



E-SOLUTIONS:

Not Just Another Pretty FACE . . .

J. Knipper and Company

O was recently visiting a client who had just been given a demonstration of a Web-based shopping cart product. He had a medical device that he wanted to make available to doctors for online ordering and resale, so he had been reviewing various e-commerce solutions. He was very excited and wanted to show what an excellent product he had found.

I was quite impressed myself as he opened the product brochure. It had a very professional appearance. The screen shots provided solid evidence of a well-designed commercial interface. The layout was very clean with beautiful imagery and crisp clear definition. I congratulated him on what appeared to be a very nice find!

Smoke and E-Mirrors

Naturally, given that his product was a medical device, I asked him how the system insures that the person ordering is in fact a practitioner. He certainly wouldn't want to see his product diverted in any manner. The corners of his mouth dropped, his eyes squinted a bit, and after a brief pause he said, "I'm not sure it does that."

He simultaneously started rifling through the brochure. Although I was hesitant to add yet another detractor to his level of enthusiasm, he was my client and I felt obligated to provide any insight that might be of help. As his product would be more valuable to a specific specialty than a PCP, but potentially some value to either, I asked if the system had the ability to control allocation based on practitioner type. The smile

quickly returned to his face as he responded "yes, the salesman explained that maximum order quantities could be set!"

He immediately turned to the features page and pointed to that configuration capability. As I read the description it became evident that the control was "global."

In other words, the set maximum would be applied to everyone indiscriminately.

Suffice it to say, the conversation went on for a few more minutes — and a few more unfortunate detractors — and ended with a sad but important conclusion. This E-Solution had a very appealing "E," but was not really a "solution" to his need at all. It was merely a very attractive front end that facilitated a limited set of common features not germane to his unique needs. In other words, it was just another pretty face.

The fact of the matter is that an E-Solution does start with a very important "E," but it ends with the even more crucial "SOLUTION."

When we embark on an effort to find an E-Solution, we usually have a very good idea of our needs. Those ideas are in our minds and in our processes (though too often not on paper). But as we are often captivated by the look and feel of an E-Solution, and understandably intrigued by its more prominent features, the specifics and uniqueness of our needs are pushed to the back of our minds as we fall madly in love with that pretty face.

Contributed by



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Fit and Flexibility

Two of the greatest challenges in implementing an E-solution are "process fit"

and "flexibility." And there is often a synergy to be found between the two. Aside from the obvious ROI requirements, the right E-solution must provide either broad enough baseline usability, or a granular enough set of configuration controls to insure that the solution integrates with your process.

In the pharmaceutical industry, it is also most often the case that the right solution will need to come from a very pharma specific solutions provider, as even the minimum requirements within pharma can be quite specific.

A good way to begin the evaluation of any solution is to create a brief bullet list of your most critical process needs and prioritize them. A very high-level process diagram is another excellent evaluation tool, and it does not need to be fancy.

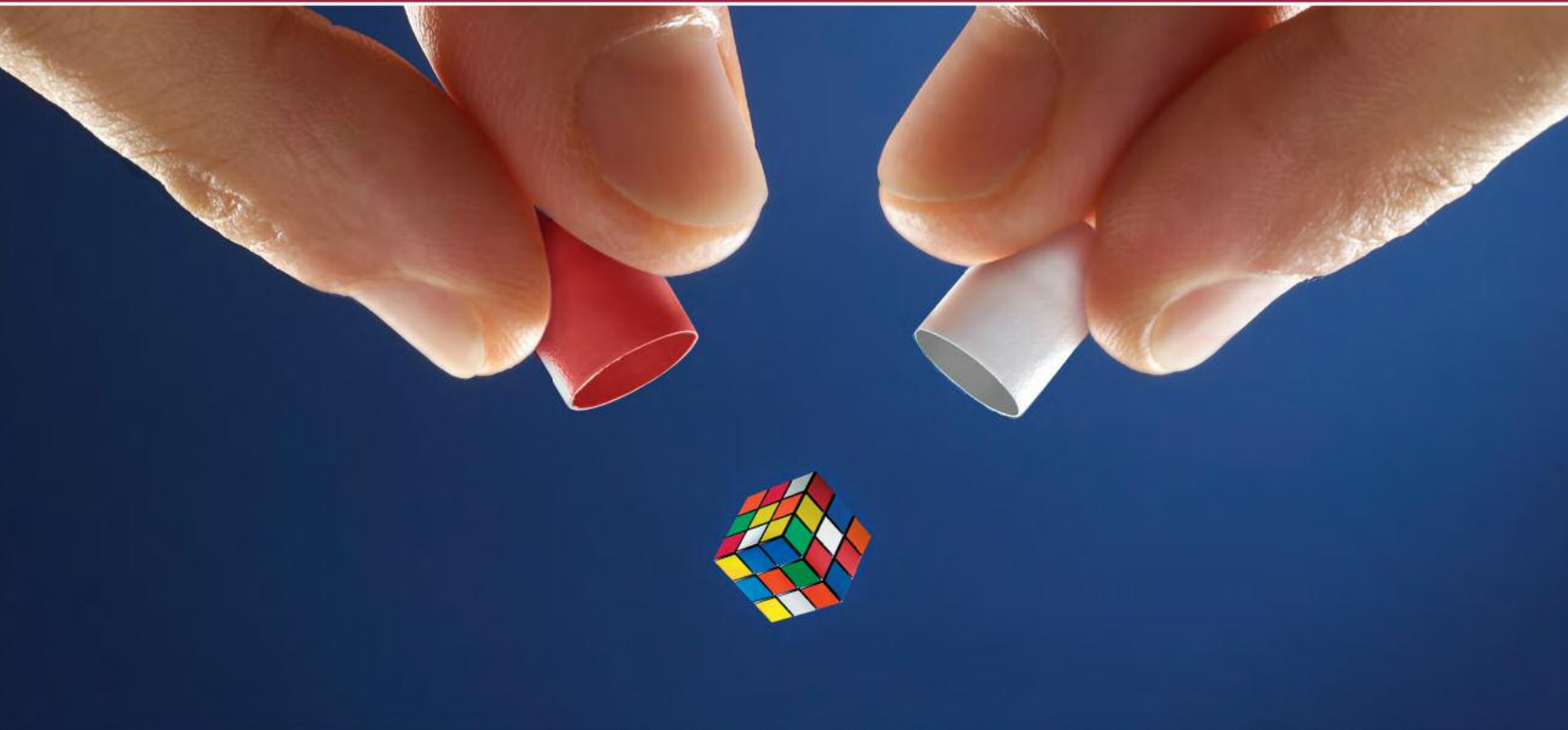
I've personally received some extremely helpful "diner drafts" (napkins with chicken scratch) that have provided excellent insight into a customer's expectations.

Ask suppliers up front how well their solution addresses your bullet list. And ask them to point out exactly how each is addressed during the demonstration. Good suppliers who are true partners will actually appreciate this type of guidance. It helps them in choosing the right solution to present. And it allows them to focus their presentation with your very valuable time in mind. Most importantly, it pre-qualifies the product as a true potential "solution" before you are inadvertently captivated by that, oh so persuasive...pretty face. **PV**

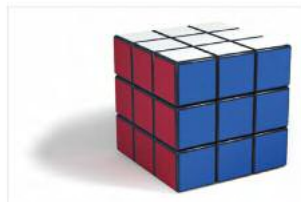
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