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CRM finds health plans' sweet spot

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BEVERLY HILLS, CA — Y&M Partners has launched a beta site of its CRM Anywhere for a large California-based health plan. By incorporating wireless into its CRM strategy, Y&M Partners hopes that the Generation Xers and the succeeding generation, who have already embraced wireless technology, will quickly adopt this touch point in their healthcare experiences.

Healthcare research firm Lewin Group, which conducted a study for Washington, D.C.-based consumer advocacy group Families USA, found approximately 17 percent of the 44 million uninsured people in this country are between the ages of 18 and 24.

Beverly Macy, founding partner of Y&M Partners, noted that reaching this age group via wireless technology presents an enormous opportunity for health plans. According to Macy, health plans have spent an enormous amount of money on their Web portals and yet provider look-ups are the killer application for members. She noted that cell phones could help drive member traffic to these Web portals.

Macy said that while 80 percent of CRM implementations target cost reduction and operational efficiency, her company's sweet spot is the 20 percent of CRM applications that focus on customer retention, loyalty and satisfaction.

"Our CRM objective is to deliver brand ROI – loyalty and retention," said Macy.

Y&M's offering is part of a trend in which CRM applications are penetrating the healthcare industry, although most play in the operational efficiency area.

Victor Otley, CEO of Portland, Maine-based IntelliCare, which provides medical call center services, said that disease management programs, which constitute approximately 40 percent of IntelliCare's business, comprise the heart of patient relationship management.

IntelliCare's ROI pitch to DM customers is that the company can go into existing call center systems and reduce 30 percent to 40 percent of operational costs.

Otley said the evolution of call centers would include bringing providers, a critical component, into DM programs, providing one more touch point for patients.

Portland, Ore.-based The Regence Group, a regional health plan in the Pacific Northwest-Mountain area, went live with its contact center in the spring of 2004 in an effort to measure member interaction.

Since the implementation, The Regence Group has been able to recognize outstanding support staff and coach specialists.

Joanne Gholson, vice president of customer service, said that The Regence Group is currently working with its contact-center partner, San Jose, Calif.-based Aspect Communications, to implement a significant upgrade with the center's telecom infrastructure to enable workflow throughout its 10 facilities across four states.