend hours. No appointments are necessary. Patients can walk in from 9am-9pm, 7 days a week.

Efficiency is Everything

The key to MedExpress Urgent Care's business model is efficiency. Not having a guaranteed stream of patients like a physician's practice, we must build customer loyalty with quality and timely service. And we must do this with a minimum number of qualified medical personnel in the minimum square footage.

From the beginning, we knew that we had to use digital imaging.

Film-based x-ray systems require more space. Additionally, operating and maintaining a film-based practice takes a specific skill set increasingly hard to find, has negative environmental considerations and requires more operational time than the use of a CR or DR.



MedExpress centers provide a warm and welcoming environment.

We selected CR. Although DR was an attractive alternative, CR offered us greater flexibility, and it was significantly less expensive.

The next step was to determine the images would be read, by whom and where. Our local radiology dealer indicated that to have the most flexibility, we would need to network our offices with a PACS (Picture Archiving and Communication System). This would allow us to take images at one

location, have the local healthcare professional do a "wet read", and at the same time send the images to a radiologist who would complete the diagnosis for multiple offices.

We selected American Medical Sales' ("AMS") PACS-1M for our first office. This is the smallest solution in AMS' PACS-in-a-BOX line designed

for users like us who do not have dedicated on-site IT staff. We initially intended to install this product in each of our offices. However, when

AMS received our next two orders, their technical sales group recognized the possibility that a more centralized model might work better for us.

"As the imaging network provider, we establish a long term relationship with both our distributor and their customer," Daniel Giesberg, President of American Medical Sales, told me. "Therefore, we monitor what our distributors are quoting and we don't hesitate to offer suggestions if we feel an alternative solution will ultimately work better for the end-user. The old model of a linear relationship between the manufacturer, the distributor and the end-user does not work in digital imaging. The new model is what I call a "triangle relationship," where all three parties work together and each party has a direct relationship with the others. The distributor provides essential local service and the PACS provider offers the technical software support and depth of digital imaging knowledge." Service is provided both locally (by the distributor) and remotely (by the PACS provider) with the aim of keeping the PACS network effective and efficient as the end-user's business grows and changes.

More Heads, Better Thinking

After reviewing our second order, AMS contacted our distributor with a "hub and spoke" solution. This provided several advantages that we had not considered. First, although the price we paid for our second and third offices remained approximately the same, subsequent offices will be added at a lower per unit cost. Second, the MIDAS PACS server that AMS recommended can be configured to give us complete redundant archiving, and our archive can be located in two locations, giving us more physical security and complying with HIPAA guidelines. Third, MIDAS provided additional features such as removable back-up drives, a web-server and a CD recorder and color labeler.

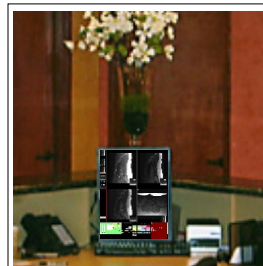
Using this model, all images can be quickly reviewed by our local healthcare professionals

as the images are also automatically routed to our staff radiologist. With AMS' "push" technology web server, the images can follow our readers to any off-site location, as well.

We have now placed orders for our fourth and fifth offices, and our plan is to open eight more by the end of 2008. At each new location, all we need to add is a viewing station and an image router. Since our customers will not necessarily return, we also like to provide them with copies of their images. The AMS CD Recorder and Labeler accomplishes this function. AMS custom designs a MedExpress label for each location, which also acts as a cost-effective marketing tool.

Teamwork is Key to Supporting PACS

Proper selection of your PACS vendor is key to a successful experience. There are large international companies and "software-only" companies in addition to companies like AMS that provide both hardware and software solutions. One issue that was not part of our selection criteria, but which has become a critical plus, is that AMS writes and supports its own software. When we have a deeper level question, we have direct access to their software development team in California. Answers and solutions come quickly. With large international companies, our ability to find creative solutions in a timely fashion would be limited, and tracking the responsible parties with offshore firms or firms using third party software would be more difficult, if not impossible.



The AMS PACS is central to our efficient digital imaging solution.

As our MedExpress Urgent Care Center model continues to grow and evolve, we will use the lessons learned in selecting our PACS solutions when we select vendors for other products and services we will need to add. The information age has changed the rules of the relationships between customer, distributor and manufacturer. It is important for us to identify those companies that appreciate this new reality.



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