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PRODUCT REVIEW

Changing the Economics of Product Data Integration

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Changing the Economics of Product Data Integration

REVIEWER: Marla Weigert, group vice president, Contract Management/Member Technology of Premier, Inc.

BACKGROUND: Premier Inc. is a hospital performance improvement alliance with 1,700 participating not-for-profit hospitals and health systems serving communities nationwide; 200 hospitals and health systems created and entirely own the Premier alliance. Premier's core purpose is to improve the health of communities, including knowledge sharing and group contracting for hospital products and services.

HARDWARE PLATFORMS: Sun x4100, with AMD Operons running RedHat Enterprise Server.

PROBLEM SOLVED: Premier receives incoming product data in multiple and inconsistent formats daily. The process of massaging this data into the right format is typically expensive, slow and inefficient. Premier receives more than 5.5 million product records a week, and we must match those records against our product item master (PIM) system's source of truth. This data comes from sources we do not control, and it must go through various levels of cleansing before it can be successfully matched. We have continuously looked for ways to improve these mission-critical processes - from manual efforts, to writing custom scripts and macros, to using off-the-shelf software. In every case, the variability of the incoming data has prevented us from getting the levels of automation and efficiency we need. With the DataLens System, we are now - for the first time in our industry - able to automate a significant portion of our workload and change the economics of how we serve our membership.

PRODUCT FUNCTIONALITY: The DataLens System is being used to complement our existing systems and boost their performance as well as speed response time and cut unnecessary manual effort. In fact, now that we have effective automation, we are identifying redundant processes between departments that can now be virtually eliminated. The DataLens System is deployed at several key points in our process. First, we use it to interpret and standardize incoming data, then to assist in matching against our PIM system's source of truth. Different data sources (member hospitals) have different data quality and can deliver out-of-the-box match rates of anywhere between two and 85 percent. With manual effort, we increased the match rates to between 60 and 95 percent. With automation, we can achieve these and better match rates with the press of a button.

STRENGTHS: First, the DataLens System is powered by semantic technology that enables recognition of product data in virtually any form from virtually any source. This enables us to scale up our process, improve quality and reduce costs - all at the same time. Second, the DataLens System has been designed for rapid learning and deployment and has many built-in shortcuts to minimize cost and effort, including the ability for direct maintenance by business subject matter experts, without needing to call IT every time a piece of data changes. Third, the DataLens semantic rule sets are highly reusable, so as we automate more processes, we can leverage the work we have already done.

WEAKNESSES: The system still can't resolve all of our data problems. Sometimes in-



The DataLens System

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coming data is incomplete, invalid or completely unintelligible and requires human intervention. Although the DataLens System helps us apply automation to the majority of our data problems - even more than we imagined we could - there will always be some small amount of manual effort required.

SELECTION CRITERIA: The DataLens System is fast to set up and deploy, easy to maintain and extremely flexible. In addition, the DataLens System is deployed as a data service and so is easy to integrate and deploy as a complement to our existing systems with minimum disruption.

DELIVERABLES: Our output is fast and scalable standardization of highly unpredictable data as well as automation of the matching and exception management processes that allow us to serve our membership with high-quality and timely data.

VENDOR SUPPORT: Vendor support has been excellent. We conducted a pilot program with Silver Creek Systems, and within one week, we had automated a seemingly impossible process. We delivered quantifiable benefits and were able to estimate a rapid and significant ROI.

DOCUMENTATION: The documentation is complete and easy to understand. We could run the product easily if we had to rely on the documentation provided.