



## Last Words



Michael Martineau

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# Power to the Consumer

On October 4th, 2007 (my birthday, by the way) Microsoft announced Healthvault, a personal health information storage service. While the date is probably a coincidence, geeks like me recognized it as the 50th anniversary of the launch of Sputnik, an event that arguably put the space race into high gear in the late 1950's.

Even if the date wasn't chosen purposely by Microsoft to coincide with the Sputnik anniversary (and my birthday, by the way), I contend that Healthvault's launch will have as similar an impact on the consumer eHealth market as Sputnik did on the space race. Why? Well, there are several reasons.

Perhaps the most significant reason is that Microsoft opted to offer Healthvault as a service rather than an application. Rather than build their own health and wellness applications, Microsoft is encouraging others to do so. The result will be a rich and diverse collection of health and wellness applications all using Healthvault to store personal health information.

I predict that many of the early applications will focus more on wellness than on health and will not require any data exchange with the health system. Consumers will soon find that they are storing a rich set of personal health information in their Healthvault using these applications and will start to demand that their doctor or healthcare provider store information in or retrieve information from their Healthvault. By introducing Healthvault, Microsoft has empowered the healthcare consumer.

Another reason that Healthvault will have such an incredible impact on the consumer eHealth market is that Microsoft has removed an expensive obstacle to the development of many health and wellness applications. Designing a robust and secure personal health information storage component is incredibly difficult. With numerous on-line applications already deployed, Microsoft has the experience and expertise required to deploy and operate high performance on-line services. Further, by working closely with the privacy community, Microsoft has garnered their support and their endorsement.

Finally, by developing a service that a variety of health and wellness applications can use, Microsoft has created a mechanism for sharing personal health information. Users of one application can easily share their personal health information among a number of applications, thereby eliminating the need to copy information between systems.

Although Microsoft has worked hard to address potential privacy concerns, there are still issues that Microsoft has to address, particularly in non-US markets. Participants at a recent OCRI eHealth event, for example, peppered a Microsoft representative with questions about the privacy of Canadian personal health information stored on servers located in the US. Until Microsoft announces how it will address country specific privacy legislation, Healthvault will be of limited interest to consumers outside the US.

What is your perspective on Microsoft's Healthvault? E-mail me at [mmartineau@branhamgroup.com](mailto:mmartineau@branhamgroup.com) to share your views. ●

As you have probably already heard through other sources, Steve Huesing, editor and publisher of this magazine, was honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the recent 2007 eHealth Awards Gala. Many of Steve's old friends and well known eHealth leaders toasted Steve in live and video-taped tributes.

As one of Steve's newer friends, I would like to echo the comments of Pat Jeselon who thanked Steve for supporting her selection to the COACH board of directors. Pat noted that Steve did so despite objections that she did not possess the same level of healthcare IT industry experience as other potential candidates. Like Pat, I want to thank Steve for his willingness to embrace both the old and the new and to encourage anyone who wants to contribute to the growth of the Canadian eHealth industry.