BC Advantage

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5 minutes with... Mick Polo

1. Tell us about your background and how you got started in the industry.

My father, Michael and Uncle David, founded our company in 1985. They focused on the development of medical software and created the original version of our practice management system. They quickly realized selling the software was not the solution that met the needs of the physicians' offices and transitioned the company into the billing service we are today that includes practice management functions, accounts receivable management and medical billing consulting.

I was always around the family business doing odd jobs and helping through the early stages. I continued to work part time throughout college. After completing my bachelor's degree I told my father and uncle I would work with them until I found a "real job" as I was interviewing and considering opportunities from various companies. I'm proud to say that was about fourteen years ago and my career is as real as it gets!

Since I started at NCDS we have progressed from a small three-room office where I sat cramped at my desk pushed in the corner of the hall to now occupying the majority of the fourth floor of our office building. The "corner office" is much more comfortable than the surroundings of our humble beginnings. Being a part of the progress has given me a true appreciation for the work involved in our daily operations and a respect for what it takes to endure business through the years.

2. In your role as President what do you feel are your biggest challenges for the future of your company?

There will always be challenges on the horizon and it's important to have a plan for any foreseeable event.

The evolution of our company leadership to the next generation is an important milestone that we've planned and prepared to meet. As a family business, we not only need to consider what makes financial and managerial sense, but also how to do this in a manner that keeps us all together at the dinner table afterwards.

We are continually planning and adjusting to the new technologies that surround our business. We are concentrating on EMR/HER strategies and how to accent the advantages our company can bring our clients and prospective clients who are working with these systems.

Finally, gaining an understanding of the opportunities in the health care reform the President and Congress are proposing. We are in a highly regulated industry with many compliance challenges. Conforming to these policies is an important standard of quality and care that distinguishes NCDS from other third party billing companies.

3. Your company started out providing software to providers and eventually turned into a billing company. What are the advantages of having developed your own software for your company's use?

Having our own software is a great business asset. We are able to maintain and upgrade it in-house. We can quickly prioritize and adapt to new insurance file formats for electronic claims and/or remittance, HIPPA transaction standards, etc. making immediate adjustments through our direct relationships with insurance carriers. This keeps claims and revenue moving for our clients. Many others are at the mercy of software vendors and clearing houses, waiting for changes and upgrades.

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In addition we can add features to improve workflow, avoid insurance denials, reporting, and better automate our billing process. It is completely customizable to our ever-changing needs. It has evolved and grown with us through the years becoming the backbone of our operation.

With an overwhelming number of software products available to medical practices having our own software allow us to integrate our practice management system with other products to provide our clients with a seamless link between billing, scheduling and EMR/EHR.

4. Continuing to grow your business is a challenge in any economy let alone the one that we are in now, so how do you go about marketing your company to prospective clients?

Our marketing starts first and foremost with our existing clients. They are at the core of our business and by providing excellent service to them we can solicit referrals. By growing around our current clients we are able to quickly build experience for a particular specialty, a market or region, specific insurance carriers, patient populations, etc to enhance our performance. We work to build a lifetime relationship with our clients and connect with their colleagues to become true business partners for the long term. Helping them meet there needs at a level that encourages them to refer their friends.

We focus on private practice office based physician groups in and around Ohio. We educate ourselves on our competition. We search geographically for prospective clients in new marketplaces that provide the biggest opportunities. We use traditional marketing and advertising efforts to support our professional networking to farm new leads but we often return to client testimonials to truly broadcast the value of our services.

5. How important is your web presence to your marketing plan?

Our website, www.ncdsinc.com, has developed into a significant resource for current and prospective clients. It is the most practical way to provide information about our company to physicians in need of our service and account data to their patients.

Our website has a patient portal to view and update demographic and insurance information, access patient accounts and pay bills online. The client login allows them to look up individual accounts in real-time, monitor collections and view or print reports. It is an incredibly valuable tool for keeping everyone informed no matter what aspect you work with NCDS.

6. and 7. In your opinion, what sets your company apart from the rest? How would you describe the culture in your organization?

Our culture shines through in the work we do and is the distinctive factor that defines NCDS. We take pride in it. You can expect a personalized, professional service from a team of hard working, accountable, knowledge employees. We focus exclusively on the relationship and the results.

My father and Uncle instilled values of right and wrong and customer service in me that have transcended throughout the organization. I think we have an old fashioned work ethic that is refreshing these days. Everyone focuses on their role but also lends a hand when the team is in need. We keep in touch with our clients, calling and meeting them regularly, answering questions and responding promptly. There are too many businesses that overlook these simple professional courtesies.

We say, "Everything leaves our office in a 'suit and tie'"... that dress code applies not only our clothes but also any correspondence, claim or phone call; it will be well presented, accurate, polished.

8. and 9.How do you stay on top of the many changes in this industry? There are many specialties that your company bills for, therefore your staff need to be proficient in many different areas. How does your company help your staff remain on the top of their game?

The billing and coding industry is different from what it was ten years ago, ten months ago and potentially even from ten weeks or ten days ago. We constantly receive, read and evaluate information from CMS, our local Medicare and Medicaid carriers and other insurances as well as use several subscription services that provide specialty information and coding updates.

I try to lead by example... I am a Certified Healthcare Billing & Management Executive through the HBMA. I attend educational events regularly and focus on self-improvement to increase my industry knowledge and business skills. I strongly encourage all our employees to be life long learners.

We support continuing education for our certified coders and billers, allowing them the time for seminars, reimbursement for CEUs, and creating a plan with them to stay current and up to date. Other employees are involved in college courses that further their business and management understanding.