

WHITE PAPER:

Meaningful Use Stage 3:

How Health IT Marketers Should Adapt &
Embrace the Delay

The government's EHR Incentive Program, also known as Meaningful Use, led to an EHR "gold rush"¹ that has had profound implications for EHR marketers since its introduction in 2009.

But the gold rush is ending. As the program enters its second phase in 2014, the EHR marketplace is entering a crucial transition to a post-adoption environment — and health IT marketers must again be ready to adapt.

As a trusted advisor to health IT marketers, including most of the world's leading EHR companies—that conducts ongoing research with physicians and engages over half a million practitioners—MedData Group understands the perceptions and needs of EHR vendors and users alike. As the EHR market matures and meaningful use enters a new phase, MedData Group regularly consults health IT marketers on how to adapt to the current delay and, more broadly, how to remain viable and competitive in this evolving landscape.

Did you know?

More than six in 10 eligible office-based physicians have already received an incentive payment from the government for Meaningful Use.

The Background, Basics, and Marketing Challenges of Meaningful Use

Meaningful use offers financial incentives (up to \$44,000 from Medicare or \$64,000 from Medicaid) to eligible professionals who meet the requirements for all three stages of the program.

There is little doubt that the program has successfully driven adoption: more than six in 10 eligible office-based physicians have already received an incentive payment from the government.² Many others who have adopted continue to await payment.

Going forward, the challenge for marketers is twofold: First, to convince those still holding out that the benefits of adopting the technology go well beyond the incentives and/or penalties. Second, and perhaps more importantly, marketers must begin to make the transition to a post-adoption environment. Clients' needs for support will grow as the program's requirements become more challenging, and they will look to their vendors for support along the way. Vendors will enjoy a competitive advantage if they are seen as fostering supportive, ongoing relationships with clients.



Moving forward

The two most vital areas of focus for marketers will be usability and customization.

Another key challenge for marketers: Erasing any bad feelings that some healthcare professionals formed toward vendors during the period immediately after the announcement of the meaningful use program, when some rushed their products to market only to find they weren't ready.³

Going forward, two vital areas of focus for marketers will be usability and customization of their EHR systems. Because Stage 3 will focus on using patient data to improve measurable outcomes, EHR users by Stage 2 should be fully comfortable working in the systems. Any technical challenges or usability difficulties practices experienced during their early days of EHR usage must by this time be fully resolved, or vendors must work quickly to solve them.

In its announcement of the proposed timeline change, which would delay the start of Stage 3 to 2017, CMS said the delay would give developers ample time to create and distribute certified technology before Stage 3 begins, and to incorporate lessons learned about usability and customization.²

Key Takeaways:

- Five years after the passage of the meaningful use program, the EHR market is transitioning to a post-adoption environment.
- The EHR vendors with the greatest competitive advantage will be those that establish and leverage ongoing supportive relationships with clients.
- A delay to Stage 3 gives marketers time to address usability and customization issues that will be crucial to physicians' long-term success in the meaningful use program.

The Changing Role of Health IT

Now that we are a couple of years into the meaningful use program, health IT marketers are being forced to think more creatively when it comes to attracting and retaining clients. Simply selling a product on its ability to qualify for meaningful use isn't enough. It's all about the user experience.

Marketers who are upfront about the risks physicians face regarding lost productivity and income, and offer solutions to those challenges, will gain physician trust and loyalty. They can set themselves apart by focusing their communication efforts on solutions to the pain points practices are experiencing as opposed to sales pitches for more technology. Physicians are looking for someone to say, "I understand you are having a hard time with this, and I can help."



Responsiveness is key

44% of practices that were considering switching EHR vendors in 2013 said they were doing so because their vendors were unresponsive to their needs.

While physicians may believe health care delivery will improve in the long run as a result of meaningful use, right now, it's just another item on a long list of mandates handed down by everyone from the government to their health plans to their affiliated hospitals. They believe the increased collaboration made possible with technology will result in better patient care, but they also believe the increased use of health IT will lead to increased costs.³

Many physicians have invested a lot of money on health IT implementation, only to see productivity and income decline as a result.⁴ Many can get back to pre-adoption productivity levels, or find ways to offset the losses, but they need help getting there.⁵ Better training, workflow optimization and high levels of usability are all things vendors can bring to the table.

Key Takeaways:

- Because meaningful use has dictated the functionality systems must provide, marketing efforts can no longer focus on what a system can do. It's all about how well the system can do it.
- Physicians are looking for partners to help them address pain points associated with health IT adoption.

Opportunities for Marketers

As a result of physicians becoming more educated on how health IT could be leveraged to meet their needs, 2013 was dubbed "The Year of the Big EHR Switch" by Black Book Rankings, a market research firm.⁶ But that research also found the vendors that are responsive to customer needs are the ones expected to remain viable. Eighty-four percent of those considering a switch said vendor viability would be their top criteria in choosing a new system.⁷

As meaningful use moves forward, successful marketers will:

Be responsive

Forty-four percent of practices that were considering switching EHR vendors in 2013 said they were doing so because their vendors were unresponsive to their needs. For example, many practices reported that their requests for assistance went unanswered and technical problems unresolved. Being responsive to client concerns and problems could make the difference between a short-term or long-term relationship.

Be aware

The biggest reason that practices struggle with implementation – and in turn become frustrated with "unresponsive" vendors – is a lack of early and ongoing training.

Offer more training and ongoing support than their competitors

Studies have found adequate initial training and ongoing support are key to successful implementations.⁸ The underuse of these services suggests that an opportunity exists for marketers to promote their importance. The biggest reason that practices struggle with implementation – and in turn become frustrated with "unresponsive" vendors – is a lack of early and ongoing training. Marketers can help by developing training and support materials that can be distributed by sales persons and/or included in the vendor's digital communications efforts.

Understand physicians' needs better than rival vendors

A major complaint among EHR users is that the systems don't meet their needs and are not customizable. The EHR vendors rated most positively are those that listen to their customers and allow their needs to drive decisions.⁹ As a partner, health IT marketers should be conducting two-way conversations with physician clients, and then educating developers on how they can meet the physicians' expectations.

Upsell Opportunities Presented by Meaningful Use

Because meaningful use increases in difficulty with each stage of the program, the relationships between marketers and physicians will inherently allow for opportunities for marketers to promote new functionalities and features of their EHR product.

The biggest opportunities for feature promotion in 2014 are technologies that enable patient engagement. For example, practices that adopt a patient portal may have difficulty getting patients to use it. This could present an opportunity for marketers to promote additional features (mobile apps, interoperable self-monitoring applications, etc.) that will educate physicians and empower them to encourage patient accountability and satisfy meaningful use requirements.

Upselling can also extend beyond goods and focus on services. As meaningful use moves forward, practices will be implementing EHR features they have never used before. This could mean an opportunity for advanced training in the form of "master classes" that address areas of difficulty. User group conferences are another way for marketers to connect with clients, and provide an opportunity for clients to connect and collaborate with each other.

Finally, as practices grow, physicians may find they need more robust versions of the software they've been using or new modules. They will turn first to their existing vendors for these upgrade opportunities, so marketers should be ready with materials and the right messaging to make physicians feel comfortable embracing the latest product or service enhancements.



Interaction is crucial

Marketers can easily set themselves apart from others by promoting a level of training and support that will guarantee success.

Key Takeaways:

- Marketers must listen to physicians and target efforts on problem-solving, not mere product functionality.
- Marketers can set themselves apart from others by promoting a level of training and support that will guarantee success.
- Once positive relationships are established, the product sales will come. Physicians will need several upgrades and add-ons over the course of meaningful use. But marketers must sell the user experience and benefits, not the products.

Conclusion

The EHR gold rush created by the start of meaningful use has slowed down considerably. Now that CMS has proposed more breathing room for itself and health IT developers going in to Stage 3, marketers should take advantage of the opportunity to build and strengthen their relationships with physicians and practices. Becoming a trusted partner will help ensure the relationship continues throughout the course of meaningful use and beyond.

Overwhelmed physicians want to be heard. They are hungry for help with meeting all of the demands that are placed upon them. Health IT vendors are in a unique position of being able to offer solutions — both technical and service-related — that will lead to physician success. Without physician success, there is no health IT marketer success.

About MedData Group

MedData Group provides demand generation and data services for providers of healthcare technology, medical devices, medical education and others looking to engage with hard-to-reach physicians and other healthcare professionals by using a fundamentally unique approach.

MedData Group publishes Medical Product Guide, the industry's go-to resource that provides clinicians and healthcare professionals with meaningful vendor, product and industry information. By distributing meaningful content to healthcare professionals, we are able to collect more data, glean deeper insights, and reach larger audiences than any other demand generation service. Using behavioral analytics and big-data techniques, our proprietary content and lead management system produces unrivaled insights that we apply to best-in-class marketing practices to achieve unmatched results towards helping our clients reach their business goals.

 **Footnotes:**

1. "Office-based physicians are responding to incentives and assistance by adopting and using electronic health records," *Health Affairs*, August 2013.
2. "Progress on adoption of electronic health records," Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Dec. 13, 2013.
3. "Numbers don't lie – the EHR market must consolidate," The Health Care Blog, Aug. 6, 2012
4. The impact of electronic health records on workflow and financial measures in primary care practices," *Health Services Research*, Dec. 21, 2013.
5. "EHR implementation with minimal practice disruption in primary care setting," WIREC, November 2012.
6. "EHR users unhappy, many switching," *Healthcare IT News*, Feb. 19, 2013
7. "Electronic Health Record sellers face make-or-break year of client ultimatums and revolts, reveals 2013 Black Book survey," Black Book Rankings, February 2013.
8. "Lessons from the literature on electronic health record implementation," Urban Institute, August 2013
9. "A framework for predicting EHR adoption attitudes: A physician survey," *Perspectives in Health Information Management*, Sept. 16, 2009.