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TECHNOLOGY

Kiwi tech can give US health system a shot in the arm

Orion Health is well positioned to offer its expertise to the \$US10 billion a year revamp planned by the Obama administration

Stephen Ballantyne

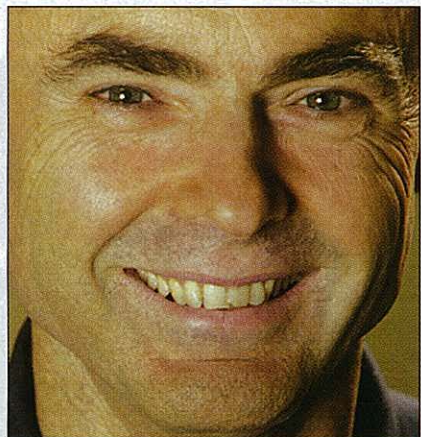
That thing I said a few weeks ago about how President Obama wants to spend \$US10 billion a year for the next five years on technology upgrades for the US health system, and how we should immediately send planeloads of salesmen to Washington to sell them the stuff we've been making that does just that – well, it seems Ian McCrae and the lads from Orion Health are on to it.

"Last time, President Bush made some noises about doing something," says Mr McCrae, "but this time it looks serious. He's ahead of the money, allocating the funds, and there's a real will and desire within North America to do something about health care and health care information. This time I think something will really happen."

"The sort of things they're looking at doing include automating primary care in particular, EMR (electronic medical records) software – stuff that we have already done in New Zealand. We have more than 90% of GPs with EMR software, a huge uptake and way ahead of America. So they're looking to do the same thing – interconnect primary care with hospitals with labs and other organisations – and again, this is something we've already done with Healthlink."

"The term they use is 'health exchange.' In that space we have very strong credentials – in fact, probably a leadership position. We've done that stuff here already and we're already in the North American market; we're very strong up in Canada and we're quite well positioned to pick up a lot of work from the Obama programme."

With 340 employees, Orion Health is



IAN MCCRAE: The New Zealand IT industry is too low profile

usually the largest software developer and vendor in the country (depending on how long it's been since Jade bought some smaller company, notes Mr McCrae). It has US offices on the west and east coasts, in Santa Monica and Boston, in addition to an office in Edmonton, Alberta.

"We see this not only as a good opportunity for ourselves, but also for other New Zealand software vendors up there as well, especially the ones with GP software." (Although Orion Health has an extensive range of healthcare software products, its efforts are mostly directed towards large-scale systems designed to be the backbone of a health system suitable for an entire state – or even 50 of them. Plenty of room for the little guys to play too.) "There are vendors here with very good products that should be marketable in the US. We're not the only ones."

"And there are no problems with selling health technology solutions from New Zealand to the Americans – there's no resistance to our being an international company headquartered in New Zealand. The Centre for Disease Control at UCLA, have already bought our stuff and these are substantial users."

"Xenophobia isn't an issue – in fact I think they kind of like working with us, because of our work ethic and

reputation, and perhaps of our slightly different way of doing business. But we partner with other big vendors, like Oracle, IBM, HP, 3M, to name a few."

Mr McCrae notes that the scale of the Obama initiative works out to be some tens of thousands of dollars per physician in the US – globally the health IT sector is worth about \$US40 billion a year, of which half is spent in the US. In this context Obama's extra \$10 billion looks even more significant. "What it would mean is that all the actual primary care physicians who aren't automated today will be over the next few years. I don't think we completely appreciate the leadership New Zealand has in this area. We take it for granted that your GP will have a computer and will refer to your medical history during a consultation, but it isn't like that in most of the US and other countries."

"We shouldn't stand still, though – we should be looking at what our next steps are. We must keep moving – it's good for our hospitals, our health system and our exports."

Any dark clouds on the horizon? Well, maybe: "Another thing I don't think we fully appreciate is how important the IT sector is to us. Orion Health alone earns about 30% more than the New Zealand avocado industry. They use about 3500 ha of land; we use about one. We pay our employees more. These businesses are good – our carbon footprint is rather small – we sell software on CDs, that don't cost much to make or transport. Ours is the sort of business this country should grow and keep."

"Look at Fisher & Paykel Healthcare – by itself it is the size of the New Zealand wine industry. They're both worth about \$700 million. We lost Navman, which would have been doing over half a billion in business by now, and were quite cavalier about it, but imagine the reaction if some Australians or whoever came in one day and bought the entire wine industry. Yet we lose high-value technology companies and say, oh well, that's the way it is. Why do we allow things like that to happen?"

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PRINTOUT

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Getting on the iPhone apps bandwagon

One of the more attractive things about making applications for the iPhone is that it doesn't require a big, complex idea. A press release informs me that Andrew Bush in Christchurch has written Bouncy Ball, which is just that – a simulated rubber ball that bounces around the screen of your iPhone in a reactive way that encourages play, and possibly addiction. You wouldn't give a damn if it was a desktop or laptop application, but on the iPhone where it sells for \$1.29, what the hell, you might as well get it. I love the democratisation of programming this implies: the credits lists on major desktop or console games rival those of Hollywood movies, but here's a platform where the archetypal solo programmer can knock up a saleable product in his or her spare time, just about. You need to know a bit about Objective C programming (which is much less difficult than C++, being mainly C routines in an object wrapper), have a Mac and have installed the programming tools that come free with OSX, and have read a few books, chiefly Cocoa Programming for Mac OS X, by Aaron Hillegass, which sells for about \$US50. There's also some iPhone-specific documents and tools Apple supplies free of charge to members of its developers' programme, which has various level of support; you don't necessarily have to pay anything. A distributor may be useful – Mr Bush appears to have hooked up with some guys in Seattle to get his ball bouncing. The other thing you need is an idea – but on this platform even half-baked ideas will do, at least for a start.

Green-rating computers

Greenpeace's second annual Green Electronics survey came out at the end of last year, I am reminded by Toshiba, which produced the "greenest" laptop examined by Greenpeace. Hurray for Toshiba and their Portégé R600, which is made with minimal use of hazardous chemicals such as cadmium, mercury and lead. Fewer hurrahs for Greenpeace, though; why are they picking on IT, especially notebook and desktop PCs? The global energy use of the entire IT industry is relatively tiny, and on a personal scale insignificant. Especially when compared with running a car, to name but the most obvious popular consumer of resources. And as for nasty chemicals – we may have seen TV coverage of the unsavoury places old computers are taken to when they are "recycled," but we've probably also seen film of the third-world wreckers yards where old ships are scrapped and it would take an awful lot of burned PCs to equal one torn-down supertanker in environmental impact. Also, Greenpeace's league tables (Lenovo came top in desktops with its ThinkCentre M58, the Nokia 6210 Navigator is the greenest cellphone, and the Sharp LC-52GX5 the winner in TVs) aren't comprehensive – for example Apple took umbrage at the way Greenpeace slagged it off a couple of years ago and doesn't participate.

Much too much

At last an end to remote control misery, as *Private Eye* magazine might put it in its annual Xmas Gift section. Except this one is serious – the latest version of Logitech's Harmony series of remote control consolidators, the 1100i, is due here next month and features a 0.5 inch, full-colour touch-screen interface you can set up how you please and use to replace the clutter of electronic magic pointing bones on your coffee table. I'd go for one of these, except that it offends my sense of values: lately I've been considering buying a netbook, such as Dell's Inspiron Mini 9, which at \$699 sounds like pretty good value, considering it's a small but complete computer, with a screen, a keyboard and everything. Unlike the Logitech Harmony 1100i, which carries a suggested retail price of \$999.90. Blimey.

TimeFiler allies with IMS Payroll

Hastings-based IMS Payroll, the software used to pay a surprisingly large number of New Zealand workers, has decided to get in cahoots with TimeFiler, the online payroll product developed by Christchurch-based Enfnit. The immediate effect is to give online access to IMS Payroll customers; IMS has been in business since 1983 and has customers throughout New Zealand and the Pacific. Both companies expect to see a synergistic expansion of business.

Symantec gives Mac another go

Stephen Ballantyne

It's admirable, really – as any fule know – there aren't any viruses loose in the world that affect Macs, so it must be a sense of duty that makes Symantec, as the leading producer of security software, continue to make anti-malware software specifically for Macintosh computers. That, and the need to satisfy IT managers who won't believe Macs really are untroubled by the plagues that assail PCs.

I thought that Symantec might have given up on the Mac market, but no – here's Norton Internet Security for Mac Dual Protection (I'll call it NISMDP), fresh from the factory. And in fact there are reasonable arguments for anti-malware on the Mac. First

off, the security landscape has changed and even PCs aren't catching viruses like they used to. They're getting secretly press-ganged into zombie botnet armies, but that's something else; and they're getting used as transmission tools for phishing attacks via browsers, which Macs are just as susceptible to as PCs.

Also, suppose a Mac receives a malware-infected email. It won't affect the Mac, but if its owner forwards that email to a PC user that would be a bad thing. For that reason it's preferable for Mac security software to include an up-to-date listing of all the latest PC threats as well as whatever it includes for Macs.

Which is probably why the first thing NISMDP did after I installed it was download a 50MB update, which

in itself gives a shocking demonstration of how bad the malware scene is in PC land.

It also reminded me of why I dread installing anti-malware software on my Mac. The last version I used was slow, irritating and put up messages whenever I plugged in a memory stick or inserted a CD.

NISMDP also throws up warning messages, but they aren't as intrusive. There's a reassuring bar across the top of web browser windows assuring you you're not looking at a phishing site. The NISMDP firewall component is much better than before, too – unlike earlier efforts from Symantec it doesn't arbitrarily block advertising banners on web pages and it lets you know if a program has attempted to communicate

with an external address.

What's this about 'Dual Protection' in NISMDP, you may ask? Simple, really: since some Mac users may have installed a Boot Camp partition on their Macs and may be running their machines with Windows of some sort. To cope with this Symantec has popped a copy of Norton Internet Security 2009 into the NISMDP box.

That's like getting a belt with your braces, and at a recommended retail price of \$129 for a year's worth of the software and automatic updates it's something of a bargain. Just plain NISM is \$99. I'm kind of persuaded – this version seems to be the best yet and who knows? Just because there isn't any Mac malware now doesn't mean there'll never be any.