HAVE YOU FOUND yourself overwhelmed by researching and considering a coding and auditing vendor? Do you need help to relieve you of your coding backlog or assist you with your daily inventory? The engulfing nature of sifting through e-mails, phone messages, and service level agreements can stymie the most committed individual.

Having a solid vendor selection process in place can help you find the right partner that will lead you to reaching your goals, and not suffering from buyer’s remorse. The more complex the decision and the product or service, the more you need to know about the vendor. Every question you ask your potential partners should make the right choice of vendor apparent.

What is the first step?
A detailed discussion about your needs and how each company can help your organization is the obvious first step in determining the right match, but where does one go from there?

Who is the vendor?
Discovering more about the vendor’s culture and platform is imperative. Is the vendor known for its innovative culture and commitment to outcomes? Reference checks are a great supplemental way to learn about a vendor from an actual client. This will give you an intimate look into the vendor’s responsiveness, client management, quality metrics, and overall ability to perform as a trusted partner.

What is the vendor’s history/background?
Experience and capabilities are vital. For example, Ovation RCS is a wholly-owned subsidiary of UPMC, a highly respected health system recognized for its innovation in clinical and administrative settings. UPMC’s culture of innovation, customer satisfaction, and cost-leadership permeates through everything Ovation does.
What coding model is the vendor offering?
Does the vendor offer a domestic, international, or a hybrid model? Many vendors are moving to hybrid models that utilize both international and domestic coders and auditors due to the rising cost of coding and lack of resources. As such, companies are opting to add international resources to fill vacancies. Utilization of international resources or a hybrid model will help meet the weekly challenge of discharged not final billed (DNFB) deadlines.

What quality of work does the vendor offer?
Choosing the right coding or audit partner is about value added to your business, and should not only be about the price and bottom line. The quality of the service adds value to your business, therefore quality guarantees should play an important role in the decision-making process. Finding a vendor whose value overreaches their cost ensures that timelines will be met, quality will be achieved, and your budget will be respected. It is also important that your contract backs up these quality and service-level guarantees with appropriate discounts if metrics are not reached.

How are onshore and offshore coders monitored and assessed? What makes this company confident that all coders can maintain accuracy?
These questions keep true industry leaders up at night. For example, Ovation offers a very unique standard. Ovation starts a coding project with 100 percent Q/A, and then works the percentage down as the coder’s proficiency increases. Even when the coder is at 95 percent accuracy Ovation performs Q/A on no less than 15 percent of coded charts. Additionally, Ovation provides an audit function on a random sample of each client’s work on a quarterly basis. Ovation also created its own Coding Academy that focuses on continuous education to ensure well trained, tested coders. It is important to choose a vendor that places significant emphasis on quality control and monitoring.

What level of security and HIPAA compliance does the company offer? Is SOC reporting available? Are home-based employees utilized? If so, what precautions are taken to ensure HIPAA compliance?
Verifying these details will help ascertain which vendors maintain superior compliance and security protocols. For example, Ovation is 100 percent HIPAA compliant and only maintains chart data in order to provide quality and performance metrics to its customers. SOC reporting is available via the Ovation hosting site. Every Ovation employee is subject to periodic security as well as HIPAA training to ensure proper protection of sensitive data. All international employees work in the office. Domestic based auditors may work remotely.

What is the bottom line?
At the very end of your discovery, don’t be afraid to ask if this vendor can clearly articulate its differentiators among its competitors.

Find and expect some of the strongest guarantees in the industry:
- Quality and turnaround guarantees
- Long-term partner focusing on reaching your goals
- Exceptional, domestic-based client management that focuses on customer satisfaction
- Ensure HIPAA and CMS are embraced
- Audits included in the per-chart price

Remember, in this important work, vendors need to be coherent and steadfast in their commitment to their clients.

Ovation Revenue Cycle Services’ Outlook

Sandy Frey joined Ovation Revenue Cycle Services (ORCS) in 2014. She has developed and monitored the coder quality and education services of ORCS, a provider proven results driven organization. Prior to ORCS she had extensive experience as a coder, auditor, manager and educator. Her expertise includes inpatient, outpatient, hierarchal condition category, and physician coding.