



Eric Grunden

Chief Customer Officer
MatrixCare

In this Voices interview, Skilled Nursing News sits down with MatrixCare Chief Customer Officer Eric Grunden to learn how his team takes the vendor-customer relationship to a new level. Eric talks about the function of a tech partner versus a vendor, and he explains why it's effective at any part of the customer journey.

Editor's note: This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

MatrixCare is the only EHR provider to focus on the entire senior care continuum. To learn more about how MatrixCare can help your organization, visit [MatrixCare.com](https://www.matrixcare.com).

The Voices Series is a sponsored content program featuring leading executives discussing trends, topics and more shaping their industry in a question-and-answer format. For more information on Voices, please contact sales@agingmedia.com.

Q: Skilled Nursing News: What career experiences do you most draw from in your role today as Chief Customer Officer at MatrixCare?

Eric Grunden: I've been in the services industry since I was 15 years old. My first job was at a grocery store, which helped me realize that I enjoy the service side. I took that realization with me into the health care space. I came to Greenway Health in its early days and eventually helped take the company public in 2012. I was its 24th employee, and when I left in 2016, we had 2,000 employees and 8,000 customers. I am always drawing on that experience with the rapid growth we're seeing here at MatrixCare.

After leaving Greenway, I went into higher education and focused on data analytics, working with colleges and universities to ensure their students persisted and ultimately graduated. Maybe it's a nod to my parents, since my father was in health care and my mother was in higher ed, but I feel like I've always had a desire to take care of people who take care of others.



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You don't go into health care or higher education for fame and fortune. You do it because you're drawn to care. I believe it's important to support the folks who are doing that, which drives the relationships that we have with our customers at MatrixCare.

Q: Skilled Nursing News: From your perspective, what makes for a good vendor-customer relationship, and what benchmarks does MatrixCare use to measure that?

Grunden: It's very in-depth, and we look at it as a lifelong partnership. I ask every customer two questions: Do we make your life easier, and do you see the value in the partnership? That signals to us and the customer that it is not just about delivering training or implementation.

Customers want to be seen and heard. They want to be visible. They want to know that we, MatrixCare, understand where they are and what their goals are based on where they are in their relationship with us. The needs of a customer in implementation versus a customer that has been with MatrixCare for 15 years are drastically different.

We also look at a number of customer health metrics, using an application that shows their optimization of our system. It's all focused on understanding each customer's journey and ensuring that we have services to meet them where they are.

Beyond those tools, we surround our customers with a range of experts. We have our customer success managers focused on delivering a positive experience. Our approach is to help them see this is a relationship for the long haul, not just a delivery of a tool.

Q: Skilled Nursing News: Which companies do you take inspiration from as you continue to invest in your team and organization at MatrixCare?

Grunden: Southwest Airlines is the first source of inspiration that comes to mind. If you've ever flown Southwest, you know they're very efficient and predictable in what they deliver. But they also look like they enjoy their job and have fun doing it.

Second, I think about Chick-fil-A. I love Chick-fil-A because it's a quality product, but if you've ever been in a drive-thru in a Chick-fil-A, you can see they're also very efficient and innovative. If I could take two companies — two experiences, two service models — and put them together, I would take the attitude and energy of Southwest Airlines and apply that to the quality product and efficiency of Chick-fil-A.

That's what I aspire to in any organization that I'm a part of, especially here at MatrixCare.

Q: Skilled Nursing News: What are the common pain points skilled nursing customers may experience with technology and technology vendors?

Grunden: We have to remember our customers are running a very important business: working and caring for residents and patients. Technology, whether implementation of brand new technology or changing technology, creates a disruption in their businesses and the care they provide. Helping them overcome and manage that is a big part of what we do.

We talk about change management, delivering services when it's best and least impactful on their businesses, and implementation versus our maintenance windows. Our goal is to tailor a unique customer experience that minimizes our impact on their business and the care they're providing.



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Q: Skilled Nursing News: What are the most important ways that MatrixCare helps SNFs address or avoid those pain points?

Grunden: Those experiences and partnerships are managed through our CSMs — Customer Success Managers — enabling us to directly understand what makes each customer unique. The factors that go into building those experiences and partnerships are customer location, size, impact and current system. Everything is specifically designed for the customer based on those inputs.

Luckily, our technology provides the flexibility that allows us to deliver updates, trainings and ongoing customer support when they most need it. The customer support reps are available 24/7 to ensure we are on standby at a moment's notice.

Q: Skilled Nursing News:
What could a prospective MatrixCare customer expect during the implementation process?

Grunden: Implementing an EHR is a major undertaking. We realize that. Whether it's a small skilled nursing facility or a large enterprise customer, our programs are based on the organization's unique needs, taking culture and existing systems in consideration.

Additionally, it is critical that the customer decides to make the transition into MatrixCare during the implementation phase, which can be very frustrating at times.

Our team works hard to make sure customers don't feel pressured to work on an external timeline. Many vendors say, "This is a 60-day implementation," "a 90-day implementation," and so forth. They try to force their schedule onto the customer. We avoid that at all costs. We allow our customers to set the timeline based on what their needs are and how disruptive we're going to be to their business.

Next, when you're implementing a tool, it's nice to have somebody who knows both the product and the customer's industry inside and out. We have a services team and implementation team with an average tenure of 16 years. Some of the folks on that team have been with us for upwards of 30 years.

When we talk about customizing the customer's experience, we're talking about how quickly we help the customer design the implementation timeline, as well as the team we're putting in place. This is critical to helping customers make a smooth transition from their previous system.

Q: Skilled Nursing News:
How does MatrixCare's approach to implementation differ from the norm?

Grunden: We look for opportunities to be more consultative as part of our implementation. Of course, we're going to implement new technology and new functionality, but there are opportunities for us to look at different workflows. One of the applications we deploy is a data analytics product that helps predict the likelihood of a fall within a facility.

Yes, we can teach you how to use that tool and interpret the data, but we can also look for opportunities to help you improve your workflow to take advantage of that tool. It's not limited to implementation, data conversion or training. We want to build a long-term partnership where we are more than a technology provider.



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Q: Skilled Nursing News: As a technology vendor why do you think it's so important to create this partnership with your customers?

Grunden: I think it's important to have that partnership because change is a given. Change is going to happen within an organization one way or another, whether it's regulatory, environmental or anything else.

As a partner, we can work through changes with customers. We can help them overcome staff shortages, ensure new tools are properly implemented and help them track COVID. There are so many ways to help them thrive in this new landscape as their partner.



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Q: Skilled Nursing News: Entering this year, no one knew fully what to expect in the skilled nursing industry. What has been the biggest surprise so far this year, and what impact will that surprise have for the remainder of the year?

Grunden: Whether it was a surprise or just an existing problem, staffing shortages got much worse. We talked to a lot of our customers, and I think they were also surprised by the amount of turnover. It showed us that we needed to be better, we needed to have better solutions for assisting our customers in this way.

Could we make it easier to learn our applications, to make training available in different ways? We have a new education services division focused on that, delivering training face-to-face, but also through pre-recorded video documentation.

We've also recently implemented live, virtual classrooms that are interactive and available at all times of the day, not just during normal business hours. It is a great complement to our brand new customer community and online forum, where we bring customers together to exchange ideas, concerns and questions about what's going on in their organizations in this unique time.