

IT Strategy for Hospitals

Healthcare is one of the oldest industries in the world and one of the biggest too (more than 4 trillion dollars cost this year). It is also one of the only legacy industries that has resisted deployment of automation solutions globally. That is changing for the past few years however, under severe pressure from several stake holders like patients, Governments, and insurance companies. Yet hospitals, automation journeys till now have been far from perfect. They do not have the right toolsets, knowledge bank, and IT industry insights to help them do the following key activities successfully:

Understand their automation requirements

Understand their IT infrastructure requirements

Analyze the applications and infrastructure options available in the market

Select the right applications and infrastructure for their requirement and budget

Deploy the application and infrastructure in a manner that gets the most benefit out of their investments

A hospital's IT strategy should lay down the framework for IT focus areas for the next two to five years. The strategy is based on requirement definitions from managements of the clinical centers and the administrative departments. As a thumb rule, the focus should be on the solution of everyday IT problems which employees may encounter, in a hospital with existing IT programs. For Greenfield projects and hospitals with no IT, it boils down to prioritizing budgeting for respective area's automation.

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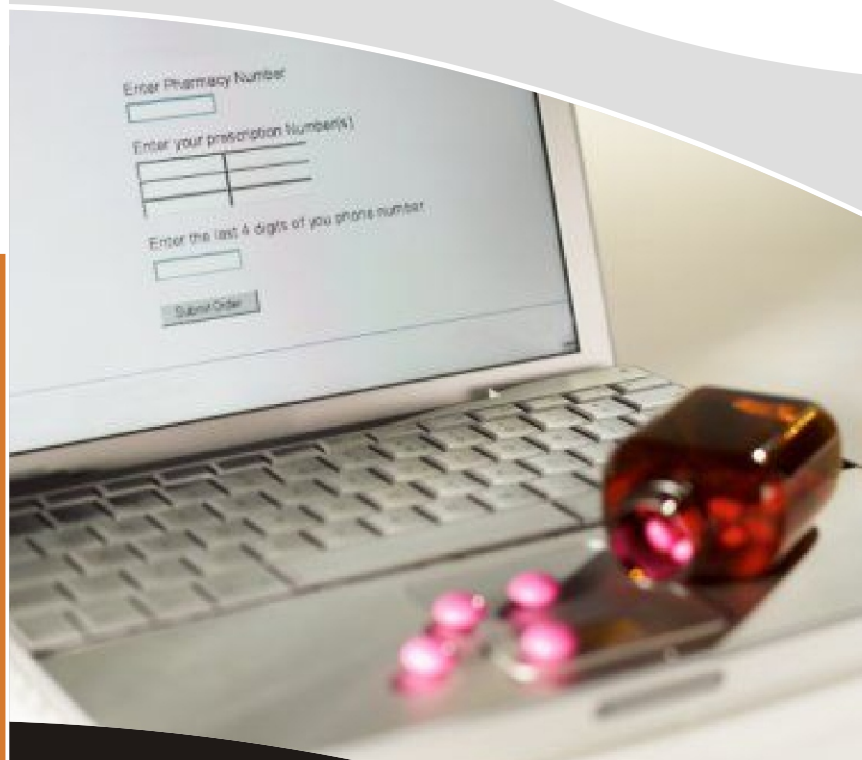
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Purpose of IT Strategy

The purpose of creating this IT strategy which is to a large extent a declaration of intent will be to set the direction wanted by the hospital concerned. Most hospitals will have the following on their 'Wants' list:

- Stable operations
- Optimal use of IT resources already deployed
- Demonstrable ROI, in the shape of improved administrative and clinical functioning, cost savings, and image building
- Scalability

IT strategy created by our consultants will ensure that efforts on the IT area are coordinated and provide optimal effect and synergy. The strategy will support resource prioritization for various IT areas, and their optimal use.

The key to developing the hospital's IT strategy will be a clear understanding of the hospital's Mission Statement. IT infrastructure and application suite dedicated to support the mission of a University teaching hospital, may be quite inappropriate for a corporate for profit hospital's mission. The management's action plan pre-supposes a review of the hospital's mission statement and values. For a typical University Tertiary Care facility, the following points may set out the framework for the IT efforts which the IT strategy will therefore support.

- Be the leading institution for highly specialized diagnostics, treatment and care
- Perform Clinical Research of high International standards
- Educate health professionals of various super specialties
- Deliver professional advice and share knowledge with external institutions
- Deliver affordable care

Elements of IT Strategy

Prior to the formulating the hospital's strategy, our consultants will survey and have follow-up meetings with the heads of the clinical centers and administrative departments to identify their needs for automation. These needs can be summarised under five headings:

Optimizing use (existing IT systems)

Focus will be directed at optimizing the use of existing systems. For hospitals with no IT, a detailed list of requirement and workflows will be created much before budgeting and vendor short listing.

Training:

Targeted training of employees in the use of existing systems and introduction of new employees to basic IT, will be a mandatory part of hospital IT strategy. Cross training and maintaining a pool of 'Super Users' who can train and support other users, will be a key training requirement, for long term successful IT automation.

Support:

A plan for infrastructure and application support will be created as part of the hospital's IT strategy. Adequate budgeting for these activities will be a must to ensure long term viability of the program. Easy 24x7 access to the Help Desk, grouping and managing all support in one place, super user/trainers availability for on-going training, hand holding of new employees, and quick infrastructure fault turnaround and redressal will be an essential part of the support strategy.

IT Project Management:

Our consultants will list out all IT projects planned for the next few years, allot resources and managers for them, and establish effective tracking matrices to ensure ontime and within budget delivery of the projects. Senior members of the IT departments will be exposed and trained in standard IT project management methodologies. Listing of project deliverables, time-lines, risks, and mitigations will be made second habit for all IT department resources.

Objectives of IT Strategy for Hospitals

We help Hospitals to plan for 'Simple IT which strengthens the hospital'. Fancy features promoted by vendors and hardly used by the hospitals, are poor use of scarce funding. Objectives of the IT Strategy will be based on this vision and guided by the hospital's core philosophy. These objectives lay down the direction in which the hospital will go, and meet the future requirements for the hospital. The following core objectives will be supported by the IT strategy created by our consultants:

1. Support industry standard work-flows:

Our consultants will strive to ensure that IT solutions which are deployed will support all essential benchmarked processes in relation to patient care, documentation of care, billing and other administrative activities.

2. Support treatment quality and patient safety:

Hospital Quality Teams working on improvements to treatment quality and patient safety have a need for easy access to documentation provided by clinical and administrative IT systems. Accreditation also makes demands on documentation of clinical activities documentation of a quality that can be supported by IT. This is relevant to both the current accreditation from NABH and the Joint Commission International. documentation of care, billing and other administrative activities.

Our consultants are mandated to foster and engender cooperation between the hospital quality team and management of clinical IT systems. Prioritization of requirements to new systems and change requests to existing systems will be done with patient safety as a primary driver (fewer errors and fewer unintended events).

3. Support administration and service functions with IT

The IT Strategy should contribute to ensuring an effective use of resources, both in administration and the many service functions which are important in the support of the hospital's core services.

The IT systems contain increasingly large amounts of data, and it will be the endeavor of our consultants to enable extraction of this data using reporting tools, so that the resulting information can be used to track and improve various administrative matrices.

4. Support development of IT skills

Today's employees expect professional development opportunities and a flexible and dynamic workplace and IT becomes an increasingly integrated part of the working day at a hospital. The IT skills level of the employees will be monitored and updated so that IT infrastructure and applications can be maintained in the best possible way. Furthermore, new employees will be offered training in both clinical and administrative IT systems. The hospital environment makes demands for flexible teaching methods and easy access to teaching material. Hosted self paced learning as a method of teaching will be deployed to contribute to training at a highly specialised level, and at the same time fulfill a wish that training can take place at a time most suitable to the user.

Fast, skilled and person-independent support structures will be created by training a group of resources with inbuilt redundancy, to support the hospital's clinical and administrative core processes.