5 WAYS

TO SPEED UP YOUR HL7 INTEGRATION

1 KEEP THE TRANSLATION SIMPLE

2 ENSURE GOOD VISIBILITY

5 MONITOR AND MAINTAIN

3 ALWAYS USE REAL DATA

4 PLAN IN ADVANCE

Love them or hate them, HL7 interfaces aren't going away any time soon.

Even though a market shift towards web services in healthcare is underway, the lion's share of your clinical information will likely be exchanged via HL7 interfaces for years to come.

Yet, both healthcare providers and vendors continue to struggle with handling the loosely defined standard in a consistent and predictable way.

Here are five key considerations that will help you simplify and speed up your HL7 integration projects:

1

Keep your translations simple

The shortest distance between two points is a straight line. The same principle is true for integration. When integrating two systems, the risk of lost or mis-translated information is reduced greatly if you keep the translation in the same language.

For example, if you were translating from Quebecois French to Parisian French, you wouldn't translate it into English first. The same rule applies to HL7.

The vast majority of interfaces require transforming or translating one version of HL7 v2 into a different version of HL7 v2. It would be very time-consuming to integrate systems by translating from one version of HL7 v2 into XML and then back into a different dialect of HL7 v2.

Keep the language consistent.

2

Use tools that have clear visibility

Integration is a constantly moving target because vendors regularly update their products. These updates often alter their interfaces in terms of what data they send and receive or how it's formatted.

When looking for an integration solution, it's important to make sure there is clear visibility into the transactions. When you go live with your interface, your support team should be able to quickly lookup all of the transactions into and out of your systems. This will significantly reduce your implementation times.

3

Always use real-world data

Integration is a real-world problem, not a theoretical one. Many of the major healthcare systems in use today were built more than a decade ago. These systems remain in place because they work, not because they strictly adhere to standards.

When it comes to interfacing, much like the first tip, the shortest and most accurate path to interoperability is the best one. It is critical that you have the flexibility to work with the real data coming from or required by your systems.

You may of heard HL7 referred to as a "non-standard standard" or that it's a "great standard, everyone has one". These catchy phrases accurately describe the lenient adoption of the standard in the market and underscore the importance of working with your existing data rather than resorting to building something from scratch.

4

Create a well-thought-out data model

The goal of interfacing should be to keep your interfaces as simple as possible. By planning your data model in advance, or building a more efficient model on top of your existing one, you can avoid multiple redundant mappings.

When you normalize how you map data, or even standardize internally around a single HL7 version, you can dramatically decrease the time it takes to maintain your existing interfaces as well as bring new ones online.

For example, if you already have an interface that sends data from a normalized HL7 message structure to your EMR, then all subsequent interfaces with your EMR need only to be mapped to your standard structure. You've effectively eliminated 50% of your interface development.

5

Don't overlook your monitoring strategy

At least half of the work in integration is keeping your interfaces up and running. The solutions that you adopt must be able to accurately monitor your interfaces and notify your staff when problems occur.

Ensuring that your staff have the right tools and training required to not only create interfaces but also to monitor and maintain them is integral to the success of your overall integration goals.

Is your HL7 integration taking too long?
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