



HME Business EXCLUSIVE

We are told there is strength in numbers, but truly, there is *potential* strength in numbers... HME providers know first-hand that HCPCS codes, allowables, inventory figures, DSO, patient statistics, etc., can easily become a numbers stampede. But what if these numbers, and the numbers of all providers, were organized and channeled for a greater good?

From the start, Fastrack has created software to capture and organize numbers into information providers need to operate successfully. Now Fastrack is turning that internal strength outward to help providers on a larger scale.

Says President Spencer Kay, "Fastrack is going to be starting an MSO, a membership service organization" — one that will roll out this month and harness Fastrack's established strengths. All HME niches will be covered, in addition to some existing Fastrack specialties, such as the home infusion and specialty pharmacy markets.

"Previously, (MSOs) started off as sort of a buying organization," he said. "We're looking to take it to a different level, and we believe, because of the technology we have, that we have a major advantage over other buying groups."

So is Kay building an MSO from the ground up? Yes and no.

"We have a customer base, so we already have members," he noted, referring to current Fastrack clients. "We already have the technology. In a sense, we've been building this for years without the purchasing end of it. We're in the process now of

Product Premiere Fastrack's New MSO

Member Service Group Touts e-Solutions, Purchasing Power... & No Fees

negotiating with manufacturers and wholesalers to get the best pricing for our clients. But (the MSO) is going to be more than that. It's going to offer benefits on other services and products they need for their business, whether it's office supplies or credit card processing services. There are things beyond buying wheelchairs and canes. These are technologies we'll be able to give our members to help them run their business. We can provide it because we've already developed it."

In addition, look for Fastrack's MSO to offer educational opportunities. "We're going to be doing training services, consulting services, help with reimbursement issues, things like that," Kay said.

And the new MSO will include a "concierge": "(Suppliers will) have someone here that they can call, and if there's a dispute with the manufacturer, we'll try to intercede and resolve it. If they need to find a product that none of our vendors (carry), we'll find it for them and negotiate a price for it. It eliminates their people wasting their time dealing with these kinds of things."

Kay also wants manufacturers to benefit, via Fastrack's core competency.

"This will also help the vendors, because if the orders come in electronically to the vendors, that's less people they need to process the orders, so it saves them money and (improves) accuracy," Kay said. "When you tell someone over the phone, 'I want two wheelchairs,' and they write down the wrong number, it's all screwed up. Then (suppliers) have to send the product back. We're hoping that we can cut some of the costs out of the system so the savings can be passed on to the provider.

"Besides the vendor being able to create the purchase order electronically and send a shipping notification, the manufacturer will also be able to send the invoice electronically. The provider can import the invoice into their accounting system. Providers will be able to download product catalogs

and prices from the vendor. We're going to be doing things through our Web site to help keep providers informed of new products and special promotions. If a vendor has 100 of an item and they want to move them out quickly, we're going to make sure our members know about it by doing broadcast e-mails. In a way, we're helping both sides. We're helping the provider and the vendor."

Manufacturer reaction so far has been "very positive, because they can't lose."

And here's the fact that will make everyone do a double-take: "There is no membership fee," Kay said. "Everyone who is a Fastrack customer will be automatically enrolled. But you don't have to be a Fastrack customer. Anyone in the industry who is buying for resale will be able to take part in this."

Becoming a member, he notes, is as easy as completing a one-page form that asks "the kinds of products they're buying, who their vendors are, the volume they're doing... so we can put them together with everyone else and say, collectively this is how much purchasing power we have."

Kay obviously hopes members will do all of their buying through this new MSO, because "The more business they put through us, the more power we have in negotiating the best pricing for them. But if they don't want to, that's okay, too. There's no pressure here."

What there is, Kay said, is a real opportunity to channel this industry's numbers to create buying power and efficiencies that will help all stakeholders. "It's a natural," he said of this Fastrack member service organization expansion. "It's another service we can offer our clients. It's a service we can offer the entire industry. We're helping the provider and the vendor. That's the goal, a win-win."

— Laurie Watanabe

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