

35th
anniversary
year

A CANADIAN SUCCESS STORY

Sierra Systems - Thought Leader and Integrated Solutions Provider

Vancouver-based Sierra Systems Group Inc. is celebrating its 35th anniversary in the information systems business. Since 1966, the company has evolved from a small system consulting company to one of North America's leading management consulting and systems integration firms, with over 900 employees in 14 office locations throughout Canada and the United States.

Sierra Systems has targeted industry sectors to implement successful, practical integrated applications for government, health care, justice, financial services, telecommunications and utilities. Last year Sierra Systems earned \$127 million in revenue and of that over 10% was from the healthcare industry. With a healthcare practice in all of its branches Sierra Systems has garnered a strong reputation that has allowed it to create one of the strongest client and project reference lists of any healthcare consulting firm in Canada.

New Thinking

When Sierra Systems opened for business in 1966, the first heart transplant still lay a year in the future, no one dreamed of CAT scans, much less MRI - and patient records existed on bits and pieces of paper, filed in different departments at different health facilities.

Thirty-five years later, scientific advances have changed the character of medicine in almost every area, but health records remain fragmented and inaccessible. No surprise, really - it's a towering challenge: integrating accurate records from numerous care providers, maintaining them over the decades of a patient's life, and making up-to-date information available to qualified people, while securing it from the eyes of others.

Sierra Systems is very fortunate to have been at the forefront of the *New Health Infostructure Thinking* that has taken place in Canada over the past 5 years. "Our involvement with the new agenda started with my participation on the Advisory Council for Health completed the Canada Health Infoway Report in 1999," says Bill Thomson, Vice President and Corporate Operations Manager. "We were then fortunate to win the pan-Canadian Health Infostructure Blueprint and Tactical Plan work that we initially completed in 2000 and recently updated in 2001. This has been Sierra System's key contribution to the new health information systems agenda in Canada."

The pan-Canadian Health Infostructure Blueprint and Tactical Plan represents the perspective of the provincial, territorial and federal governments on the health information systems directions and priorities over the next few years. According to Trevor Hodge, Sierra Systems' health practice lead in Canada, "The challenge in completing the plan was threefold - get focused on what infostructure was really required, ensure all governments were in agreement, and make the Blueprint and Tactical Plan fresh and exciting. Fortunately, we had the support of a strong leadership group in the Advisory Committee for Health Infostructure (ACHI),

as well as its associated working groups to make this happen."

The plan's success can be measured in part by the strong support that it received from the Conference of Deputy Ministers of Health and the decision by the Government of Canada to support the implementation of the plan with the allocation of \$500 million for electronic health records and telehealth.



Trevor Hodge, Canadian Health Practice Lead for Sierra Systems

As a follow-up, Sierra Systems has recently completed the *Electronic Health Record Interoperability White Paper* for ACHI. "This is a think-piece that we believe takes the discussion about electronic health records in a Canadian setting to another level of consideration, and again demonstrates the depth that we have within the company to move the electronic health record agenda forward in a pragmatic and step-wise manner," noted Hodge. "Our work with ACHI, the *Western Health Information Collaborative* and *Health Infostructure Atlantic* has given us some unique insights into what is possible in a collaborative pan-Canadian setting and we have been able to reflect that knowledge and experience in the White Paper."

Integrated Solutions Provider

The deployment of *electronic health record systems* is both a business and systems integration challenge. In addition to thought leadership, Sierra Systems' other core competencies include custom systems development, package implementation and the integration of these systems. Sierra Systems has a long history of working with both clients and vendors of package solutions to implement integrated clinical and administrative healthcare information systems across Canada.

"We are at the cusp of something new in healthcare information systems in Canada" says John Buckley, Sierra Systems' health practice lead in Atlantic Canada. "The bar is being raised and both clinical and administrative systems vendors are going to be challenged to provide cost-effective and contemporary solutions. The massive investment required in healthcare information systems has to be coupled with significant improvements in healthcare productivity across the continuum of care if the pan-Canadian infostructure vision is to be successful."

In order to complete healthcare assignments in a cost-effective manner Sierra Systems has now deployed a *Global Development Centre* approach. This allows Sierra Systems to provide services at the client site, off-site but within the same city as the client location, remotely within North America and offshore in India. Hardy Sekhon who leads Sierra's offshore development practice and has used the Global Development Centre to complete a number of healthcare projects, notes, "We have taken the time to get our global approach right so that we can provide the best skills in the

right location. In this way the client can be assured of a quality solution at a significantly lower price. The combination of US, Canadian and Indian resources has given us incredible flexibility in how we approach projects in the healthcare sector in both Canada and the United States.”

Sierra Systems is currently completing the *Provider Registry System* for the Western Health Information Collaborative in the Global Development Centre. A 4-tier J2EE solution, the Provider Registry is a critical piece of the electronic health record architecture for the Western Canadian provinces. “Further, Alberta’s *Provincial Personal Health Identifier Initiative*, led by Malcolm Steele in Edmonton, has also allowed us to further showcase Sierra Systems’ strengths in this critical area.” comments Hodge. Moving forward in the enterprise registry space, Sierra Systems has strategically positioned itself with Quovadx Inc.

Quovadx Inc., formerly Healthcare.com, is a leading provider of Total Business Integration (TBI) products and services, an industry leader in healthcare and a market leader in the following technologies: *Enterprise Master Person Index (EMPI)*, eBusiness Process Management (eBPM) technology with adaptive applications for Disease Management, Utilization Management, Clinical Trials Management, Trading Partner Management and real-time transaction-based applications for eligibility verification, patient information verification and insurer reimbursement. Quovadx’s signature integration technology *QDX Integrator* (formerly known as Cloverleaf) enables the unrestricted sharing of data and business process within or outside any enterprise. “We feel Quovadx complements our existing strength in the development and implementation of client and provider registries in Canada, however, we also see significant potential for their other products in healthcare other industries” says Hodge.”

Sierra Systems has also been successful in creating some important bridges in healthcare information systems - something that makes them both unique and at the forefront of the industry.

The first is the bridge between electronic health records and telehealth. Through their association with CardioComm Solutions Inc. and the development of their new *GlobalCardio™ System*, Sierra Systems has been able to create a revolutionary product for CardioComm that provides physicians and caregivers with the ability to transmit, store, retrieve and analyze ECG data securely over the Internet for all their cardiac patients - a product that has recently received clearance from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to be marketed by CardioComm Solutions in the United States.

The second is the bridge to the aboriginal community in Canada. Sierra Systems owns 49% of *Donna Cona*, Canada’s leading aboriginal IT company. Donna Cona CEO John Bernard has been the recipient the National Aboriginal Achievement Award in Business and Commerce, as well as Canada’s Top 40 Under 40 award for Canadians who have become outstanding leaders in their chosen fields before reaching 40 years of age. He comments that, “Our relationship with Sierra Systems has been extremely beneficial. It has allowed the two companies to grow both commercially and culturally. Together we have begun to develop a significant aboriginal healthcare business because of our relationship with clients like Health Canada and their *First Nations and Inuit Health Information System* and the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation and their *National Native Addictions Information System*.”

Sustained Success Comes From Having A Strong Team

The continued success of Sierra Systems in the healthcare industry does not come without hard work. Over the past 20 years, people like Bill Thomson, Kathryn Hannah, Dave Wattling, and more recently Trevor Hodge have helped build the healthcare practice within the company. However, each would agree that Sierra Systems’ current strength in healthcare is a result of the team that has been put in place. When you look at Deb Shera, Bob Brown, Malcolm Steele, Don Newsham, Vytas Mickevicius, Gary Fox, John Buckley, Jane Curry, Audrey-Claire Lawrence and over 150 others with healthcare industry experience across the country, you then begin to realize the potential that Sierra Systems has, as well as the reason that it has enjoyed sustained success.

As a company Sierra Systems has been recognized as having a unique culture. Grant Gisel, President and CEO comments: “ as founders of the company we set out 35 years ago to create an empowered workforce and an organization that is not bureaucratic. We have maintained a strong commitment to a developing careers for our consultants and support that commitment through SKN, our internal knowledge network, as well as the Sierra Systems University.”

As proof of that, Sierra Systems just recently in November and December of last year was chosen as one of the top 100 organizations to work for in Canada by *McLean’s* magazine, one of the top 50 by *The Globe and Mail*; and in British Columbia, *BC Business Reports* picked the company as one of the top 25 companies to work for. This is obviously a resounding acknowledgement about the people culture within the company.

Hodge sums up by adding, “We know we have one of the strongest healthcare teams in the country, however, it is very important to us that we give back to the industry that supports us - that is the essence of what Sierra Systems is. For this reason you will continue to see us being a strong supporter of COACH, the eHealth Conference, the CIHI Partnership for Health Information Standards, HL7 Canada and the ISO Committee on Health Informatics where both Don Newsham and Jane Curry play key roles. It is part of our unequivocal commitment to the healthcare industry in this country.”



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