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Letter from the Executive Director and Editor-in-Chief, (HITM)

Dear Readers,

On February 17, US President Barack Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Known by its acronym ARRA, the legal measure is one of the most ambitious commitments to healthcare IT anywhere, anytime.

Mr. Obama plans to pump-prime the US economy through investments in healthcare (alongside energy and education) and to jumpstart healthcare by means of IT. The sums earmarked for healthcare IT are not insignificant - about 15 billion Euros. By our calculations, this is equal to about 100 dollars for every American aged over 20. If Mr. Obama's plans work out, they could very well do to healthcare IT what the Apollo program did for space exploration, or the Manhattan Project for nuclear technology.

Aside from the sums committed to ARRA, there is another crucial factor which differentiates the US initiative from those like the EU's RTD Framework Program. The Obama gameplan involves spawning, catalyzing and growing a user base which will both push and pull healthcare IT, and do so in the real world of here and now. It does not concern itself with technology for technology's sake.

In this respect, the US is headed towards launching what we, in our previous cover story, called the era of i-Health. Europe needs to be even more concerned now that it does not get stranded in an island of e-Health, of demonstrations and pilots, while the US develops masses of healthcare IT users, alongside protocols and standards (the Real, Real Thing).

Yet another recent development with major relevance for Europe's healthcare IT community is the acquisition in April of Sun Microsystems by Oracle. The approximately 6 billion Euro all-cash takeover highlights one of the enduring mantras about recessions – that recovery is marked by the absence of many old familiar faces.

The Sun-Oracle duo is now poised to take the battle of the Titans (or Microsoft-against-everyone else, as one of our in-house wags put it) to the next phase.

One need not really be surprised. Oracle has been an acquisitive beast. It has, in the past seven years, bought and digested onetime rivals in the enterprise software space like PeopleSoft, Siebel and J.D Edwards, and at least 40 more in other areas. Its offering now encompasses everything from the back-office database through EAI to applications. In the world of healthcare at least, such omnipresence is hard to miss. About the only thing Oracle lacked was an operating system and a future-facing programming language. Via Sun, it has got both, namely Solaris and Java. On April 20, Oracle CEO Larry Ellison called Java "the single most important software asset we have ever acquired."

Against such a development, it will be interesting to see Microsoft's riposte.

But then, the behemoth from Redmond is not the only player left in town. In recent years, networking giant Cisco has been as acquisitive as Oracle. It too sits on tens of billions of dollars in cash reserves. Cisco's Net-centric concept of Unified Computing may juxtapose well into the offsite Data Center elements of Electronic Health Records – including those achieved in large-scale working deployments such as those of the US military. In the e-Health area, moreover, Cisco's still-novel Telepresence videoconferencing system seems set to revolutionise telemedicine (and much more).

The future of healthcare IT remains exciting. More is still to come.

Yours truly,

Christian Marolt

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