Powering decade-long growth for Acadiana Computer Systems

Founded in 1969, Acadiana Computer Systems, Inc. (ACS) is a Louisiana-based company that provides revenue cycle management services, proprietary revenue cycle management software and health care consulting services to more than 4,000 providers ranging from large academic teaching facilities to physician practices and other health care entities.

Background

Before 2006, ACS coded directly from paper-based clinical records for its numerous health care clients, a labor-intensive process. As the business experienced unprecedented growth beginning in the mid-2000s, it became apparent to company executives that new technology would be needed if they were going to achieve their ambitious business goals.

ACS began looking for a computer-assisted coding (CAC) solution that would allow the company to keep up with its fast-growing volume while helping to maintain accuracy and compliant claims, without adding staff and costs.

Challenges

The company sought a CAC solution that would meet several demanding requirements.

The system needed to be:

- Robust enough to handle the projected increase in volume and customers
- Flexible enough to handle ACS' unique business structure and operational needs
- Adaptable, so that it required no major changes in the way physicians dictated reports
- Easily interfaced with ACS' proprietary software system
- Capable of adapting to ever-changing industry regulations

Also, since the CAC system would be integral to its business, ACS deemed it essential to have an ongoing, collaborative relationship with the company providing the solution.

By implementing Optum® CAC Professional, ACS:

- Achieved a 50% improvement in productivity for radiology coding
- Reduced claim denial rate by up to 10%
- Doubled the number of documents processed per hour
- Successfully transitioned to ICD-10 without a decrease in productivity

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Solutions

After a thorough evaluation of CAC vendors and products, ACS selected Optum® Computer-Assisted Coding Professional. CAC Professional is powered by proprietary and patented natural language processing (NLP) technology from Optum, which leverages more than 10 million medical facts to read physician documentation and understand grammar and syntax, identifying key clinical facts and mapping those facts to codes.

"It was the best product out there," says Tina Burley, director of integration and client support for ACS. "We had tested quite a few and CAC Professional was the most flexible and accurate, and the easiest to work with."

The technology also has the adaptability needed for a company that provides services to a variety of different hospital-based physicians, hospitals and practices. "We didn't want to go to our providers and tell them they had to change the way they did their dictation," says Peggy Kelly, chief operating officer for ACS. "With CAC Professional, doctors don't have to change their dictation styles. The intelligent engine reads the full body of the report and does not code from the title. It's a more compliant product. It all comes down to the NLP engine and its capabilities."

Kelly has also been impressed with the system's integration capability. "You cannot argue with the quality of the automation. The exports are handled so meticulously from CAC Professional to our proprietary software that the chance of human error is removed."

Today, more than a decade after the system was first implemented, ACS President Tim Anderson sees it as a key contributor to the company's growth. "The Optum technology enables us to be successful. The efficiency is remarkable. We now have a predictable environment that allows us to take on more clients and grow the business without adding staff."

Anderson also points out that CAC Professional has become a differentiator in ACS' drive to be more competitive. It has allowed the company to meet clients' price point expectations while ensuring quality. "By using sophisticated coding technology, we are able to demonstrate to prospective clients that we can get work done efficiently while consistently getting to the right codes." The result: ACS has added new sites each year since the system was implemented.

The close working relationship has benefited both companies. "Part of our reputation is given over to Optum," says Anderson. "They have to be our partner. There has to be a trust. They've always had an open ear and we enjoy a healthy exchange of ideas on how to grow together."

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We recognized that CAC Professional was just more sophisticated than the other CAC applications out there. I've kept an eye on the market over the years, and I still haven't seen anything better.

Tim Anderson
President
Acadiana Computer Systems, Inc.

Results

ACS has achieved significant improvements since it adopted CAC Professional. These include:

Increased efficiency

By automating code suggestions, reducing manual processes and streamlining workflow, coder productivity has doubled since the implementation of the CAC system. "Without CAC Professional, I doubt we could produce 50% of the work we do in a day," says Anderson.

Improved accuracy

ACS has seen considerable increases in coding accuracy since adopting the CAC technology. Coding without errors has improved by 85%–95%, and as a result, there has been a 7%–10% reduction in claim denials.

Enhanced compliance

ACS was looking for consistency across its coding staff. The CAC Professional environment helps ensure uniformity while easily handling the unique aspects of each site. According to Anderson, "We now have a more predictive environment from one coder to another, which is just as important as being efficient."

Streamlined workflow

Client-defined work queues let ACS managers organize and route work using customized criteria. The system's automated workflow ensures that the right document is sent to the right coder at the right time — speeding processing and preventing bottlenecks. Automation of charge entry has also had a positive effect on ACS' workflow, boosting productivity and compliance while supporting the organization's efforts to strengthen its bottom line and offer its clients competitive rates.

Better management reporting

Managers can quickly access operational data using the system's extensive reporting capabilities. The executive dashboard helps track the progress of documents through the coding cycle, monitors the productivity of local and remote coders, and helps improve ongoing compliance efforts.

By monitoring daily workflows, managers can easily pinpoint problems and address processing snags. "We use the dashboard to make sure that everything is being completed in a 24- to 48-hour time frame," says Burley. "The system's coding reports are also great for physician education and coder training."

CAC Professional handles over a million radiology transactions, more than 90,000 cardiology transactions and upward of 30,000 emergency department transactions each year for ACS.

ACS' ICD-10 transition beats the odds

Many radiology industry experts projected a 20% decrease in productivity during the transition to ICD-10, with some forecasting a permanent negative impact. Optum and CAC Professional helped ensure that ACS beat the odds.

"On October 1, we made a full transition to ICD-10" says Peggy Kelly, chief operating officer for ACS. "For us it had minimal impact. By December, we were back to our pre-ICD-10 productivity levels."

Roadmap to success

Optum supported the transition from ICD-9 to ICD-10 with analytics that showed how the clients' current straight-to-bill rules would be affected by the ICD-10 implementation. These analytics provided the specific roadmap to set up and verify ICD-10 straight-to-bill rules prior to the October 1, 2015, switchover.

Hitting the ground running

Three of ACS' largest customers process more than 30% of their volume straight to bill. The combination of support from Optum product specialists, the ICD-9 to ICD-10 analytics roadmap, and CAC Professional's natural language processing capabilities made it possible to realize high straight-to-bill levels right from the October 1 transition date. For example, straight-to-bill volume dropped just 2% from September 2015 to October 2015, and by December was within 1% of the ICD-9 straight-to-bill level.

Rapid gain in productivity

At the same three large sites, which together process 40,000 radiology reports per month, overall productivity rapidly returned to ICD-9 levels. Coder productivity increased rapidly week by week after an initial 17.9% decrease in October 2015, matching ICD-9 productivity levels in less than three months.

New site gets up to speed fast

ACS implemented a large facility on CAC Professional just two months prior to the ICD-10 go-live date. Within one month of production, ACS sent 20% of the customer's volume straight to bill. Even with the transition to ICD-10, the client's straight-to-bill percentage climbed to over 30% within two months after October 1 — a testament to the skill and preparation of the ACS team and their confidence in the CAC Professional platform.

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