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# Building a BridgeForward to improved medical data

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**By Brian Cook**

A local firm that developed medical software back in the 1990s and was acquired at the height of the dot-com boom has returned to the fray in another guise.

The team at Beverly-based BridgeForward Software Inc. is led by the same CEO, John Moriarty, as before — when it was known as MicroScript — and is trawling the same waters for business, hospitals in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Because of its reputation as MicroScript, BridgeForward was able to establish a new product offering to such organizations as the National Health Service in Britain, most notably in Scotland, where its product is now established in most Scottish hospitals.

And just recently, the company signed a deal with a major health care consortium to provide a new kind of automated system that helps keep track of patients as they move through the British health care system. Its design, said Moriarty, is to help maintain the records of patients no matter where they seek medical help. To do that, the company was asked to bring together a range of application providers to solve the problem.

“Ideally, if a patient gets treatment in one facility and perhaps sometime later is treated somewhere else, the master record will always be updated,” Moriarty explained.

“The attraction of this approach is that it is not just restricted to the medical profession but can be usefully applied to other

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industries and businesses.

A first installation is under way in a U.K. hospital, and the consortium, which also includes Initiate Systems Inc., UltraGenda nv/sa, HealthSystems Consultants Ltd. and Agilisys Ltd., will take some time to see what other possible applications may be available.

As Moriarty tells it, back in the early 1990s, a new genre of software technology was born — the interface engine. Its role was to operate as an enterprise integration application. “The health care sector was a major target for this technology because of the enormous amount of proprietary systems that needed to talk to one another,” Moriarty explained. “The medical industry at that time was way behind the curve when it came to this kind of organization.”

Serving the dozen or so various departments within a hospital and their often incompatible legacy systems were about 2,000 software vendors offering a wide range of applications, most of them built for Unix operating systems. Moriarty guesses that about 100 or so of those had revenues of \$100 million or more.

“In a sense it was a boutique business, because each vendor had proprietary software and communication with other programs therefore had to be negotiated, sometimes at a hefty price,” he said.

In 1993, Moriarty and a few others developed software, using the PC as a platform, that would “screen scrape” information from these legacy systems without moving or affecting the data. “It was largely accomplished,” he says, “by creating a script, (hence the company name), that would emulate a terminal used by hospital staff members tied into a mainframe computer system.”

Further development created a more solid product that became an interface engine. This led to the creation of a software program the company named “ebiz 2000.”

The company was doing well selling in the \$20,000 to \$50,000 license space, but Moriarty saw more potential. The company had about 1,000 installations in medical facilities in the United States and the United Kingdom at the time. It did not, however, have the cash on hand to develop much further.

In 1999, a company called New Era of Networks (NEON) stepped in and bought Moriarty’s company for \$100 million. Soon after that, NEON struggled in other parts of its business and was bought by Sybase. In its acquisition moves, Sybase sidelined the MicroScript software and Moriarty left to do other things.

Fast forward to 2003, and Moriarty and a few of his former colleagues from MicroScript re-entered the market by acquiring

ebiz 2000 from Sybase. The team spent a while developing the product to meet the needs of a market that had shifted, changing the product name to ClearSpan Server and selling to application developers rather than end users.

"The price points have dropped since we last did this," he said. "What was our bottom price range (\$20,000) is now the top end."

Today ClearSpan is bundled with other people's software packages.

Going forward, the company could move toward open-source solutions, Moriarty said. Meantime, as more and more hospitals look to automate their records, Moriarty expects to see growth continue.

"There are some 5,500 hospitals between the U.S. and the U.K., and so far only about 1,300 have our software," he said.

*Brian Cook is a freelance writer based in Sharon.*

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