

New Brunswick Telegraph-Journal

N.B. businesses can cut health costs

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Page: A6
Section: Opinion

Entrepreneurialism can pay off for the public as well as private investors. A key example is health care, where creative businesses are proving that they can address logistical shortcomings more readily than government can.

MedRunner, based in Saint John, is a small company that exemplifies this evolution. It has pioneered web-based software that allows doctors to register prescriptions with pharmacies, saving time and preventing errors. Ten physicians and 20 pharmacies are testing the process; by year's end, MedRunner hopes to deploy its product nationally.

This company, and others like it, represent a new field: the application of information technology to systemic problems in health care. From digital diagnostic imaging to instant surgical bookings and online prescriptions, ehealth has the potential to speed diagnosis, reduce waiting times and slow the rapid growth in health-care costs.

Successive federal governments have made the development of ehealth initiatives a priority, and former health minister Michael Murphy spoke often about the value that electronic records would confer. That value has not yet been realized - but the potential is growing.

The Department of Health doesn't need to devise its own computer technology, nor should it be searching for a one-size-fits-most software vendor. There are many companies out there competing to meet similar requirements. The provincial government must tap into the creative power of this highly competitive market.

If officials can determine what the province's needs are, entrepreneurs will do the rest. The competition may even give rise more local businesses serving national markets.

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Health care: Murphy thinks he has the right prescription

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Section: City
Byline: APRIL CUNNINGHAM TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

SAINT JOHN - Todd Murphy isn't kidding when he says he wants his company to become the Google of health care.

From his Prince William Street office, Murphy and his seven full-time staff want to change the way health care is delivered, one prescription at a time.

MedRunner, as the company is called, has already started testing its web-based application with 10 local doctors and 20 pharmacies, and by the end of 2011, Murphy wants to go national.

"I've a very intense and competitive guy," said Murphy, 34, a graduate of the University of New Brunswick's master's of business administration program.

"I like a challenge, and obviously taking on the health-care system is a big challenge. But if I'm going to get up and do something, I want to do it right."

In less than two years, the company has grown from operating out of Murphy's two-bedroom apartment, to working in a posh uptown office using \$100,000 in venture capital from the New Brunswick Innovation Fund.

The technology works by allowing physicians to send prescriptions to pharmacies online, avoiding illegible handwriting and negative drug interactions, which can add costs to health care.

The service is free for doctors, while the company receives fees from pharmacies, health insurance companies and pharmaceuticals.

"The Google model works because we give away everything for free," he said. "It's very efficient for the provinces because we save money for the health-care system - we have private companies paying for it."

Eventually, Murphy wants patients to ask their physicians to use MedRunner to deliver prescriptions, eliminating the need for paper copies - and mistakes - altogether.

He believes his web service could save social and economic costs as well. The system could eliminate "double-doctoring," he says, such as when a patient tries to get two prescriptions filled for OxyContin, an addictive narcotic often sold on the street.

"We can provide the trail that helps eliminate the abuse," said Murphy, a Newfoundland native who grew up in Dartmouth, N.S., and founded the company with his UNBSJ classmate, Kevin Garnett.

To get there, 2011 will be busy. After the local trial is complete, Murphy plans to expand his service province-wide by sometime in the summer.

By the end of the year, he wants to reach other provinces, including Ontario.

He plans to double his workforce in the meantime hiring account managers, customer relations people and software developers.

"We built our product to be national," he said. "We just don't want to improve New Brunswick's health-care system, we want to improve the Canadian health-care system. It's a model that can save the provinces hundreds of millions of dollars."

Now struggling with mounting health-care costs, governments must lean on the support of private industry and innovation to succeed, he said.

"Governments should not be in the business of IT. They should have special industry experts building those solutions and managing them so they don't have to sustain those costs," he said. "Innovation comes from private industry - it doesn't come from government." Still, Murphy says success hasn't come overnight. He's been working hard for a year and a half, and much of that has been working closely with doctors to get their buy-in.

But he's proud of what's been accomplished and "super-excited" about what's yet to come.

"It's phenomenal," he said. "It goes to show that anybody can do this with hard work."

"And we want to take on the responsibility of being that company that people point to and say, 'These guys started from an idea. They came from local universities and they're out to change the world.'"

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Nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit; Funding McCain Institute's Entrepreneurial Leaders Program offering micro-lending, mentorship to aid startups

Fri Dec 10 2010

Page: B1

Section: Business

Byline: JULIANNA CUMMINS TELEGRAPH-Journal

When April Glavine had trouble finding financing to transform her passion for healthy living into a business, her parents pulled through with an investment to get her vending machine company off the ground.

Now, Glavine, 30, and a group from the University of New Brunswick's G. Wallace F. McCain Institute's Entrepreneurial Leaders Program (ELP) are developing a micro-loan and mentorship program to give a boost to other small businesses.

"Our whole idea is entrepreneurs in New Brunswick need to help other entrepreneurs in New Brunswick to be successful," said Glavine.

With Glavine leading the way, some members of the ELP group have come together to work on developing a program, funded through a combination of money from their businesses and fundraising initiatives. Members of the group presented the concept for the program at the Future NB conference held in Moncton last week.

Glavine said she was inspired to develop the micro-loan program after the challenges she faced in starting her own business, Lean Machine.

She had difficulty finding financial support for her business because of her relative inexperience and her desire to break into an unconventional market: vending machines carrying healthy food, such as almond milk and gluten-free snacks.

"I might not even be a company today if it wasn't for my parents believing in me, because I was high-risk, new to the industry, and I really had a small ask in regards to a monetary need," said Glavine.

Her parents, also entrepreneurs, put up a small investment of \$10,000, said Glavine. Her company now employs three people and has machines across Atlantic Canada and Alberta, with plans to expand nationally.

By September 2011, the ELP group plans to start accepting applications for the micro-loans. The group will review applications four times a year, said Glavine.

The loans will be small, as the term micro-loan implies. The largest loan that any one company can potentially take is \$10,000, said Glavine.

Glavine said the group is still working out what the

terms and conditions of the loans will be. The program will also feature a significant mentorship component between the group and the entrepreneurs selected for the loans, said Glavine.

Sean Dunbar, owner of the company that makes Picaroons Traditional Ales, is also a member of the group that is developing the program. Dunbar said Glavine championed the idea of establishing micro-loan opportunities for small businesses who may not otherwise get a break.

"No matter how small you are, there are people that are trying to get into business that are smaller than us," said Dunbar.

He said such programs can allow for smaller business to avoid the sometimes drawn-out application process for loans from financial institutions, and can also provide emotional support.

"The financial support is probably half of it - the fact that somebody cares enough to lend you a little bit of money is the other half," said Dunbar. He said many of these entrepreneurs need only small loans, which keep them off the radar of more traditional loan-granting institutions.

Todd Murphy, the chief executive of MedRunner Health Solutions Inc. and a member of the group developing the program, said he hopes the micro-loans can help young people create their own summer jobs, rather than turning to fast food joints for temporary work.

"You'd be surprised how much you can learn by starting your own lemonade stand," said Murphy.

Glavine said she spoke about the concept of micro-loans recently with an entrepreneur she currently mentors. Clara Fassett, of Litter Clean All Natural Cat Litter, needs to spend \$700 to purchase a software program to help her business move on to the next step, said Glavine.

"It would break my heart to see her not be able to move forward and grow her company based on \$700," said Glavine.

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Prescription technology MedRunner gets \$100,000 boost

Thu Oct 7 2010
Page: B1
Section: Business
Byline: QUENTIN CASEY FOR THE TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

Todd Murphy doesn't try to hide the lofty objective behind his Saint John-based startup.

"Our main goal is to completely change the health-care system for the better," he says.

On Wednesday, Murphy's vision moved a step closer to fruition with a major funding announcement from the New Brunswick Innovation Foundation (NBIF). The venture capital corporation is investing \$100,000 in MedRunner, which Murphy started as a MBA student at the University of New Brunswick in 2008.

Created with UNB pal Kevin Garnett, a software engineer, MedRunner has developed technology that allows physicians to send prescriptions to pharmacies electronically. The idea is to avoid illegible handwriting and negative drug interactions, which can both lead to adverse health effects and added health care costs.

"We're building a health-care application that can help sustain the health system," Murphy said in an interview on Wednesday. "We want to help cut costs and make sure our province can support our health care system."

Murphy, the company CEO, says the software has been tested with physicians over the past year in various New Brunswick pilot projects. Next month, the technology will go "live," meaning it will be used for transmitting actual prescriptions from doctors' offices to pharmacies.

The goal is to first roll out the software in Atlantic Canada, and by next year, distribute the technology across Canada.

Murphy says MedRunner technology will be provided free to doctors, but won't say how the company plans to make money from the venture.

In addition to the \$100,000 from NBIF, MedRunner has received \$75,000 from private investors and \$125,000 from the First Angel Network Association, an Atlantic Canadian not-for-profit venture capital group.

According to Murphy, Canadian pharmacists dispense 450 million paper-based drug prescriptions each year. In the United States, that number is 3.5 billion. Translation: there's a large market for MedRunner's services.

"It should make life easier for pharmacies, for physicians and for patients. That's the hope," said Ryan Kennedy, a Saint John pharmacist, who has offered advice during MedRunner's development.

"I think the technology has the ability to do a lot of good. It just depends on the extent to which the prescribing community chooses to use it."

Murphy says the key has been in consulting with doctors from the very beginning - even when back at UNB.

"We approached a group of physicians and we asked them: what problems can we help you solve? They said prescriptions were the biggest hurdle," he said. Over the past year, the company has sought advice and input from more than 100 doctors, he added.

"As jurisdictions all across Canada and the United States race to make the legislative changes needed to permit electronic prescriptions, the timing of MedRunner's introduction to the marketplace is optimal," said NBIF president and CEO Calvin Milbury in a release issued Wednesday. "When several investors come to the table it helps to build the credibility the company needs to raise even more capital when it starts to grow."

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The get up and go attitude; Improving productivity: Businesses seek employees who are innovators and want to drive prosperity in the company. Employees are increasingly being called on for ideas and leadership

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Section: Business
Byline: John Pollack For the Telegraph-Journal

Curtis Howe and Bob Justason say they aren't afraid of letting business get emotional.

The chief executive and head of operations, respectively, at Mariner Partners Inc. don't subscribe to the common philosophy that business shouldn't get personal.

Rather they work under the theory that sincerely caring about the company and its customers will help both prosper.

The seven-year-old IT firm now employs more than 110 people and from day one has tried to get every new employee to care about the company's success as much as its co-founders.

Mariner says it strives to create an entrepreneurial culture in the workplace, despite beginning to look more like a corporation than a startup, at least from the outside.

"Startups tend to attract a certain profile of people (that get) excited about the idea, excited about the work," Howe says. "They're personally invested, not just financially but emotionally."

These are the kind of people Mariner tries to attract.

"Every single individual can influence the success of the business," Howe says. "Just like a tiny little startup."

The same mentality is becoming more and more prevalent among New Brunswick's manufacturers and trades people, says David Plante, New Brunswick vice-president for national industry association the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters.

"Workers in a plant would have more responsibility not only for their performance, but also for the performance of their peers," he says.

"The old 1950s picture of somebody punching a time card in at 8 a.m. and punching out at 5 p.m. doesn't exist anymore."

He says employees are increasingly being called on for ideas and leadership, especially on workplace safety issues.

But as production lines become more automated, and some of the labourers are retrained for higher-paying

technician jobs, Plante says manufacturers are starting to look for people at all levels of the operation to be thinking about improving efficiency and productivity.

Although it means fewer jobs overall, Plante says he believes many labour groups appreciate the shift to a more "innovative" manufacturing workforce.

"People intrinsically value the contribution they make in their work," he says. "The more value they place on it, the greater ownership they take for the ultimate performance of the operation."

At Mariner, Howe and Justason aim to show employees how and why they matter by sharing "detailed" financial information "that's typically not shared with employees."

"We share that widely so people understand what's going on, where the revenue is coming from and how their work is going to affect those revenues," Howe says.

For the last four years the firm has housed a startup in its office for a year at a time, with the goal of helping that small firm kick off by giving them access to the business expertise within Mariner.

The program has turned out the likes of Radian6 Technologies Inc., Brovada Technologies Inc., MedRunner Health Solutions Inc. and currently Shift Energy Inc.

The Mariner chiefs say they do it purely to help the startups while encouraging the development of companies that will be headquartered here and struggle to come up with a direct benefit to the company.

"It may be what keeps us entrepreneurial, is having these startups around," says Justason. "It's energizing to be part of that. It's contagious."

But the two men say getting employees to care about the business and customers has more to do with making them feel like their jobs aren't always on the line.

"People are used to being expendable, it takes a lot of time to convince people they're not," Howe says. "But once you do they do amazing things."

"If they believe that they really do matter they will

astound you with what they can really do."

Rather than have a book of policies, Mariner has core principals Howe and Justason try to communicate and demonstrate, such as always do the right thing for the customer and give them the quality of service you would a family friend.

"Listen and understand the customer's situation and put them above the financial and political needs of Mariner," Justason says. "None of your customers want to see you go bankrupt, generally they'll want you to see a reasonable rate of return."

Howe and Justason don't claim to have any secret to creating an entrepreneurial environment, nor do they encourage others to try what they do, they've simply found something that works for them, they say.

"We don't have this all well oiled," Howe says. "I'd say there's a group of our employees who are pretty well off the learning curve on this and could teach us, but there are others who haven't had the time to be immersed in it."

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Complementary businesses; Environment: A Port City startup is looking at alternative uses for captured carbon while operating a sustainability consulting service to fund the on-going research and development

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Byline: John Pollack For the Telegraph-Journal

For most startups generating revenue and becoming profitable is a lengthy process that can take years if it ever happens at all.

Some software firms will release early versions to generate revenue sooner and fund further development, as startup guru Guy Kawasaki advocates.

But many other entrepreneurs don't have this option because their products may be more expensive to develop and may need to be complete at the time of sale.

A Port City startup developing a carbon capture system is hoping a related consulting business on the side will help fund its prototypes and spread the word about the firm.

"We're looking at developing the most cost-effective and highly efficient system out there," says Scott Walton, chief executive of Enovex Inc. "Also one that has a high degree of automation management so it's a plug and play system."

While other carbon capture systems the firm has looked at require a lot of maintenance, Walton says Enovex plans to build a dashboard to see what's happening at all times and easily make changes.

The firm plans to target coal power generation stations with its carbon capture system, to reduce their environmental impact.

But instead of storing the carbon underground, a common but controversial tactic, Enovex is looking for other uses for the carbon, nitrogen and water it would sequester from coal power plants.

One of the biggest prospects is feeding the carbon to algae to create bio-fuel, Walton says.

"There's going to be massive potential to tap into that," he says

Carbon capturing has its share of critics including science historian James Fleming - author of the not yet release book *Fixing the Sky: the Checkered History of Weather and Climate Control* - who spoke at St. Thomas University in January.

But Fleming's issue is mostly with the storing because it's hard to find a good location and it's hazardous if it leaks, though he also says the capturing process is energy intensive.

But he says Enovex has a more innovative approach, though it raises environmental issues about growing the algae.

"Where are they growing it? Is it environmentally sound to turn lakes into algae farms? On what scale?" he says. "What's the larger environmental picture? How economically viable will it be?" Fleming asks. "The questions are in the details, (but) it's not a bad system.

Walton says 90 per cent of the firm's focus, since they started their research and development about a year-and-a-half ago, has been around the capturing system itself, but these are all questions the company is considering and will have to study further.

With the help of researchers at the University of New Brunswick, Enovex plans to start building an initial carbon capture prototype next month, which should take six months to complete. Then all of 2011 would be spent building a larger prototype, after which the firm would be looking to build a customized system for a pilot customer.

Walton expects the development process to cost between \$500,000 and \$1 million. The company is applying to a wide range of R&D funding programs, including ones aimed at academic-private partnerships.

But to help get cash flowing Enovex Inc. launched a sustainability consulting service that not only looks at dollars and cents but also social and environmental longevity of a business.

"Businesses should be accountable for how they're impacting everything around them," Walton says.

By evaluating their businesses and comparing it to industry leaders, Walton says he can help companies reduce the negative - and increase the positive - effect on their people, and surrounding communities, profits and the planet.

"With the consulting service we're seeing an enormous demand, because last week Wal-Mart (NYSE:WMT) announced they're requiring all of their suppliers to become sustainable with their operations," he says.

Walton says both sides of the business will remain after the carbon capture system is on the market

because the two complement each other.

"We can learn about a company using our suitability consulting service and work toward the potential future sale of our carbon capture technology," he says. "It's a much smaller sale upfront with the consulting service."

Enovex is a part of Propel ICT Inc.'s accelerator program and has been able to strike a fairly cushy office deal because of it.

The firm is sharing office space with fellow Propel startup MedRunner Health Solutions Inc.

"We're taking space and when we get revenues we'll start paying them a sublet fee," Walton says. "It gives us time to get off our feet."

The heads of both firms say they enjoy having other entrepreneurs in the office they can get advice from.

"We've had a little bit of success and we know how difficult it is in the early stages of startup," says Todd Murphy, chief executive of MedRunner adding his landlord at 115 Prince William Street wants to focus on housing technology companies in the building.

"We wanted to share the cost, but we think it's more important to create an entrepreneurial environment for us to thrive," he says.

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Mixing business with technology; ICT: There are plenty of opportunities for people with broad ranging skills to work in technology, executive says

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Page: B1

Section: Business

Byline: John Pollack For the Telegraph-Journal

It seems almost everywhere you look there is some sort of computer technology.

A much larger percentage of people work from a desktop or laptop every day than in decades past, and more and more people are carrying around handheld computers in their pockets they call smartphones.

Though using email, word processors and web browsers are more or less common knowledge, actually understanding how a computer works - or how to fix it - is a rarity.

But that doesn't necessarily matter for someone looking for a job in the technology sector says David Baxter, vice-president of innovation for T4G Ltd., a national firm specializing in technology solutions for business problems.

Baxter, who comes from a business background, says there are plenty of opportunities for people with a broad range of specialties to work in technology in New Brunswick.

"The ICT sector is an enabling sector that allows you to do interesting things to solve business problems," he says. "There is a certain amount of knowledge equity that you build up as you progress through your career."

This can be an asset for tech firms.

E-Health companies value insight from health-care professionals, energy tech firms want to hear from power sector veterans and technology workers often needs business people to help monetize ideas, he says.

Although there is a continent-wide shortage of technology-trained workers, Baxter says people with other complementary experience are needed as well.

"I believe collaboration is necessary anywhere," he says. "It's one of the conduits to making innovation happen."

Todd Murphy, co-founder of Saint John-based tech startup MedRunner Health Solutions Inc., knows first hand how this can help a new business.

The University of New Brunswick MBA student looked to his school's computer science faculty to find people with the technical skills needed to make his idea for a paperless prescription service a reality.

But this wouldn't have happen if Murphy hadn't taken the initiative to walk down the hall, something he says not enough people do.

He says there should be more communication and collaboration between business, computer science and engineering students as well as their related counterparts at the community colleges.

"They may not come up with anything, but it gets them talking," he says. "There are lots of business people out there that want to start a business but they can't find the right people."

But startups aren't the only place where technology-interested non-techies can find a job, Baxter says. Plenty of the province's ICT firms have a need for them as well.

"The other opportunities have more to do with utilizing your creative, or your problem solving abilities," he says, adding big-picture thinkers and the ability to forecast future trends are often valued. "There are lots of opportunities for people to come in with that kind of perspective and apply a technology solution to what really is a business challenge."

After the necessary collaboration between technology and business people and other specialists has happened, Baxter says all parties will be better prepared for possible future endeavors.

"It is a two-way street," he says. "Whether you're coming in with a technology orientation or coming in with a business orientation, you learn enough about the other and what it takes to apply that type of creativity."

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MedRunner Health Solutions Inc. receives boost; Technology: Software will help replace traditional paper-based prescriptions

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Section: Business
Byline: QUENTIN CASEY FOR THE TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

A budding New Brunswick tech firm was one of 14 companies to receive a financial boost in Ottawa on Monday.

Saint John-based MedRunner Health Solutions Inc. received just over \$60,000 to help test its medical software. The firm hopes its creation will change the way patients have their medical prescriptions ordered and filled.

MedRunner software, when up and running, will allow doctors to fill out prescriptions electronically - and send them directly to pharmacists.

According to company co-founder Todd Murphy, the software will help replace traditional paper-based prescriptions. Gone will be handwriting errors due to physician hen scratch, as well as the potential for adverse drug reactions.

The technology will also link directly to a patient's electronic health record - when that system is eventually up and running - and reduce prescription abuse and fraud.

Funding for MedRunner was announced by Ottawa-based Precarn Incorporated, a not-for-profit outfit that supports budding technologies that need a push to market.

"We're ecstatic because they are the first agency to come in and support us," said Murphy, who recently completed his MBA at the University of New Brunswick.

"It has enabled us to jumpstart and get ahead of the competition."

Murphy, 33, said the funds will allow MedRunner to launch trials linking a number of doctors' offices and pharmacies in Moncton, Fredericton and Saint John.

In development since June, the software needs real world testing to reveal any bugs. Murphy expects the test trials, to be run in partnership with the New Brunswick Pharmaceutical Society, to start Feb. 1 and last for three or four months.

Following the trials, he hopes to take the technology to every corner of the province - and then across Canada.

Murphy said he is optimistic about the technology's chances of success, particularly because the firm has sought advice and insight from local physicians, including Saint John doctors Stephen Willis and Brian Craig.

MedRunner received just over \$60,000 out of the \$2.1 million announced on Monday. The funds are intended to help the selected firms test and push their "first-of-a-kind technologies" to the market.

MedRunner joined 14 other firms from across the country in receiving money. The other technologies cover a wide spectrum, including technology to help with energy efficiency in buildings, and educational software to boost the brain development of children.

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New Brunswick Telegraph-Journal

Paper prescriptions meet their match; Health MedRunner working on a virtual service that will make medicine pickup quicker, easier

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Byline: JOHN POLLACK Telegraph-Journal

Whether it's justified or not, doctors are notorious for having illegible handwriting. But if a New Brunswick start-up can prove its service is worthwhile, patients may no longer wonder how pharmacists can read prescriptions.

Saint John-based MedRunner is working on a prototype for a virtual prescription service that would not only make picking up medicine quicker, easier and more efficient but also integrate with, and contribute to, a patient's medical record.

"In paper prescriptions there's so much room for error, and adverse reactions," says MedRunner co-founder Todd Murphy, an MBA student at the University of New Brunswick

If a prescription were misread it could result in death, he says, but in a virtual system that mistake is far less likely.

The company has the Department of Health's approval to work in co-operation with the pharmaceutical association to test the service to prove the concept works.

The service, which is still under development, would be part of New Brunswick's province-wide e-health records system, which would allow doctors to easily access a patient's medical and list of past and current prescriptions when deciding on a treatment.

MedRunner aims to have the service ready to test in Saint John within three months.

The service will also be automated.

"It will alert the doctor of any interactions they may not have thought about," says MedRunner co-founder Kevin Garnett. Stephen Breen and Adrian Phinney are also involved in the company. All three men are taking computer science at UNB.

Any authorized person would be able to add to the list of medicines a person has taken or is currently taking, from any computer with Internet access.

The addition to the virtual records could further help save lives, Garnett says.

"It may come in handy when you may be unconscious and maybe you can't speak for yourself," he says.

MedRunner has had Dr. Stephen Willis and Dr. Brian Craig, both from Saint John, providing feedback on the service.

"It's build with the help of physicians and pharmacists, for physicians and pharmacists," Murphy says.

He hopes MedRunner can have the service province-wide by December, and after that the team plans to target other Atlantic Provinces.

"We're designing our product to be able to move into any province," he says adding it will meet all federal and provincial standards across the country.

MedRunner has had help developing its product and business from some experienced technology businesspeople through Propel ICT Inc.'s business accelerator program.

Gerry Pond, a 40-plus-year technology veteran and the current chairman of Mariner, one of New Brunswick's largest tech firms, is one of MedRunner's advisors in the program. His company is also considering investing in MedRunner.

"This function of electronic prescriptions has been done throughout the world, but we haven't seen a lot of it in Canada, so I don't think there is any doubt this is going to happen," Pond says. "The first company to devise a system that's well accepted by the medical community and the pharmaceutical community is probably going to take the lion's share of the business."

Pond says MedRunner is the front runner, at least in New Brunswick.

The start-up is in discussions with three of the seven major pharmacies in Canada to implement the service, though neither Murphy nor Garnett would say which ones.

Murphy says MedRunner is also developing two other products to later add on to the current secure web-based application, but wouldn't provide further details.

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