

## Software developer maintains healthy roster

Attending industry conferences helps Suncoast find clients

BY ROBERT YANIZ JR.  
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

**CLEARWATER** — Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, Suncoast Solutions is in the final throes of a 4,000-square-foot expansion of its office space, reaching a total of about 12,500 square feet.

The provider of software for hospice, palliative care and end-of-life institutions was born out of necessity from The Hospice of the Florida Suncoast, but today, its products are used by nearly 25 percent of hospice institutions nationally, said CEO Teresa Craig.

In 1996, The Hospice of the Florida Suncoast developed Suncoast Solutions as its own in-house team to create software applications for the nonprofit. The division spun off into a for-profit subsidiary in 1999 and began selling its software to other companies.

Previously VP of finance and information systems at The Hospice of the Florida Suncoast, Craig was appointed CEO of Suncoast Solutions in 2000.

"I was so excited about the software they were developing and the opportunities to serve better," she said. "That's part of why I came."

When Suncoast Solutions started, its clients were mostly nonprofit hospices. The company has since branched out into for-profit and home health organizations.

From the very beginning, one of the biggest challenges in fostering Suncoast Solutions' growth, said Craig, has been competing with companies like McKesson, Allscripts and Cerner.

"We're a pretty small company, and our competitors are huge, billion dollar corporations," she said. "Our idea is to have software that helps you to still be big and act small."

Suncoast Solutions' association with The Hospice of the Florida Suncoast proved helpful early on. The nonprofit's connections and track record were valuable tools in establishing Suncoast Solutions as a repu-



KATHLEEN CABBLE

Teresa Craig, CEO of Suncoast Solutions, talks with David Little, Ed Shuffler, Dalla Johnson and Daryn Hyland during a clinical training class on electronic documentation for hospice patient medical records.

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table company among the hospice community, which Craig said is comprised of only about 4,000 hospices nationally.

"Building the reputation of being a company that is here to stay has been an important thing for us to do," said Craig.

While Suncoast Solutions advertises frequently in trade magazines and on the Internet, its most effective tool for cultivating word of mouth is its consistent presence at industry conferences.

Certified a Microsoft Gold partner, Suncoast Solutions attends about 35 such events annually and even holds its own annual conference designed to educate clients on its software.

ing and how the product can help them best," she said.

Although the company continues to recruit from The Hospice of the Florida Suncoast, it also uses IT Resources Corp., an information technology staffing firm in Tampa, and finds prospective employees at conferences and other events as well.

Suncoast Solutions began with just eight employees but has since increased to 52. Much of this growth took place in the last two years, following the release of the fifth incarnation of its software.

The electronic medical records software helps clients cut costs by reducing the incidence of duplicate services and provides improved patient care and data management, said Craig.

Paul Stinson, senior VP of product management at Sage Healthcare, the health care division of Sage Software, expects EMR software will become more popular in the years ahead.

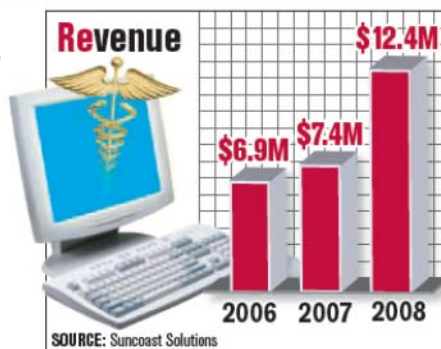
"It's a very promising industry," Stinson said. "There's a real drive to improve patient care and reduce health care expenses."

The technology does cause a six- to eight-month training lag as physicians grow accustomed to the new system, Stinson said, but he believes that health care professionals are beginning to realize that the technology is worth the initial hassle.

Among Sage's health care products, EMR continues to be the primary focus. "Today all the excitement is surrounding the medical records," said Stinson.

This bodes well for Craig, who hopes to double the size of her company within the next three to five years. "I think we're going to continue to have opportunities to grow because we're going to help reduce the costs that are causing hurt," Craig said.

Suncoast Solutions will begin preliminary testing on the sixth edition of its software in March, followed by heavy promotion at the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization Leadership Conference in April.



SOURCE: Suncoast Solutions

ABDIEL RIOS

Craig places a great emphasis on informing current and prospective clients about Suncoast Solutions and its services.

The company offers online training and 24-hour call center support, and Craig personally tries to reach out to every client at least once a year to follow up on their experience with the software.

"[Our staff] knows the issues they're fac-

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