

Expert Perspectives



Partnerships in action

Structuring ultrasound vendor relationships to help you reach your goals

When optimizing your ultrasound services, the alliances you form may be as important to your success as the purchases you make. Partnerships with companies -- whether they be formalized agreements or simply a decision to look beyond transactional purchases to creating a mutually beneficial, long-term relationship -- can help you manage the cost and complexity of your services. With the right partners, you can serve patients better, increase efficiency, stay on the cutting edge, and increase staff satisfaction. Your partners can help you uncover areas for improvement, offer informal benchmarking based on their experience with other organizations, and provide educational opportunities. Given the many ways partnerships can help through collaboration, innovation and co-creation, it's no surprise that 41% of healthcare leaders say that their hospital or healthcare facility needs to prioritize strategic partnerships and collaborations to successfully implement digital health technologies. ¹

So, how do you distinguish those companies that are interested in a true partnership? One way is to evaluate in terms of people, process and technology.

1. People

- a. Does the vendor listen – or just sell?
- b. Are you aligned on goals?

2. Process

- a. Does the vendor help you determine the path to your goals?
- b. Do they have a holistic view?

3. Technology

- a. Does the vendor offer the tools that will make your goals a reality?
- b. Can they keep you on the cutting edge?

More than other imaging modalities, overseeing your ultrasound services is an exercise in fleet management. Even in a small facility, you have numerous ultrasound systems, many of which move throughout your facility and serve varied clinical stakeholders. This makes partnerships exceptionally valuable in helping you achieve the right mix of ultrasound technology to meet your goals.

This article examines the experience of three global health systems – MarinHealth Medical Center (Greenbrae, Calif., USA), Reinier de Graaf hospital (Delft, the Netherlands) and München Klinik (Munich, Germany) – and shares best practices about how their long-term strategic partnership with Philips has transformed technology management and patient care.



PEOPLE: MarinHealth Medical Center

MarinHealth's Director of Radiology Michael Watson is convinced that people are at the core of a successful partnership. When Marin General Hospital (now MarinHealth Medical Center) broke ground on a new 260,000 square foot medical center, it partnered with Philips to furnish the new center with a comprehensive range of advanced medical technologies, including patient monitoring, telehealth and clinical informatics solutions, education, applications support, consulting and design services. The partnership also encompasses the acquisition of many imaging systems, among which are 12 EPIQ ultrasound systems.

Watson stresses the importance of choosing equipment companies that understand your goals. "I've been in radiology for 40 years, so I knew that Philips develops great equipment, but more than that, they back up their equipment with great service and the way they treat their customers," he says. "Over the years, I've worked with other large technology providers. In my experience, they don't listen to what you want – they tell you what you're going to get. Philips is different. They listen to what you want and what your needs are and then they match those needs and wants to what you're going to get."

“ Philips is different. They listen to what you want and what your needs are and then they match those needs and wants to what you're going to get. ”

Education aids skill development and supports job satisfaction

Watson cites education as another area outside of technology that has helped MarinHealth's radiology department meet its goals.

"Before I arrived at MarinHealth, none of the ultrasound technologists were going to educational meetings or on-site trainings. When one of the Philips team members reminded me that we had a fund to draw on for continuing education sitting there unused, we started doing on-site training sessions and sending sonographers out for off-site training."

Consequently, for the last two years, MarinHealth has been routinely enrolling clinicians and sonographers in on- or off-site trainings to increase their breadth of knowledge and skills. The prospect of "free" education has even helped Watson recruit sonographers, who are in short supply due to COVID-19, and boosted job satisfaction among current staff.

Bottom line: Choose companies that offer more than equipment. "For me, it's not just about the equipment, it's the people, the service and the educational aspects," Watson says. "The relationship I have with the Philips team is very trusting and you don't get that overnight. It's by working with each other side by side, year to year, toward a common goal. We're like a family."

“ When one of the Philips teams members reminded me that we had a fund to draw on for continuing education sitting there unused, we started doing on-site trainings and sending sonographers out for off-site training. ”

PROCESS: Reinier de Graaf hospital's ultrasound future secured with Philips

Reinier de Graaf hospital's (Delft, the Netherlands) 15-year strategic partnership with Philips gives the healthcare provider long-term continuous access to Philips' advanced diagnostic and interventional ultrasound technologies. Throughout the contract lifetime, Philips provides the installation, training, maintenance, upgrading and replacement of all imaging equipment.

System replacement plan defines transition

The partnership, begun in 2015, includes an optimized system replacement plan that is transitioning departments from 40 ultrasound systems from nine different companies into a Philips family of ultrasound systems that will total approximately 65-70 systems.

This process-based approach provides Reinier de Graaf with the ability to anticipate and plan for new equipment. "The replacement plan clearly indicates when each ultrasound system will be replaced," say Luc Huijskes, Senior Medical Technician. "That is very reassuring for users to know in which year they will get new equipment, so they can already look around for options that are available at the moment. And if Philips is planning a major upgrade, then we will already know that and we can act accordingly."

The hospital benefits from EPIQ and Affiniti systems' uniform platform and similar user interfaces. "The systems and transducers are also easily interchangeable between departments when additional capacity or functionality is needed," Huijskes says. "Lastly, training sonographers on a unified platform will also be more efficient."

Because the partnership is based on providing what the hospital needs, if in a rare case clinicians need certain ultrasound functionality that is important to them, but unavailable from Philips, the contract allows procurement with other companies to ensure they can still access the specific functionality.

Fast service and parts delivery

The process-based approach is also reflected in robust field service and rapid spare parts delivery.

"Obtaining spare parts quickly has rarely been an issue," Huijskes says. "If something breaks in the afternoon, a new part is usually delivered by the next morning, which limits our downtime."

He adds, "When we encounter a problem that we can't solve ourselves, we can call someone at the Philips help desk, who will contact a field service engineer. We usually get a callback within a few minutes."

Bottom line: Investigate the processes that will help you operate efficiently and effectively. Your ultrasound company should be able to help you develop long-term plans for new equipment purchases and offer assistance in keeping costs predictable.

“The replacement plan clearly indicates when each ultrasound system will be replaced. That is very reassuring for users to know in which year they will get new equipment, so they can already look around for options that are available at the moment.”



TECHNOLOGY: Partnering with München Klinik to optimize ultrasound use

Ultrasound utilization is often difficult to assess in large health systems as the modality is so widespread. München Klinik had 168 ultrasound units distributed across its five hospital sites. The challenge was that the clinical departments weren't tracking how the equipment was being used.

Philips and München Klinik conducted an Ultrasound Demand Analysis across the system's five hospital sites to gauge precisely what was happening with every ultrasound system throughout the organization.

"Often, there is no overview of how and when ultrasound is used. No one is able to collect the relevant data," says Aline Mittag, Philips Healthcare Transformation Services Consultant. "Understanding ultrasound system usage is key to effective technology management."

“Understanding the usage of the ultrasound systems is key to effective technology management.”

“We worked out what was feasible and what worked for each department. The objective was to have complete transparency over all systems in the health system – who was using them and when, and what they were using them for.”

Ultrasound Demand Analysis includes detailed interviews

The analysis began with an online questionnaire and included detailed follow-up discussions.

"The questionnaire told us how they are using ultrasound, how often, how long a diagnosis takes and what procedures they perform," Mittag explains. "Next, we discussed the results with department heads and doctors to obtain more context on usage, such as what technologies they need."

"We worked out what was feasible and what worked for each department," she adds. "The objective was to have complete transparency over all equipment in the health system – who was using them and when, and what they were using them for."

Tangible benefits

At the conclusion of the Ultrasound Demand Analysis, the Philips-München Klinik team identified 24 ultrasound systems with a savings potential of €850,000* (ca. 997,000 USD [2021]), with cost-savings from Day 1. According to Mittag, a collaborative approach helps healthcare organizations appreciate the value of having the right imaging systems for their unique needs.

“Customers like München Klinik – as well as the Philips team – liked this cooperative strategy because it builds trust on a completely different level,” she says. “It’s never ‘us’ versus ‘them.’ We’re one team with a shared goal.”

Bottom line: Take advantage of consultancy services to help you reach your goals. Aligning your ultrasound equipment fleet with your needs is a task best managed when the vendor and healthcare provider collaborate to discover key indicators, such as system utilization and the potential for systems sharing across departments.

Stronger together

Philips’ commitment to a partnership based on people, process and technology has helped institutions like yours manage their ultrasound fleet, addressing operational and clinical needs and driving efficiencies. Our philosophy is that by building partnership into everything we do, we create mutually beneficial, long-term relationships. We and our customers are both in the business of bringing health to as many people as possible. We can do more when we do it together.

Results of customer testimonies are not predictive of results in other cases. Results in other cases may vary.

1. Future Health Index 2021.

©2021 Koninklijke Philips N.V. All rights are reserved. Philips reserves the right to make changes in specifications and/or to discontinue any product at any time without notice or obligation and will not be liable for any consequences resulting from the use of this publication. Trademarks are the property of Koninklijke Philips N.V. or their respective owners.



philips.com

Printed in The Netherlands
4522 991 73221 Nov 2021