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Distribution of Information; an Expensive and Critical Concern for Hospital

The complexity of distributing information is a challenge for all businesses today. The workplace is no longer defined by buildings, departments or areas, but by an individual's specific location at any given time. Technology and other circumstances has employees scattered across areas as companies strive to do more with less and demand more from them each day. To meet ever increasing demands for efficiency, the United States Postal Service (USPS) continues to implement initiatives that put greater responsibility upon the mailer to provide accurate and up to date mailing information on every mail piece. These changes can prove to be difficult for companies that are not focused upon nor have knowledge of the mailing industry. Nowhere is the timely and accurate distribution of information more critical than within a hospital or healthcare organizations.

Healthcare facility burdened by mail service issues

A large healthcare system in New England was experiencing significant delays and failures in distribution of both internal and external correspondences and documents. This organization consisted of three hospitals at separate locations, remote HIM (Health Information Management) Records storage and numerous satellite locations requiring mail and document distribution. Radiology reports and critical patient information was being misdirected and handled multiple times, potentially impacting the quality of patient care and putting the organization at risk. Misdirected mail was filling up mail bins requiring extensive time to be reviewed and redirected, often to the wrong location, repeatedly. Mailrooms were unorganized, cluttered and hard to manage as accumulation of mail occurred and misdirected mail had to be re-processed along with daily volumes which continued to be received. At any given time there would be large volumes of periodicals alone that would need to be sorted and distributed. These items represented a challenge in that addressing information was often vague or inaccurate to determine the recipient and their location.

Additional Challenges

The mail operations were significantly impacted by processing all outgoing mail, which included printing, folding and inserting all of the billing statements and hospital correspondences. Another portion of this process was to presort the outgoing mail to achieve postal discounts. To achieve these discounts there was a heavy investment in equipment that required a significant amount space. It also became necessary to solicit mail for processing from external businesses in order to justify the expense of the

equipment, space and manpower. This added to the drain of resources and facilities for a non-core business function.

This organization also relied heavily upon a team of couriers to move documents from the various hospitals, satellite locations and HIM sites, often requiring use of 3rd party couriers to complete routes and handle additional courier requests. The Fleet of vehicles were in disrepair due to lack of maintenance which often kept vehicles out of service for significant periods of time and resulted in higher repair costs. Documentation and accountability for gas, vehicle whereabouts and other necessary information was non-existent or incomplete.

Addressing the issues requires Mail Industry Professionals

This organization determined that there was a need to solicit assistance from a company that could evaluate their processes, determine a solution to eliminate the problems in distributing information and regain valuable resources for core functions while maintaining postal discounts. OMG, LLC evaluated the entire process through a detailed due diligence, focusing upon the workflow, staffing, areas of operation, scope of the distribution channels, equipment and level of training and industry knowledge. Certainly, cost savings and cost avoidance were underlying goals of the review as well. Upon completion of the review and recommendations conducted by OMG they were contracted to manage the on site mail service. This allowed them to establish an industry proven mode of operation to the organization that would supply long term stability and structure to meet the challenges that occur within the United States Postal Services and related industries. With a national presence, OMG offers over twenty years of service in On Site Facilities Management within the Healthcare, Insurance, Manufacturing and Legal industries among others.

Key issues and solutions

The results of this process identified key areas that needed to be addressed that were preventing the timely distribution of mail, documents and packages throughout the organization.

Large Issues were Focus of initial Effort

In addressing outgoing mail processes OMG determined that the organization would be better served by outsourcing the processing of mail for postal discounts, liquidating equipment and consolidating mail services to a smaller well designed mail center. OMG took responsibility for working with vendors to fulfill existing contracts, locating buyers for equipment and reviewing potential sites for relocation. OMG also determined that there remained a need for mail processing equipment to process daily correspondence generated in-house and recommended as well as facilitated the purchase of up to date industry certified equipment at a reduced rate based upon their buying history with the vendor. This solution provided a maintenance agreement and a back up system to eliminate any delays in mailing. Software was included in the purchase of equipment to establish chargeback accounts for all users to document postage allocations by department for greater accountability.

OMG also addressed the issues associated with the courier processes by redesigning existing routes to be more efficient and to include vehicle rotations to lessen the wear associated with specific routes such as additional stops for one route, multiple right hand

turns on another route, etc. It was determined that existing vehicles needed to be retired from service and OMG again acted on behalf of the organization to liquidate the vehicles and negotiated the acquisition of new vehicles to meet the requirements of the new routes, established a scheduled maintenance program and set expectations for fuel charges.

Accurate Data is Critical

The mail services were completely dependent upon the legacy of knowledge possessed by the mail staff and shared with subsequent staff. There was no system to capture the location of individuals within the organization other than word of mouth and 'post-it' notes. Individual moves would be sent via e-mail to be posted in the work areas for reference or worse, communicated verbally to an individual who would be the only lasting source for that information. Mail Service staffing is not unlike any other areas of production in that at any time there can be significant turnover leaving the area crippled without a standardized process for documenting the locations of mail recipients. Without documentation the 'legacy of knowledge' leaves with former employees making it nearly impossible to sort and distribute mail with accuracy and within an acceptable time frame.

OMG determined there was no central record of where to sort mail and documents. Mail slots were simply labeled by individual name or department with no logical organization such as departmentalization within buildings or alphabetically sorted. Again, any exceptions to individuals or departments were simply noted and attached to boxes or e-mails were taped to the table below the mail slots for reference. Even with stability in staffing the mobile nature of staffing in a Healthcare organization makes it nearly impossible to stay on top of the movement with manual or verbal processes. Changes must be communicated consistently to all users and stakeholders to insure that the process is efficient.

At the core of creating an efficient process for readily identifying location of mail recipients is an accurate and all inclusive database for all persons and departments within the organizations. In the case of this organization it took bringing many parties together to share information and provide cooperation in compiling a database to include more than 5,000 records. This included non-hospital employees working within the hospital that needed to be identified as well. Information for each entity was gathered to include name, title, department, building, floor, and office number to pinpoint the physical location for delivery. Even determining standardized department names became difficult, due to the lack of consistency. For example buildings that had been renamed were still being referred to by their former name plus there were multiple variations of departmental names. This again took the cooperation of users and stakeholders; spearheaded by the OMG leadership onsite; to overcome these hurdles.

Once all of the variations of information were standardized and documented within the database a mail stop code needed to be created incorporating intelligent design that could be easily communicated to users and taught to staff. In this instance buildings were given a 2 letter code, floor numbers were incorporated and each location on a floor was given a numerical designation to establish a code (for example: FL213). Having the codes established lead to the need to establish compliance by all users in order to facilitate accurate delivery of incoming and internal mail. Key department heads and representatives were provided with the proposed mail codes and the explanation behind their design. These individuals were counted on to support the effort and set the

expectations for their departments to begin using the new codes. Payroll and Human Resource departments became valuable partners in utilizing the new codes on all correspondences. Print facilities also began incorporating mail codes on each department printed envelopes to enable chargeback of postage and accurate distribution of return mail pieces.

Individual meetings were conducted by OMG leadership with all departments and users within the organization to educate and establish participation. Consistent feedback was provided during the implementation to address any issues.

The final piece to full implementation was to incorporate the new database with containing all of the new mail stops on the organization's intranet for quick and consistent reference. This again required the cooperation of OMG and the organization to accomplish. The database that was created included all entities that would be located within the organization, hospital staff, support personnel, executives and applicable contractors.

The critical nature of Lab Reports was addressed and a special process was created to escalate the service level and accuracy of their distribution. Special mail tubs were created to be used solely for these items and were utilized to identify them as 'critical' throughout the distribution process. Great care was taken in working with the Lab department to establish expectations for using new mail stops to insure continuity. Significant improvement in delivery times and accuracy were achieved through these efforts.

Assessing Results

Through the process OMG recognized eight areas for significant improvement:

- Staff reduction
- Equipment and Maintenance Cost Reduction
- Significant improvement of Service Levels
- Eliminate need for large amount of space
- Courier Consolidation
- Improvement in area of Compliance
- Identify and offer Additional Services
- Budgetary Improvements through Cost Savings and Cost Avoidance

Staff reductions were achieved by consolidating incoming and outgoing mail processes at one location and significantly improving the workflow to be more efficient. Eliminating in-house processing of billing statements allowed resources to be reassigned as necessary.

Equipment, maintenance and supply costs were significantly reduced to match the volumes that would be handled internally moving forward

Through OMG's ability to evaluate workflow processes, establish accurate, all inclusive Policies and Procedures and provide documented Service Level Agreements, all levels of service improved significantly. OMG's sense of urgency and accountability were paramount to this outstanding achievement. Through Model Site Standards, Quarterly Site Audits and Client Review meetings the focus on delivering quality service is constantly reviewed and measured. Along with OMG's efforts, the outsourcing of billing statements actual achieved a greater service level through the 3rd Party vendor's available resources.

OMG's experience in the Healthcare industry provides a foundation for establishing expectations for meeting compliance expectations such as HIPAA, Hazardous Mail procedures and Disaster Recovery. These items are reviewed regularly with all associates to maintain consistency.

Many additional services were implemented upon OMG's installation as the on site management for mail services. All additional services were a result of OMG's experience in the industry and proven methods of success. Foremost of all services was the intricate and complicated documentation of all mail recipients associated with the organization. This resource has proven invaluable to numerous areas including Payroll and Human Resources. OMG brought an electronic tool to track accountable mail and time sensitive, critical items that did not previously exist. Detailed reporting and real time data became available for review with this implementation.

With all process implementations and established expectations in place the mail services were recognized for its organization, commitment to service and industry knowledge as a valuable resource. These accomplishments established trust and reliance upon the mail services that had not existed in the past.

The success associated with OMG's efforts was significant and documented client verified cost savings. Within the first two years of the contract between OMG and the organization there was a net savings of **\$685,000**. Staff reductions resulting in consolidation of services and focusing upon core business functions resulted in nearly \$200,000 in annual savings while significantly improving service levels and the quality of service!

Commitment to the Future Insures Continued Success

Although there has been much success through the partnership of OMG and this organization, OMG's focus is on meeting the needs of the organization for years to come. There are many changes that are occurring and are being planned in the mailing industry that will have an impact upon all mailers. OMG is directly involved in the industry through participation in industry organizations and educational opportunities provided by local Postal Customer Councils (PCC) and Mailing Systems Management Association (MSMA). Subscriptions to industry publications and a commitment to continuing education for all associates are also highlights of OMG's effort to being the premiere on-site facilities management provider.