

5 Hot Trends in I&R

Big changes are happening in the I&R industry - are you keeping up? Becoming familiar with trends can help I&R leaders improve their organizations and secure new contracts.

This white paper will discuss the five hot trends in I&R. Each section will provide a list of action items to help service providers get started with beneficial new projects.



HOT TREND # 1: CHAT AND TEXT

Text-based I&R is the fastest growing trend in I&R right now. Through text and chat, I&R service providers are landing new contracts, serving larger populations, and establishing themselves as forward-thinking organizations.

Probably the most important benefit of text and chat is that it helps service providers remain relevant in a digital world. New media is shifting the way people communicate, and many phone-based services face obsolescence. Youths especially stay away from phone conversation, and cell phone voice-minute usage rates continue to decline overall.

However, that doesn't mean you should leap right into chat right away. Many organizations that start up chat programs underestimate the cost. While the software and hardware can run as low as \$2,000, other expenses such as training, program development, and staffing frequently go unaccounted for. On average, a chat program will cost between \$40,000 to \$60,000 per year to support a limited, daytime schedule. Steep, but necessary for longevity.

—> *Action Item: Don't Get Left Behind*

To get started with a text/chat program:

- **Contact AIRS.** Ask about the recently completed document called *Beginner's Guide to I&R Chat*. This guide is the most comprehensive resource to-date on the subject.
- **Don't reinvent the wheel.** If you try to build a program from scratch by yourself, you'll waste a ton of time and money. Instead, gather research on the subject and network with individuals from organizations with a chat program already in place. Additionally, you may want to seek out I&R consultants that offer free consultations for basic chat/text questions.

The cost of chat/text programs are frequently underestimated.

AIRS' *Beginner's Guide to I&R Chat* is an essential resource.

HOT TREND #2: SPECIALIZED I&R

Many service providers are adding specialized I&R programs to their list of services. Specialized I&R refers to services that are more in-depth and that focus narrowly on a special need or population.

These programs are becoming very popular with I&R service providers, especially since they often come with built-in funding. Further, specialized I&R broadens resource data bases with exclusive referral destinations – such as for specialized clinicians, organizations, and services.

Examples of specialized I&R services include early childhood development programs (like Help Me Grow), chat and phone lines for veterans (like the Florida BrAlve Project), and resources for local populations. The services typically include special requirements for providers, such as specific training for specialists, technology requirements, and deeper resource-networks of professionals.

—> *Action Item: Specialize for High Dollars*

If you are interested in adopting specialized I&R programs:

- **Become familiar with state and federal interests.** There is a considerable amount of potential revenue attached to special interests, such as healthcare reform, disaster management, etc. If you identify an interest, be prepared to negotiate.
- **Visit the Help Me Grow website.** You may want to consider becoming an affiliate for the service. Visit www.helpmegrwnational.org to see if there's a fit.
- **Learn about the needs of your county and surrounding counties, and develop an I&R solution.** Specialized services for specific populations or regional needs (such as high-school drop-out rates, recidivism, etc.) have high success rates for winning funding.

Adopting specialized I&R programs will increase funding.

Learn about government interests to see if there's an opportunity.

HOT TREND #3: UNIFIED TELEPHONY

The I&R industry is consolidating, and organizations who form unified-telephony networks will become more competitive for new contracts and grants.

Unified networks enable levels of service that far surpass what individual providers can achieve. Advanced call-routing strategies allow centers to take volumes of calls in multiples of what they could handle by themselves.

Further, collaborative networks ease the administrative burden of day-to-day operations, and many call-center managers who currently operate under a unified model wonder how they ever did without it. Finally, unified telephony opens up lots of options, including consolidated staffing models, shared resources, call rollover, and more.

However, unified telephony is cost prohibitive, and may not be for everyone. Many smaller centers have a hard time absorbing increases in technology and telephony bills. Still, being part of a unified network is a great benefit, especially when applying for new contracts.

—> *Action Item: Have a Get Together*

If you are interested in learning more about unified telephony or want to where to begin, follow these steps:

- **Don't make the pitch alone.** If you're ready to suggest the idea of unified telephony to potential partners, find someone knowledgeable to help you. Either reach out to AIRS or partner with a consultant who has worked with unifying networks before.
- **Assess community needs.** Communities that get the most out of unified telephony are those affected by frequent disasters. A high frequency of emergencies could open the door for funding opportunities in a unified network.

Unified telephony opens up lots of options.

Consultants can help you to begin the unification process.

HOT TREND #4: RE-ENVISIONING CONFIDENTIALITY

Most organizations' privacy policies aren't as ironclad as they think. Although I&R service providers have decades of experience in confidentiality, the game completely changed with new 2009 legislation regarding HIPAA, and many providers have failed to adapt. As such, those organizations who haven't re-visited their privacy policies are vulnerable to devastating fines and loss of community trust.

"Most providers don't realize that most breaches of confidentiality aren't technology-related," says Aaron G. Blackledge, lead strategist of GeauxPoint I&R consultancy and co-founder of HIPAA compliancy firm ManageTrak. "Rather, most breaches are related to operations, such when data is emailed by low-level employees."

The penalties for violating state and federal privacy laws are severe, even for non-profits. For example Blue Cross Blue Shield of Tennessee was fined \$9 dollars in 2009. This is an extreme case, but the cost of cleanup as well as the damage to reputation for I&R providers that breach confidentiality can be more than enough to cause dissolution of an organization.

—> *Action item: Get Protection from "Game Over"*

To ensure that you are safe from catastrophic confidentiality breaches, do the following:

- **Make sure your privacy policy practices are up-to-date before you launch new initiatives.** Especially if you're mining new data sources, such as through I&R chat, you need to have your data practices looked at.
- **Have a privacy expert evaluate your privacy policies in addition to legal experts.** You'll pay out less for expensive legal services this way. Also, most lawyers don't understand how I&R centers operate, and their advice might not be actionable. Instead, have a privacy expert come in on the front-end, and the lawyers can review the work afterward.

Service providers are more vulnerable than they think.

Seek expert advice *and* legal advice; it'll save money and be more effective.

TREND #5: DISASTER MGMT. ECO-SYSTEMS

Management eco-systems are holistic approaches to disaster response.

Pandemic flu and mass fatality are hot items in government planning.

State and federal agencies have identified gaps in their abilities to handle specific types of disasters, and are forming lucrative new I&R partnerships.

Two main areas where the industry is receiving funding is pandemic flu – which I&R has a long history of handling – and mass fatality, a relatively new planning component to disaster response. There are many government officials who remember how effective I&R was in addressing the H1N1 swine flu epidemic.

However, the contracts are often competitive, and are typically awarded to service providers in the best-established disaster management “eco-systems,” which include:

- Large networks of I&R providers.
- Collaborative partnerships with disaster-response agencies.
- Social media presence and digital volunteers.
- Interactive websites.

—> *Action Item: Prepare for the Best*

To ensure that you are safe from catastrophic confidentiality breaches, do the following:

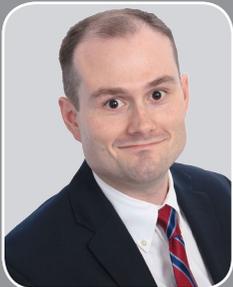
- **Become aware of state and federal needs in your community.** Potential contracts won't always come to you. Contact government agencies and mention pandemic flu and mass fatality – the hot items of government planning right now.
- **Compete at the next level.** You won't be the only one going for disaster-planning dollars. State agencies seek partners with comprehensive gameplans, which include: operations plan, communications plan, technology plan, etc. To get to the next level, Contact GeauxPoint to learn about the “Disaster Management 2020” preparedness model.

MEET

GEAUXPOINT

There are lots of opportunities out there for savvy I&R providers, but taking advantage of these opportunities can be extremely challenging. This is especially true when technology is involved. Fortunately, GeauxPoint has experience providing solutions for nearly every I&R need, and no service provider has to go it alone.

GeauxPoint is a consultancy that helps I&R organizations improve business performance. Our consultants have a combined total of decades of experience at the leadership level in the I&R industry. We are:



Aaron G. Blackledge, Lead Consultant

Specialties: Technology, data security, chat, analytics, thought leadership

A national thought-leader in operations and service delivery, Aaron has lead and assisted with numerous successful I&R projects throughout the country. However, he is best known for pioneering Crisis Chat. Before that, he worked in the corporate world managing technology departments for such companies as Adobe and Cardinal Health. Currently, Aaron serves as the chair of the Louisiana 2-1-1 Coordinating council, and sits on Board of Directors for the Louisiana Association of United Ways.

Richard LaPratt, Consultant

Specialties: Administration, accreditations and certifications, disaster management

There are few industry leaders who haven't worked with or heard of Richard LaPratt – a seasoned veteran with more than 15 years experience in the human service and I&R field. He's an accreditations guru, having coordinated, managed and achieved five-year National AIRS accreditations for multiple service-providers throughout the country. Currently, Richard acts as president of Louisiana AIRS, and also sits on the AIRS National Board of Directors.



John Paul Nettles, Consultant

Specialties: Grantwriting, fundraising, marketing, project management

John Paul Nettles first cut his teeth in information and referral when he started as a volunteer crisis counselor in 2006. He later transitioned into grant writing and hit a home run almost immediately when he helped Aaron Blackledge land the initial funding for the nation's second Crisis Chat program. Since then, John has been an independent marketing and grantwriting consultant. He works with clients to locate funding for new projects and to help develop long-term sustainability strategies.

For projects, proposals, or for more information, email aaron@geauxpoint.com or call (225) 802-1805.

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