Waltham's OnPage bringing critical communications into the smartphone age

For most people, pagers are a bulky technology happily left behind in our more streamlined era, but in hospitals around the country they're still a crucial, if unwieldy, communication tool.

Waltham-based OnPage Corp., formerly known as Onset Technology, has been trying to change that over the past few years by ushering healthcare messaging into the smartphone era — a surprisingly difficult process. And now the company is expanding its product to new markets.

ONPAGE WEBSITE
OnPage's critical communication software on various devices.

"The change is really, really, really slow in healthcare," OnPage CEO Judit Sharon said in a phone interview, but the shift appears to be inevitable. "We know that the market is there. We know the need for critical messaging is there and that paging companies are closing their doors."

A February 2016 study commissioned by OnPage competitor TigerText found that 90 percent of the 200 hospitals surveyed still relied on pagers. Even though practically every healthcare worker has a smartphone in his or her pocket, regular texts or emails are not compliant with patient-privacy rules laid out under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). And smartphone alerts don't do enough to catch doctors' attention.

OnPage's cloud-based software, which can be downloaded on iPhones, Android phones and BlackBerry phones, solves both problems and also enables users to send photos or voice attachments securely and to manage on-call schedules.

Sarah Carter, a Ph.D. student in clinical psychology at George Mason University, has been using a donated version of OnPage for a study on suicidal tendencies among military veterans and says the software has been "integral" to the safety structure she and her fellow researchers have implemented.

"It was very smooth," Carter said of the installation and testing process. Because the application lives on the phone of each of the four researchers, they can easily rotate who is the primary on-call person in case of an emergency. If a veteran in the study is exhibiting dangerous signs of suicidal thoughts, OnPage will send the researchers, in the appropriate order, a piercing auditory alert that won't stop until one of them has directed the veteran to the help he needs.

Founded in 1997, Onset Technology originally focused on making it easier for employees at big corporations to communicate across multiple devices and channels. In 2011, the company launched OnPage, its cloud-based software aimed at replacing pagers, and in 2015 it rebranded as OnPage Corp.

Onset Technology raised $3.5 million in 2001 from the Challenge Fund, the FLV Fund, Hollinger Digital Inc., the Intel Communications Fund, MAG Ventures and Poalim Electronic Communication, and in 2009 it raised another $3 million in a round led by the Israeli-based venture capital firm Cedar Fund.

OnPage now reaches 15,000 users in a few thousand customer organizations, according to Sharon. More recently, the company has identified a need for its critical-communication technology among IT management teams — and roughly 50 percent of OnPage's business now comes from that sector, said a company spokesperson.

Sharon sees more opportunities for expansion with the rise of the Internet of Things, imagining sensors on critical pieces of equipment that connect to OnPage and are set to automatically send an alert when something goes wrong. Sharon said the

company, which employs roughly 50 people, is profitable and not currently seeking out new investment.

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