



## TAKING A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO EVALUATING HEALTHCARE ANALYTICS VENDORS

*by Jennifer Bresnick*



## INTRODUCTION

*Healthcare organizations in the market for analytics tools must ensure prospective vendors align with their goals, strategies, and expectations for a fruitful long-term partnership.*

A decade after the EHR Incentive Programs spurred the healthcare industry to start embracing digital technologies in earnest, many providers are still searching for the best way to extract actionable insights from their growing data assets.

The market for data management and analytics tools is extremely active as health systems look to complement their basic digital infrastructure with enhanced capabilities, such as data dashboards and quality measurement tools.

According to an Ernst & Young survey, more than 90% of healthcare executives in 2018 were planning to undertake at least one technical adoption project, with the majority of initiatives directly related to making better use of data. Organizational goals for implementing new health IT tools include improved analytics

capabilities, competitive benchmarking tools, and data-driven strategies for improving the patient experience.

With nearly the entire industry on the move, health IT vendors are competing fiercely for the time and attention of key decision-makers. As a result, providers will be exposed to a number of different sales strategies—and they will need to develop the business savvy to choose vendor partnerships that will lead to the best possible outcome for their organization.

Choosing a healthcare analytics tool is a major decision with long-term implications for the success of any provider group. Every health IT selection process must be considered as one part of an overall business strategy that combines input from clinical, financial, executive, and administrative stakeholders.



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Health IT tools typically require some degree of customization and optimization before they can meet the customer’s needs, which in turn requires a positive, productive working relationship between the vendor and the client.

In addition to assessing a vendor’s core technology for functionality and reliability, healthcare providers must consider how that vendor’s culture, business practices, and communication style align with their own.

A mismatched vision of the implementation and optimization process can leave both parties frustrated and dissatisfied and result in lower productivity and a reduced return on investment.

In an effort to equip providers with as much information as possible, industry experts such as KLAS Research are highlighting the importance of vetting health IT companies for broad cultural alignment.

In 2019, the respected market research firm added a new scorecard to its Best in KLAS health IT rankings, giving special recognition to vendors whose culture, relationships, and overall value to the client went above and beyond the ordinary.

Vendors that score highly on these consumer satisfaction criteria are more likely to produce better results than the competition, KLAS

believes, even if multiple companies offer similar levels of sophistication and functionality in their software platforms.

“When the culture of the customer is aligned with the culture of the vendor, it’s much more conducive to producing results,” agreed George Dealy, Vice President of Healthcare Solutions at Dimensional Insight®.

“Our job as a vendor is to add value for our customers. The product itself is certainly key for that, but so is the knowledge that we’ve accumulated throughout our years of experience and the processes we put in place to work with our customers in the most positive, productive manner.”

In a crowded and quickly changing health IT market, healthcare organizations will need to expand their vendor selection processes to include this new set of comprehensive criteria. Taking a more comprehensive view of vendor assessment will allow providers to select an analytics platform that will offer true value across the entire enterprise.

## PLANNING OUT THE JOURNEY FROM VETTING TO VALUE

“Finding a partner that has experience—and is able to communicate that experience to us in a way that makes sense for **where we are and what we’re trying to achieve—is crucial, and it’s something that we prioritize.**”

—Jessica Foy, Manager of Analytics at EvergreenHealth

The vendor selection process begins with an internal evaluation of clinical, operational, service line, and financial goals, existing skills and resources, and any budgetary parameters related to the initiative at hand.

Organizations must have a clear idea of the staff members involved in the project and the responsibilities that each individual will take on. They must also ensure that these staff members are aligned around shared goals.

Providers should identify all of the stakeholders that will be affected by a new technology and include representatives from each of these areas in a steering committee or technology selection panel, suggested Dealy.

“Governance within the organization is the first step,” he asserted. “The right people have to be at the table before you even start making a list of vendors to consider.”

For example, a surgery service line typically includes physician or surgeon leadership, operational executives, and subject matter experts: the staff members who understand how the organization’s data translates into the actual events that take place in an operating room.

“Those three groups within the service line all need a seat at the table, because they are all looking for strategies to improve utilization, efficiency, and clinical outcomes,” explained Dealy. “It’s essential to have those roles and relationships in place before looking externally.”

“If the organization is trying to decide on a technology strategy that will improve utilization and efficiency, they should be working towards a situation where all of those groups are looking at shared definitions for their shared data so they can make more meaningful decisions.”

At EvergreenHealth, a two-hospital health system located just outside of Seattle, an IT steering committee unites leaders from across the organization to achieve those goals.

“Our steering committee is very important for deciding which projects to pursue and how to best develop concepts into reality,” said Jessica Foy, Manager of Analytics at EvergreenHealth. “Whenever anyone in the organization has a great idea and thinks we should have a technical solution for it, they can bring that suggestion to the committee.”

“That not only allows everyone to participate but also creates a process and a pipeline for vetting and evaluating ideas so that we can be sure they fit into our overarching plan.”

When a project is approved, the IT steering committee begins to evaluate potential technology solutions and the vendors that provide them.

“We certainly pay very close attention to the product itself during this process,” said Foy. “But we also closely assess the vendor and the culture of that organization to make sure we are aligned in what we’re expecting and planning.”

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Organizations that have strong internal governance processes, proper staff in place, and clear expectations from a vendor partner are more likely to choose a technology platform that will bring both clinical and financial success.

## SETTING SHARED EXPECTATIONS TO GENERATE LONG-TERM BENEFITS

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With the number and scope of value-based care arrangements on the rise, provider groups are seeing more pressure to gain visibility into their data assets and apply data-driven insights to the delivery of care.

Succeeding in an increasingly value-based environment requires organizations to embrace more than just a new technology platform. They must also cultivate a new outlook on care delivery that permeates their strategic initiatives.

“One of our goals is to grow as an analytics-driven organization so that we can expand the story that our data is telling us,” said Foy. “That will allow us to manage populations more effectively and more proactively.”

“We know that we want to see the benefits of our data. We want to meet the Triple Aim. We want to deliver consistently excellent care to our patients. Those principles guide everything we do, especially as we start to get deeper into value-based financial arrangements that demand so much more from us as a care provider.”

Vendor partners play an integral role in helping healthcare organizations complete that transformation into data-driven enterprises, and must therefore share in this vision, Foy continued. EvergreenHealth knows that it cannot achieve its objectives without partnering with technology experts.

“We want to work with vendors that understand the challenges involved in applying those principles to how we operate on a daily basis,” she said. “It’s incredibly important for our vendors to show a willingness to listen to what’s important to us and the ability to break down our unique challenges into manageable, actionable pieces.”

EvergreenHealth’s commitment to continuous improvement makes the organization the type of client that vendors enjoy working with, as well, said Dealy.

“We love partnering with customers who understand that most data analytics and data governance projects are as much about cultural change as they are about technical installations,” he said. “All health IT implementations require active involvement from the organization. As a vendor, we need to be responsive and proactive—but we need that from our clients, too.”

“Any vendor that just signs a contract, slots a tool into place, and sends a bill is not really fulfilling the idea of becoming a partner with their customer. On the other hand, a customer that signs the contract and expects to just sit back while the vendor connects all the dots is probably not going to see the best result, either.”

A technology partnership needs to be a two-way street so that the customer can generate value quickly and address the opportunities for improvement within the care setting.

“Generally, there is a lot of momentum when you start a project, but you start to lose excitement and commitment if the project drags out too long,” said Dealy. “You want a vendor that can capitalize on the interest as quickly as possible and produce results that will wow the end user so they’re more likely to make lasting changes to the way they use data for decision-making.”

“Getting the technology up and running as quickly as possible allows the organization to begin the process of educating stakeholders and securing the buy-in that is critical for ensuring that a new tool is used appropriately.”

## LEVERAGING A STRONG PARTNERSHIP TO ACHIEVE MEASURABLE SUCCESS



*"We have grown in the way we use our data: we used to just respond to one thing at a time when something came up, **and it wasn't very organized or cohesive.**"*

—Jessica Foy, Manager of Analytics at EvergreenHealth

A positive, collaborative vendor-client relationship based on a shared strategic vision can help healthcare organizations achieve the measurable results they seek.

At EvergreenHealth, working closely with Dimensional Insight has led to performance improvements in multiple areas of the organization.

Gaining data-driven visibility into antimicrobial stewardship practices helped the health system decrease its average treatment time for antimicrobials from 92 days to 39 days, representing a 58% decrease in reliance on these powerful therapies.

The health system has also seen significant gains in performance for preventive care, such as a 46% increase in the number of colorectal screenings delivered in the primary care setting.

And the number of patients that now leave the inpatient setting within 90 minutes of receiving a discharge order has doubled thanks to enhanced access to a data dashboard for providers.

"We have a long list of other projects we want to tackle, as well," said Foy. "And we know that we can rely on our vendor to support and encourage us as we work through those objectives."

EvergreenHealth has become nimbler and more responsive now that providers have access to meaningful data when and where they need it, she continued.

"We have grown in the way we use our data: we used to just respond to one thing at a time when something came up, and it wasn't very organized or cohesive," said Foy.

"Now that we have a fundamental data architecture in place and a single source of truth for what we're doing, we can be much more deliberate and proactive in our responses to issues that arise."

For Dealy, taking the time to work hand-in-hand with clients like EvergreenHealth is simply the right way to do business.

"You can't generate customer satisfaction with a product if you don't help the customer understand it, solve any issues they might encounter, and work with them to extract maximum value from what they purchased," he said.

"That seems like common sense to me, and I don't think that's optional if you're looking for a vendor. It should be at the heart of what every company does."

## CONCLUSION

In a highly active market for healthcare analytics tools, healthcare organizations will need to examine more than a vendor's technology to develop meaningful partnerships and succeed with value-based care. Before committing to a product or platform, providers should identify and assess several different qualities in a vendor (e.g., company culture, communication style) that directly correlate to client satisfaction.

Ensuring that a vendor aligns well in these key areas will heighten the likelihood of collaborating effectively and maximizing the value of a provider's data assets. With the right vendor on board, healthcare organizations will have the tools they need to generate and capitalize upon enthusiasm for long-lasting change across the enterprise.

## ABOUT DIMENSIONAL INSIGHT

Dimensional Insight® is a leading provider of analytics, data management, and performance management solutions, offering a complete portfolio of capabilities ranging from data integration and modeling to sophisticated reporting, analytics, and dashboards. The company is a seven-time Best in KLAS winner in healthcare business intelligence and analytics, most recently ranking #1 in 2020. Founded in 1989, Dimensional Insight has thousands of customer organizations worldwide. Dimensional Insight consistently ranks as a top performing analytics organization by customers and industry analysts in its core market segments including healthcare, manufacturing, and beverage alcohol.

For more information, please visit <https://www.dimins.com>.

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