



*What will the software industry look like in 3, 5, 10 years from now?*

The software industry's evolution can be defined by distinctive events. Given the relative adolescence of software, the distinctive trends and events appear rapid and ubiquitous. However, the popularity of the "cloud" and "software-as-a-service" defining the current era represents a defining step for the next burst of development. CRM, ERP and collaboration applications have successfully migrated to the cloud, and as such virtually all software applications are being forced to consider a rebirth of their delivery, development and value models in response.

Perspective has a tremendous impact on the adoption of cloud application delivery. Having begun my career as a technology consultant and then moving into technology leadership positions within Fortune 50 companies, I have experienced the difficulties of adoption and am not immune to the complexities of software development. With ZirMed, I have experienced the ability to subtly shift revenue cycle management for healthcare to the cloud and deliver a SaaS application on a rapidly growing scale. The US healthcare sector has historically been a laggard in terms of technology adoption and has defied many ASP and cloud delivered services. Healthcare providers must weigh their significant security and privacy concerns along with the availability and maturity of the software providers. Only recently have healthcare providers begun to broaden their consideration of SaaS beyond revenue cycle to include clinical applications. These trends are defining the next versions of medical applications.

While much of my energy and time is consumed with evaluation of how to use software to provide a knowledge platform and achieve efficiencies within our business, an equal amount of effort is consumed considering the impact of the shift to the cloud within healthcare in general. Healthcare produces enormous amounts of information specific to the patient, provider and disease/treatment which can drown users in data. It is a quick extension of these trends to see that the ability to distill and streamline information is fundamental.

Despite the obvious value of processing, coordinating and analyzing information that affects the health and wellbeing of our population, the infrastructure is not established to facilitate the structuring and combination of that data to empower its use. With federal stimulus investments and regulatory nudging, the healthcare sector will be investing heavily in technology over the next three years. For all the popular reasons driving consideration of cloud SaaS models, healthcare buyers will be migrating software purchases to these models. However, significant movements of off-premise data will naturally lead, over the longer term, to necessary investments in data collaboration and sharing between SaaS applications for analytic and disease management purposes. This movement has already begun, and ZirMed has been able to take advantage of the ability to deliver business analytics efficiently and effectively because the breadth of our revenue cycle management applications spans the administrative and financial processes within healthcare. However, as clinical systems evolve, we are beginning to experience client demand to make our data available to combine with clinical systems for a more holistic view of the business, and we anticipate that this trend will continue for the foreseeable future.

*And, what customer demands and business trends will drive changes in software products, how they're developed, and the industry that provides them?*

Business efficiencies and cost control are not the factors impacting the design, development and deployment of SaaS applications. Rather, it is the experience - user experience and patient experience. Particularly in healthcare, workflow considerations are fundamental. Software design must be both adaptive to existing processes and flexible to evolve with changing best practices. Corporate purpose must influence the application design and system architecture; however, the user must define the interface and intuitively navigate the software.

Healthcare is not dissimilar from other industries in that software purchasers aren't always the end-users; however, customer demands for intuitive and simply designed software targeted to the specific user has a heightened importance within healthcare due to the high training costs and risks associated with misusing software.

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