
Health IT tip of the day: Ask your e-signature vendor 5 critical questions

Written by Max Green | January 06, 2016

Few industries benefit more from simplified and secure document workflows than the healthcare industry, where paper still burdens doctors, administrators and patients alike. But not all e-signatures are created equal.

Pem Guerry, executive vice president of SIGNiX in Chattanooga, Tenn: Before hopping off the paper train, it's critical to first understand the difference between independent and dependent e-signatures.

In short, independent e-signatures — also called digital signatures — and their cryptographic information are embedded permanently into signed electronic documents, and those documents have no reliance on the e-signature vendor's server for validation. Dependent e-signatures, by contrast, link back to the e-signature vendor for verification.

In healthcare, independence offers a critical benefit because vendors can digitally shred their copies of documents without a trace of metadata left behind. This eliminates an access point for potential cyber criminals, which better protects healthcare documents and protected health information and supports compliance.

Here are five questions to ask a vendor to ensure you'll receive independent e-signatures:

1. Is the evidence behind each e-signature permanently embedded in the document?
2. Can the e-signature's evidence be seen with free document viewing software?
3. Can the e-signatures be validated without going back to the vendor that produced them?
4. Can the e-signatures be validated offline?
5. Do the e-signatures comply with international, published standards that will be discoverable forever?

In such a highly regulated industry as healthcare, it's vital for transactions to be legally sound today and tomorrow.

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