

Attention to Detail, Exceptional Customer Service Key to InterMed's Success

Q & A with Rick Staab,
Don Fletcher, and Dave Bauerle

by Julie E. Williamson

As more corporations place a greater emphasis on the bottom line, exemplary customer service is often the first business priority to fall by the wayside. Fortunately, companies do still exist that make customer satisfaction and quality service a primary mission.

Such is the case for InterMed Inc., the Alachua, FL-based technology management provider. Since its inception in the late 1980s, InterMed has been striving to meet and exceed customer needs by creating a corporate infrastructure built on honesty, integrity and unbiased product support—and at the same time, doing so in a financially responsible way that allows reinvestment into key areas of service development and customer support.

At the heart of InterMed's success is the longstanding belief that a customer's complete technology needs are best met by a dedicated and experienced organization. In light of that philosophy, InterMed has united sophisticated technology with knowledgeable professionals who are aptly prepared to rise above challenges, anticipate long-term needs and cultivate enduring relationships. Through its satellite offices in Charlotte, NC, Atlanta, Miami, and Columbia, SC, InterMed's experienced staff has been able to further bring those goals to fruition.

Here InterMed partners Rick Staab, Don Fletcher and Dave Bauerle discuss the value of maintaining a strong foothold in the realm of customer service, the path InterMed plans to take in the near future, and the underlying missions that have led to the company's long-term success.

Q: What led to the formation of InterMed?

A: Each partner comes from a slightly different background. Dave came from the imaging side, Rick came from the biomedical side and Don came from the ultrasound side—combined, we had more than 20 years of experience when we created the partnership. We all believed there was a lot of room for improvement, and we

joined forces to develop a solution that could meet all the customer needs. We have seen other companies come and go because they lacked integrity and the customer suffered. That was something that none of us wanted.

We go to bat for our customers and are committed to providing the very best service. In thinking on behalf of the customer, there are a lot of times where we will stock parts that a typical manufacturer will not have in a central or regional location—and that allows us to get the customer up and running more quickly. We recently had a situation with a down nuclear camera. We had a hard drive in stock and literally drove it to the customer the same day to get them up and running. The manufacturer would have had to order it and next day it, and do software upgrades, which would have added an additional 24 hours to the downtime. We have even chartered aircraft to send out parts just so we could get the customer up and running that same day. Going that extra mile is what we're all about, and that's something you can't always say about other companies.

Q: What products and services does InterMed provide?

A: InterMed provides sales and service on a range of medical equipment, including radiology, imaging, ultrasound and biomedical equipment. Essentially, we provide sales and service on virtually all of the electronic medical equipment one would find at a hospital, medical center or clinic. InterMed Ultrasound division, together with our partners, sells more than 400 ultrasound systems per year. Our international trade has risen dramatically as we have learned how to deal internationally. We have one of the largest ultrasound inventories and sell everything from transducers to accessories, such as gels and paper.

We are particularly proud of some of our new lines. These include our CR and DR solutions; digital upgrades; new fluoro rooms and general radiographic generators; IS2 Nuclear Gamma cameras; Sony and Mitsubishi printers; print media; and VCRs. All of these new lines were thoroughly researched and are considered the best in the industry in many categories. We are very excited about recent success with our Nuclear Camera sales. Similar to ultrasound, we have several nuclear medicine service engineers that give us a competitive advantage in selling this product and its service.

InterMed offers a technology management program for servicing equipment from the point of purchase all the way through its life cycle. Our focus in the past has been on service, but as InterMed has grown, we've been asked to move into other areas as well. Our technology management product is a culmination of different focuses. As our expertise developed in different service areas, it became a product we could provide to hospitals that needed management of their entire program, not just management of an imaging or biomedical department. When we started a few years back, we were providing training on different ultrasound machines in anything from basic training to more advanced, higher end units. We began

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by training our technicians in the field to make sure they were aware and to document that competency, but then we were asked to train some other people, which evolved into a really nice program. Since that time, we have developed relationships with some of the bigger players out there. By providing the training, we then have an opportunity to sell spare and replacement parts, and provide technical support to our customers. They see us as the experts and call us back to get technical support, which leads to equipment and parts sales.

The evolution of InterMed has been extremely customer driven. As our customers' needs have developed, InterMed has taken on new products and areas of medical equipment management to meet those needs. We were involved in the service of what we believe is one of the original PACS systems in the world. Because of that, we've grown as a PACS service division and have provided services and alternatives for PACS to a number of facilities on the east coast.

Q: What else sets InterMed apart from the competition?

A: We are focused on resolutions and providing what the customer needs, as opposed to providing what we need the customer to need. We don't manufacture anything, so everything we sell comes from an unbiased opinion. We support customers, not certain manufacturers, which enables us to outfit the customer with what they need without pushing a particular brand of equipment.

Our primary company-wide focus is—and always has been—based on developing strong, honest customer relationships. Sometimes, we'll consult with a customer on products we don't even carry directly. They will come to us for an honest answer and we will try to sit on the side of the customer to help them make the best equipment and equipment management decisions. The atmosphere we have created and maintained is one of our greatest competitive advantages. Everyone here has the same type of attitude toward building relationships and servicing the customer. We don't think you can do that just by buying products and putting people in place. We've grown to this point gradually and purposefully. Because we've taken our time and were able to grow and reinvest our resources, we have been able to put the right person in the right position.

Another differentiating factor is that InterMed is a fiscally responsible and debt-free company. We try to impress on all our employees the importance of having that kind of responsible, honest, high integrity to make us strong with our customers for the long haul. By reinvesting a lot of our profits, we have been able to put in that infrastructure and grow to the point where we are now. We've done even more so in the last year to take us to that next level.

Q: Where do you see InterMed in three to five years?

A: We have been reinvesting our money. On the service side, we've invested in infrastructure (such as warehouse managers and a human resource manager, for example) that we never had before. We have invested in this infrastructure because we want to be poised to go to the next level. Our next venture from a service side is to get an affiliation with the health systems—doing services for health systems, not just specific hospitals. We are now doing equipment recycling plans with health systems and talking about doing technology management, or imaging and biomedical services for health systems. That's going to take us to the next level.

Q: What has been InterMed's greatest accomplishment?

A: One of our greatest accomplishments is the culture we've created. We founded this company many

years ago and we still feel that we have a very tight team and a family-oriented staff. We are only as good as our employees, so we invest a lot in employee training, education and the overall corporate environment. We have people who are very dedicated to their jobs because they like what they do. Also, by being fiscally responsible, we have been able to reinvest in the infrastructure to make us a stronger company and allow our employees to do their jobs better. We have been able to grow and yet maintain the InterMed mission along the way.

Many businesses are primarily profit-driven. Even though our bottom line is strong, it isn't our only focus. The customer is our main focus. Each of our employees has the same mentality and that is to follow up to make sure the customer is taken care of, and to do that before they go home at night. Receiving compliments from our customers on how well our employees handle situations is a common occurrence here, so we know we're doing something right.

We have even been approached by a number of large companies that wanted to acquire us because they weren't able to duplicate the same kind of atmosphere. We pride ourselves on being able to make the sale because of the relationships and trust we've built with our customers. We don't ever want to lose that feel. As we continue to grow to a much larger company, we will strive to keep that family-oriented atmosphere and never lose sight of the importance of having strong employee and customer relationships. As a larger company, we will be an even bigger player by maintaining that type of culture. END



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