

# Microsoft offers free HealthVault for patients' records

Victoria Colliver, Chronicle Staff Writer October 5, 2007

Microsoft Corp. introduced a free Web site on Thursday that gives consumers a single place to store and manage their medical information, one the company says is safe from data miners, hackers and other security threats.

HealthVault (*healthvault.com*) comes at a time when many technology companies are racing to offer electronic medical records and other online health tools.

Using the site, people can store records, lab results and prescription lists, and even upload data like glucose and blood pressure readings. People can determine what pieces of their records they want to share with whom, and even specify a time length.

With HealthVault's premiere, Microsoft has leaped ahead of other major competitors, including Mountain View's Google Inc., that have publicly said they plan to provide online tools to help people keep track of their health histories.

"A lot of tech verticals that promised billions of dollars of revenue to their bottom line to have health information tools ... haven't produced," said Dr. David Brailer, former head of health information technology for the Bush administration who now leads Health Evolution Partners, a San Francisco firm that invests in medical ventures. "Many of those companies have stepped back and, in the middle of that, Microsoft steps forward and does this."

But Microsoft's announcement also raises the question: Will people trust Bill Gates' software giant with their highly sensitive medical information?

"Americans make trade-offs of convenience versus privacy risks every day of their lives," Brailer said. "Who becomes the consumer's trusted brand for health information is way up for grabs, and I don't see why Microsoft isn't a contender, along with many other companies."

Indeed, even the nonprofit consumer watchdog group Patient Privacy Rights is impressed with the venture.

"A lot of people would never suspect Microsoft would want to put people in control of their information. In years past, they've certainly been busted for taking people's data,

but the corporation is clearly in a different place," said Dr. Deborah Peel, founder of the group, explaining Microsoft agreed to strict privacy regulations and to submit to outside audits.

Peel, who has been in contact with HealthVault developers for six months about privacy issues, said she's impressed with the company's commitment to security.

"If Microsoft can show ... that health technology can work with consumers in control of their data, this changes everything," she said.

Microsoft teamed with more than 40 companies and organizations, including the American Heart Association, Allscripts Healthcare Solutions Inc., a Johnson & Johnson diabetes management program called LifeScan Inc., softwaremaker Kryptiq Corp., Home Diagnostics Inc., New York-Presbyterian Hospital and Medical Informatics Engineering, which provides electronic medical records.

The true potential of HealthVault will take time to develop, said Steve Shihadeh, general manager of the company's Health Solutions Group said.

Because electronic systems have been slow to catch on with physicians and hospitals, many consumers will not be able to receive and transmit compatible information from health providers, he said. Users will, however, be able to download information by fax.

Microsoft, which will make the site free to patients and providers, plans to make money off advertising connected to its HealthVault search tool, Shihadeh said. But he said the search tool has privacy controls, and advertisers must also adhere to rules.

"We won't mine for data. We won't sell their data," Shihadeh said. "I think we're really raising the bar awfully high for privacy. All the data is secured in one place in a locked-down data center with the best security capabilities available."

Health experts said Microsoft will have to prove its value and earn its trust for consumers to use the tool.

"The key question will be, 'Who is the most trusted source for storing, managing and securing personal health information?' " said Dr. Jeffrey Rideout, former head of Cisco Systems Inc.'s health care practice who is now with Ziegler HealthVest management, a private equity firm in San Francisco. "Microsoft may be that. Physicians may be that. We know probably health plans and employers are not that."