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Front End Document Scanning Streamlines Insurance Claim Verification

Piedmont Hospital adds scanners to its front end registration process to create images of original insurance documents that can be accessed from its back end offices.

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Written by [Khristen Chapin](#)

While the benefits of high-volume scanning in healthcare environments are generally well known, you may not appreciate what small, low-volume scanners can do. But Piedmont Hospital (Atlanta) realized a time savings of approximately 2 to 3 hours per day by scanning vital documents at the patient registration point with those small scanners.

Piedmont Hospital runs two hospitals totaling 600 beds, and its billing and financial services are located about 12 miles from the main hospital campus. The hospital uses an electronic document management system from Third Millennium Healthcare Systems (Decatur, GA), a niche ASP (application service provider), to manage its back office documents (correspondence, remittance, and payments).

Like most hospitals, when a patient is admitted (through emergency, inpatient, or outpatient services), the registration staff makes a copy of the patient's driver's license and insurance card to put with the file. At a later point, the insurance information is keyed into the hospital's database, and the copy of the original is kept for verification purposes. The need for verification usually occurs in the billing part of the process, when the hospital files claims and bills insurance companies. According to Foster North, president and COO of Third Millennium, 20% of insurance claims sent by hospitals are rejected or denied by the insurance company. When a claim is rejected, it means the insurance company needs additional information or documentation before it will pay; denial means the claim won't be paid. "Ninety percent of the time a claim is rejected or denied, it is because of a mistake at the hospital," North states. "That usually happens because someone keyed in a policy number or street address incorrectly."

In Piedmont Hospital's case, when a claim is denied or rejected, the first thing the hospital does is compare the insurance information on file to the copy of the original. But, since Piedmont's Patient Financial Services office is off campus, the photocopy of the card is, too. "We had to call the patient at home or work and get the card's information to double-check our files," says Rick Childs, director of Patient Financial Services at Piedmont. "It would sometimes take some time to track down the patient, which delayed the claim. And that isn't very good for our image."

The solution to Piedmont's problem came about from a discussion Childs had with Third Millennium. The ASP was checking up on Piedmont's service, and Childs told it that his office needed the ability to see the hard copy of the insurance card. "We never see the copy in the business office, but we're the ones who need it," Childs explains. "I told Third Millennium that we were looking to get imaging at the front end, to capture the identification and insurance documents, and to get the images into the system." As it turned out, Third Millennium was in the process of developing a solution for front end scanning, and with input from Piedmont, developed software to integrate with Piedmont's existing document management system from the ASP.

Footprint, Document Thickness Factors In Choosing Low-Volume Scanners

Since the front end scanning would be done in registration, Piedmont put a lot of thought into the scanners it could use. "In registration, the biggest challenge is space," says Childs. "There's a desk with a monitor and keyboard, and there isn't room for much else. We needed a scanner with a very small footprint, but that was still efficient in scanning quality and speed." With advice from Third Millennium, Piedmont installed Strobe XP 200 scanners from Visioneer (Pleasanton, CA), which have a 2" by 2.5" by 11" footprint. "In some cases our registrars' desks are so tight for space that we had to put the scanner on top of their monitors," Childs says.

The Strobe scanners also accommodate the documents that would be scanned: insurance cards and drivers' licenses. "The scanner needed to be able to handle the thickness of credit card-like documents quickly," Childs explains. "We were streamlining our verification process, but more than anything, we didn't want to add time to the registration processes."

Index Images As They're Scanned For Quick Retrieval

Because Piedmont already used Third Millennium's indexing system for its back end correspondence and remittances, as well as payment posting, integrating the front end scanning software was simple. Piedmont created a screen scraping capability within the application so that the data from the scanned image would be auto-indexed by six to eight indices such as name, address, social security number, and/or medical record number. "This way, if any authorized hospital employee needs to access the image, the employee can pull it up right on their computer by any of those indices," says Childs.

By scanning the insurance and identification documents at the front end and creating an accessible-from-anywhere image, Piedmont has reduced its registration time by 2 to 3 hours each day. Rather than getting up, going to a photocopy machine, making the copy, and coming back, registrars can scan the images from their desks while remaining in contact with the patient.

In Piedmont's Patient Financial Services office, if an insurance claim is denied, employees can access the original document image to verify the information. "We don't have to track down the patient, going through some agitation to get that number again because it is wrong in our data," says Childs.