

A CANADIAN SUCCESS STORY

DINMAR Consulting: From traditional healthcare IT consultants to "total solution" providers

Despite the current economic downturn, there are some success stories out there. DINMAR Consulting Inc. is one of them. The Ottawa-based firm opened its doors in the early 1990s as a small systems integration shop. Over the past decade both the company profile and the business model have evolved - today DINMAR has over 70 employees, based in 5 offices in Canada and the U.S., with clients throughout North America and Australia - and is continuing to grow.

As one of the few Canadian consulting firms that focus its service offerings exclusively on the healthcare industry, the company offers a wide range of consulting services, products and total solutions to the industry - a somewhat unique approach to servicing health care needs. In today's new and tougher economy, this departure from the traditional consulting model may be a major contributor to DINMAR's success.

Traditional Consulting to Total Solution Provider

DINMAR began its evolution from the typical consulting services model about 24 months ago. According to President and CEO, Mark Groper, "we were driven by the clients, to make a change from a straight services provider to a total solutions provider. It was a function of their not wanting to go to multiple suppliers that began the evolutionary change for us." Since that time, DINMAR forged

even further down the total solution path, mixing its healthcare-specific skill set with new products, technologies and partners to help clients achieve their organizational goals.

Over the past several years the company has developed or acquired a number of new products in order to serve the needs of its customers. These include a healthcare-specific accounts receivable solution (HCAR) as well as a suite of clinical applications. The HCAR solution was developed by DINMAR in 1999, specifically to serve the complex needs of the Canadian healthcare delivery environment. The company developed the product using Oracle standards and Oracle Corporation is now marketing the product. In November 2000 the company purchased Oacis Healthcare System's Oacis product suite. Since the acquisition, DINMAR has been actively expanding the product suite as well as growing the research and development team dedicated to it. "The acquisition or development of these types of technologies gives us another tool to help clients in realizing their organizational objectives," noted Groper.



Mark Groper, President & CEO

Geographical Expansion

To better serve its growing market, the company expanded from one to five offices in the last 18 months. The company now has offices in Ottawa (head office), Toronto and Edmonton, as well as U.S. offices in Atlanta, Georgia and Petaluma, California. "We are bucking the trend of office consolidation," remarked Groper, "we are expanding while others are contracting." This geographical expansion puts our consultants closer to the clients who utilize their services.

DINMAR is also busy fostering the idea of internet-based services through the opening of two new healthcare-focused data centers. The company operates these centers out of the Ottawa and northern California offices. Each data center has redundant systems, an uninterruptible power supply and a 24x7 help desk that services more than 25 Canadian and international healthcare organizations. The data centers host over 20 servers (Sun Microsystems enterprise machines and Hewlett Packard servers) and run a broad spectrum of operating systems, including Linux, Unix, Novell, NT, Windows 95,98, 2000 and XP. High availability for each center is derived from a combination of fault tolerant storage arrays, backup UPS power, redundant system components (redundant power supplies, hot-swappable components) and an on-line monitoring system which alerts support staff to any warning or error conditions. The data centers are connected via a secure, high-speed VPN. This allows help desk engineers in the Ottawa office, for instance, to access the 3 servers that host separate versions of the Oacis application out of the northern California office.

British Columbia Mental Health Society

The company was selected to work with the British Columbia Mental Health Society to assist them with the implementation of Cerner Corporation's HNA Millennium product suite at both the Riverview Hospital and Forensic Psychiatry Services Commission, two large psychiatric institutions servicing the lower mainland of British Columbia.

This project includes the implementation of Cerner's chart management, person management and online orders/results applications, as well as the analysis, design, testing and implementation of a number of interfaces to existing systems. The project team is "blended", consisting of Riverview and Forensic Psychiatry staff, Cerner and DINMAR staff.

This model is typical of the company's collaborative implementation approach. Glenn De Roy, Vice President for DINMAR in Western Canada, noted that "Riverview Hospital and Forensic Psychiatry Services Commission are leaders in Canada in providing mental health services, and are striving to use technology in new and innovative ways. DINMAR is proud to be working with them on this very exciting and critical project".

“Growing” Relationships

While customer engagements still do involve tradition IT consulting services, the firm finds itself responding more and more frequently to requests for more broad and complex assistance. One example: a project that includes the provision of hardware, services, software, etc. — everything required to deliver a turnkey solution. In some cases a project can further expand to include the provision of software support services and/or outsourcing of some component of the IT function.

“One of the areas where we think we add value beyond what most clients are expecting is in preparing the client and their people for change and then helping them to realize the benefits of the investments they have made,” says Laurie Hicks, DINMAR Vice President. That includes assessing the client’s readiness for change, determining the impact of the change on each person effected, planning how to prepare and train each employee for the new way of doing things and then offering the on-going support to ensure that the benefits identified in the business case are actually realized. “Good communication is key at every stage of managing change successfully and is a hallmark of our service to clients” says Hicks.

“Growing” People

The firm’s employees possess a variety of skill sets, including technical expertise, project management experience, change facilitation, and operations. Many were practicing clinicians prior to joining the firm and have years of experience working on the complex and unique issues that define our industry. At the same time, other consultants within the firm offer the benefits of experience working in other industries. This allows the firm to blend deep knowledge and understanding of the healthcare business with the fresh ideas and best practices from outside the health care sector.

Ottawa Inner City Health Project (OICHP)

Another example of DINMAR’s ability to provide a total solution set where no off-the-shelf product was available is the recently completed engagement for the Ottawa Inner City Health Project (OICHP). The OICHP’s primary mission is to explore options for the collection and dissemination of key health information across stakeholders who interact with Ottawa’s homeless population, thereby enhancing the provision of services to this group.

The firm was contracted to design, build, project-manage and implement the OICHP information system. The system is a web-based application, hosted out of DINMAR’s Ottawa data center, and accessed at each of approximately 16 clinics within the city of Ottawa. The application was developed using Java Servlets, web application server technologies and a Postgress SQL database. The system allows caregivers to complete an electronic record for each episode of care provided to individuals formally registered with OICHP.

“The community who serve the homeless in Ottawa have been thrilled with the contributions of DINMAR through the development of the electronic health record system. As a valued partner, DINMAR has helped make our dreams of care coordination a reality,” noted Wendy Muckle, OICHP Project Director.

Canadian Blood Services

Canadian Blood Services (CBS) operates the Blood System across Canada, with the exception of the province of Quebec. CBS is responsible for the management of donor recruitment, collection, processing and testing of the blood, plasma and platelets collected and for the management of the inventory.

The CBS and DINMAR have had a long-term relationship that has seen the company work on various strategic initiatives. The company was recently engaged to assist the CBS with the implementation of a new blood management information system. The new application will replace a number of current systems and also extends computerization into areas that are currently manual, such as donor registration at mobile clinics. The firm’s consultants are working with a team of CBS staff and contractors, providing project management, business analysis and system validation expertise. The total project staff complement, at its peak, will approach 30 people. Deliverables of the project include the design and development of new business processes to be used in conjunction with the system in the CBS’s 14 main Blood Centres as well as various satellite facilities.

Acting co-Vice President of Corporate Services, Jeff Moran, remarked, “DINMAR Consulting is able to bring specific expertise in systems implementation to complement our own staff’s knowledge of CBS operations. I am impressed with the way that DINMAR Consultants work in a team environment — they give us good advice and recommendations that fit very well with our project and corporate objectives.”

One way in which DINMAR consultants gain their breadth of experience is through the company’s formal training program, whereby each individual’s training needs are evaluated on an annual basis. These needs are aligned with the company’s strategic direction, and individual training programs are established and executed. “We believe that it is imperative that our training needs and strategy keeps pace with technological change and our client needs, so that we not only build skills for today, but position our consultants for the market of the future,” said DINMAR Executive VP, Dinis Cabral. The industry-specific skills that this program yields are essential to a company whose focus is to improve healthcare delivery through the effective management of information.

The Client is the Key

A common thread across the entire spectrum of the firm’s services and solutions is the belief that the best solutions are those that are based on understanding a client’s goals, operations and internal issues. Rather than simply implementing information systems, the firm believes that success is based on the application of sound principles and appropriate technologies to help clients realize their business objectives.

This approach allows DINMAR’s clients to realize their business objectives again and again. This is evidenced by the fact that more than 90% of the company’s clients contract with the firm for additional services. In today’s new and tougher economy, where competition is fierce, it’s this type of creative and full solution approach that wins the day.

