All Fax Is Not Created Equal

A checklist for effectively transitioning from PSTN to FoIP

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Despite a growing variety of high-tech communications tools, fax remains mission-critical for many industries, allowing organizations to connect to different providers, systems and technologies.

What's more, the need for fax keeps growing: A study from International Data Corporation, a global market intelligence firm, found that 82 percent of survey respondents said fax usage increased over the past year. And an industry analyst interviewed by Vox estimated that about 75 percent of medical communications are delivered through fax machines.

Why is faxing so resilient?

For healthcare providers, the answer is obvious: Patient data needs to be passed from one doctor or clinic to another in a safe, reliable manner compliant with HIPAA regulations. That happens more smoothly these days due to the growing use of the electronic health record (EHR), but providers from different health systems may not have compatible EHRs – or they may not want to share more information than necessary with what might be a competing medical group or hospital.

For these reasons and others, healthcare providers will continue to rely on fax for the foreseeable future.

However, connecting fax equipment over Internet connections instead of using legacy PSTN phone lines can deliver many of the advantages of traditional faxing – namely, data security and reliability – but at a much lower cost. If you're ready to give Fax over Internet protocol (FoIP) a try, read this eBook to learn what qualities to seek in a vendor to make sure you get the best product and service to meet your needs.

Real-time, encrypted data

For healthcare providers, maintaining HIPAA compliance is critical. That means the immediacy and privacy of data transfer is essential – and not all FoIP solutions are designed for compliance. Look for solutions that meet the following eight parameters:

1

Real-time data transfer, rather than "store-and-forward"

Real-time faxing serves as a conduit for data rather than containing an intermediary storage step. It connects the sending and receiving fax devices, which means you know a received message comes straight from the sending fax machine and not from an intermediary re-faxing the document. That differs from cloud-based "store-and-forward" systems that store fax data in an intermediary station before forwarding it to the recipient. For obvious reasons, the fewer "middlemen" between the sender and recipient, the better from a privacy and HIPAA-compliance standpoint.

HIPAA regulations require fax service providers that use store-and-forward systems to assume liability by signing a legal agreement called a Business Associate Agreement with the healthcare provider. It's an arduous and time-consuming process that requires intervention by legal, IT and security teams, among others. This type of "man-in-the-middle" solution also puts your healthcare organization – and the fax service provider – at higher risk for privacy or compliance breaches and associated penalties.

In contrast, real-time fax transfer meets HIPAA guidelines for data transmission under the "conduit exception," which eliminates the need to sign a BAA with the service provide. Real-time fax is an accepted legal form of document transmission, along with courier, and U.S. Postal registered mail.

2

Encrypted T.38 technology

Encrypted T.38 is hands-down the best FoIP protocol suited to transport protected health information. Here's why:

Unlike PTSN (phone line) faxing, T.38 uses the internet as a conduit for data transfer. This improves speed, reliability, security and performance at a significant savings to users.

Unlike HTTPS, T.38 does not use a "middle-man" fax server to store data before sending. Depending on how an HTTPS fax is deployed, the sender may encounter "false positives," situations where it appears a fax page was sent when in fact it had failed. T.38 offers safer, faster transfer and page-by-page confirmation as the fax is transmitted.

T.38 encrypts not only the signaling (SIP) over the Internet, but the media (image) as well. That ensures high-level security of your data with low susceptibility to hacking.

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Fully Virtual

Choose a solution that lets you go totally virtual (VoIP or FoIP). That means you can trade the hardware used for PSTN connectivity for software that uses FoIP. Here's why that's optimal:

Any hardware in the interchange may fail, interrupting your communications while you wait for technical support.

Gateways in the path of transmission hamper encryption. It's best to have the entire transfer in the hands of one provider who can encrypt end-to-end.

Fully virtual lines can be used by all divisions and locations in your organization – and even abroad. The phone numbers can be used to send and receive faxes no matter where you are located.

4

Compatible

Your fax provider should be EHR-agnostic, meaning its faxes can easily populate in any EHR format. Unlike document exchange solutions from different vendors, T.38 is a standards-based protocol adopted by the community at large, rather than a proprietary solution. This means your faxes can be easily exchanged with other organizations without error regardless of which EHR system they use.

5

Sustainable

Faxing isn't going away anytime soon, but that doesn't mean certain fax capabilities won't. Some things to keep in mind to ensure you have a long-term, sustainable solution:

Reliability:
Large telephone companies are dropping traditional PSTN faxing, converting to technologies like G 711 (voice protocol) that are less reliable than T.38. Even solutions marketed as T.38 sometimes are converted to G 711 within the carrier network.

Maintenance costs:
When you use fully virtual, T.38 technology, you don't need to maintain additional fax line connectivity hardware — you're using virtual fax lines. This means no maintenance fees or equipment costs, and no waiting around for a technician to arrive.

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Scalable

Your fax provider should be able to accommodate your needs no matter whether you're a doctor's office or a large, multi-state health system. T.38 protocol can be applied to a single, multifunctional device or a multi-server health system.

It's fully capable of scaling to meet your growing practice with a simple request to your service provider, whereas expanding traditional on-site faxing usually requires additional equipment, phone lines and extensive technical support that may result in downtime.
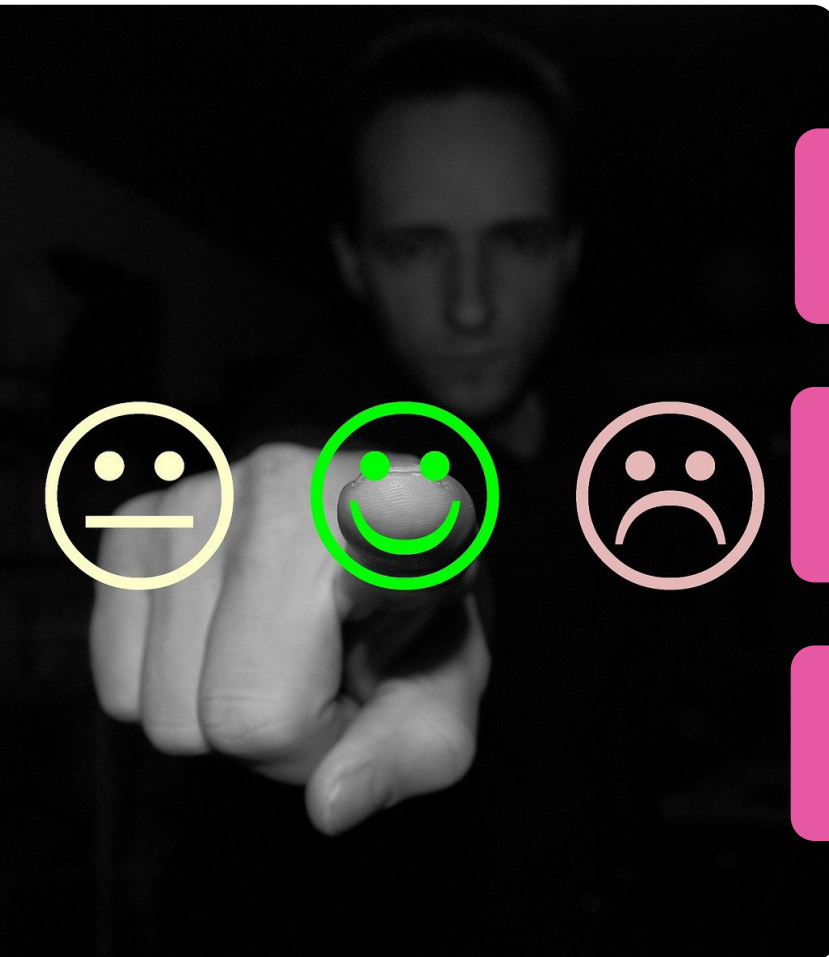
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Customer-Focused

Healthcare offices rely on faxing to provide services to their patients. In that critical environment, world-class customer service is a must, and not every provider gives every client personalized, VIP treatment, no matter what your size or scope.

Look for a FoIP service provider that offers:

High-priority service for mission-critical applications

24/7 intervention as needed

Technicians specialized in T.38 faxing

It's also important to find a provider that demonstrates a commitment to identifying the source of any problems and works toward solutions – even if the problem relates to another vendor.

Don't be shy about vetting your prospective vendor by talking with other customers in the healthcare arena, so you know you're getting an experienced partner dedicated to your success.

8

Affordable

FoIP can save you money – up to 50 percent compared to analog fax costs.

One way to save even more is by choosing a vendor with flexible payment options such as a no-contract plan with 30-day cancellation, instead of a locked-in multi-year contract.

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Healthcare providers need faxing capabilities that are reliable and secure: advanced T.38 technology offers the best option at the best price. Now is the time to give T.38 faxing a try, but selecting the right vendor is critical to making the transition smooth and positive. This eight-point checklist will help you in that decision.

As you get started on your journey, let Cloudli provide a free presentation of what we offer. Call us at 1-877-808-VOIP (8647) to talk to an agent about Cloudli faxing services, or visit cloudli.com for more information.

About Cloudli

Since 1991, Cloudli has developed and provided advanced technologies for cutting-edge voice and fax communication services. We customize services using our own development resources without depending on third-party developers. That allows our customer and network support teams to offer more effective and timely support.

Cloudli serves both small business and large enterprise customers in over 12,000 locations in the United States, Canada and many international locations. Our extensive focus on high-availability, service continuity and round-the-clock monitoring ensure you get reliable service every minute of the day.

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