Working with EHR Vendors
Understand the Differences Between Common EHR Vendors
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Redox exists to improve healthcare by uniting patients and providers through easily accessible technology. Technology can dramatically improve healthcare. It helps healthcare organizations become more efficient. It gives patients more control of their healthcare experience. And when done right, technology removes distractions so providers can focus on what’s important: their patients.
No two EHRs are the same, even when they’re sold from the same vendor. This system variance can make it difficult to forecast integration projects accurately unless you understand the nuances of each system.

In this guide, we’ll cover the basic differences among the most common EHR vendors and explain how they can impact integrations and project timelines.

At Redox, our goal is to help your team integrate your product more efficiently with a wide variety of EHR vendors—without requiring significant vendor-specific changes to your product. However, when it comes to selecting and kicking off a project, it’s important to know that there are some key nuances in vendors that may impact timelines and development options.

There are three main categories of EHR vendors: Enterprise EHRs, Clinic-focused EHRs, and Niche EHRs. Let’s dive into the commonalities—and the key differences—between each.

In this guide, we’ll cover the basic differences among the most common EHR vendors and explain how they can impact integrations and project timelines.
Enterprise EHRs

Enterprise EHR vendors typically have products that can be used across the entire spectrum of patient care—clinical (outpatient, inpatient, emergency), patient access (scheduling, registration), revenue (billing), and many more.

**Examples:**
Cerner, Epic, McKesson, Meditech

**Common Integration Methods:**
HL7, API, FHIR

Given the breadth of workflows and business areas these systems cover, it’s fairly common that they have a full suite of HL7 interfaces already available that can be leveraged for your Redox integration project. Enterprise EHR vendors may also have API or web service capabilities that can be used depending on your workflow and integration needs, but not all enterprise EHRs provide this method of integration.

Usually, the health system has its own IT staff who is responsible for handling any work that needs to be done with the EHR or interface configuration. However, if you’re doing a complex integration, building a brand new interface, or running into issues that the local IT team can’t resolve, they may pull in the vendor for additional support.

Many health systems using these EHRs are extremely well versed in HL7, but their knowledge and implementation of other integration methods such as APIs or FHIR can range from expert to novice. If necessary, they may choose to implement new integration methods to support your product, which may require involvement from the EHR vendor to either enable new features or to support and train the local IT team on the set-up. These may lengthen your install timelines.
Clinic-Focused EHRs

Examples:
Allscripts, Athenahealth, eClinicalWorks, Flatiron, GE Centricity, Greenway, NextGen

Common Integration Methods:
HL7

Clinic-based EHRs tend to get the majority of their business from clinics that only require a basic outpatient EHR. This allows them to provide a lower cost product that is also appealing to small practices with one to ten clinicians. Additionally, independent practices that don’t have a dedicated business relationship with a particular hospital or health system often choose one of these lighter-weight EHRs.

Because the workflows that need to be performed are mostly done from start to finish within the clinic, it’s less common for these practices to have experience with integration, and they often need their vendor involved to start (and complete) any integration project.

Clinic-focused EHRs further break down into two categories: EHRs that primarily use HL7, and those that have APIs available.
Clinic-Focused EHRs

**PRIMARILY HL7**

**Examples:**
eClinicalWorks,
GE Centricity, Greenway,
NextGen

In Redox’s experience, the example EHRs usually have HL7 as the primary option to complete a non-real-time integration, but they may also support other non-real time types of integrations such as SFTP. Many of these EHR vendors have reported plans for API or web-service-based integrations in the future, though timelines and available functionality is still very unclear.

Clinics using these EHRs often have limited interfaces already installed, if any, and they typically need to initiate a work order with the vendor and receive a price quote or statement of work on the interface to be completed. For the majority of practices using these EHRs, they are aware of the process to follow and the potential charges they may incur to implement the EHR-side of the integration based on the terms of their contract with the vendor. After the quote or statement of work is signed by the clinic, the EHR company will assign a resource to complete the interface installation who will be the main point of contact for any interface work that needs to be completed.

There may also be a mix of vendor and health system resources that will be responsible for any configuration that’s needed within the EHR, which often increases the timeline of the project. However, Redox helps facilitate these conversations and assists in filling out information about the integration requirements. Additionally, our experience working with these vendors means we have a solid starting point created to match their base specifications and can conform to the vendor’s preferences.

This flexibility often reduces the amount of interface configuration that the vendor needs to complete, allowing the project to move more quickly.
These EHRs are more likely to exclusively use a vendor-specific API to integrate with their product. Vendors that have robust APIs typically prefer that method of integration, as the technical lift is significantly lighter for both them and their health system customers. In some cases, you may find that you need HL7 in order to achieve specific components of your integration. When this happens—and HL7 is offered by the EHR—the process outlined in the section above typically applies to these groups as well.

While the process of connecting to vendor-specific APIs is usually much quicker than other methods of integration, Redox is able to help your team streamline this process by supporting the myriad of authentication methods required by different vendors. Best yet, our established integrations can easily be turned on for your team.

In order to connect to the vendor’s API, you’ll need to start by having the health system grant you access to their system. The health system is typically familiar with this process and can always reach out to the vendor with questions. Once the vendor processes the clinic’s access request, they will provide authentication information, such as a URL or password, that will be used by Redox to complete your connection to the EHR.

For EHR vendors that Redox has connected to previously, we already have the appropriate credentials needed to move forward with the connection. For vendors that we haven’t worked with before, we’ll need to complete scoping via vendor-provided specifications or a call with the EHR vendor. Scoping helps us understand their particular approach to authentication and allows us to identify any development needs to facilitate the connection.

Once the connection is established, Redox will complete any necessary configurations and create your subscription. When the subscription is in place, you can start making calls to the API and work with your Redox Customer Success rep to identify any adjustments that are needed.

In some cases, the vendor may also require you to sign up for their API services or offer optional programs that can allow you to initiate the integration project request, help get your project expedited, gain access to a sandbox environment, or provide dedicated support from the vendor for product marketing. If the vendor does require you to sign up for their API program, there may be additional fees involved that will be outlined by the EHR vendor.

One other key thing to note is that clinics using EHRs from vendors whose primary method of integration is APIs likely do not have a testing environment.
Niche EHRs

Examples:
NetSmart, Orchard LIS, Phoenix Ortho

In addition to the traditional EHR vendors, there are a number of specialized EHRs that you may need to integrate with. These may be EHRs that are used for specific services, workflows, or specialties. In our experience, some of these EHRs support HL7 or API integrations while others have limited or no integration capabilities and may need to complete EHR development in order to allow an external system to connect to their product.

For vendors that we haven’t worked with before, we’ll need to complete scoping via vendor provided specifications or have a call with the EHR vendor to understand their integration capabilities (and to identify any development needs required to facilitate the connection). Your Redox Sales Rep or Account Manager can let you know whether or not we have experience with the EHRs you’re targeting.
Other Nuances & Terms to Know

Outsourced IT Teams

Some health systems choose to outsource their IT teams to consulting companies. From onsite and immediate support to ticket or work-order based support, there’s a lot of variance in the types of contracts and relationships a health system has negotiated with their consultants. If the health system you’re working with outsources their IT shop, work with your Redox contact to understand how the health system requests support and what their expected response timelines are.

Resellers

Some EHR vendors may allow their product to be sold by resellers. In these situations, the support for the EHR will go through the resellers and not directly to the EHR company itself. This can make getting the necessary support more time consuming.

On-Premise vs. Hosted vs. Cloud

There are three primary methods in which EHR vendors deploy their software. An EHR vendor may offer only one option or all three.

On-Premise

The EHR software is installed as a unique instance and configured on a server owned and maintained by the health system to meet their specific needs. This is the most common deployment method of enterprise EHRs.

Hosted

The EHR software is installed on a server owned and maintained by the EHR vendor, but it’s a server dedicated to that specific health system. For enterprise EHRs, this is usually a unique instance of the software owned and configured by the health system. For clinic-based EHRs, this can either be a generic version configured and maintained by the vendor or a unique version configured and maintained by the health system with assistance from the vendor. Hosted instances may have regional divisions that require their different connections.

When a health system uses a hosted solution, there is usually a queue maintained by the vendor to address interface additions and updates. Each EHR vendor has their own process and timelines for working their queue. If you’re working with a health system using a hosted EHR, work with your Redox contact to understand how the health system requests new interfaces and what the expected timelines are for the EHR vendor to complete the interface install.

Cloud

Most commonly used by clinic-based EHRs. The EHR vendor software is deployed from a central cloud server to all health systems using the product. While the health system has the ability to make certain customizations (such as list values or tables), the core features and functions of the software are deployed uniformly across all systems using the EHR.
Integrate Confidently

There are many nuances and variations across EHR vendors that must be considered when thinking about (and executing) an integration project. Though what we’ve outlined above covers a lot of information and accounts for the most common variations we’ve seen across our interoperable network, there will continue to be nuances and changes that can only be accounted for during project scoping.

Leveraging the knowledge of integration experts is the best and most efficient way to account for variation across systems. That’s why partnering with us can help you navigate complex projects and make the best use of your time, resources, and talent.

Get More Support

Whether you’re working with us already or are brand new to integration, we’re always here to answer your questions and support your integration project from kick off to go live and beyond.

Reach out to us today or check out our website for more information.

Contact Us
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