A Comprehensive Buyer's Guide for Dental Imaging Software

10 KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK TO MAKE A
WELL-INFORMED CHOICE

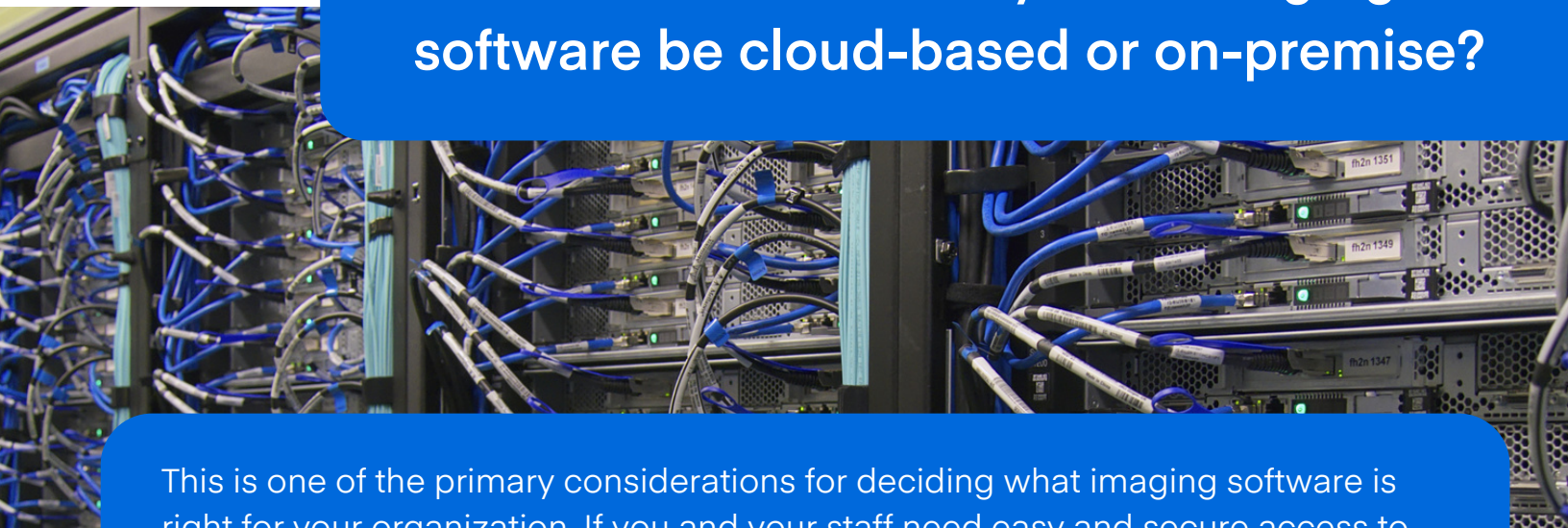# So, you've decided it's time to upgrade your outdated dental imaging software?

Congratulations!

As you begin considering your options, this guide will provide insights to help you select the imaging software that best suits your practice's needs.

Many factors go into the decision-making process, so here are some of the key questions you should ask to get started.

Question #1: Should my next imaging software be cloud-based or on-premise?

This is one of the primary considerations for deciding what imaging software is right for your organization. If you and your staff need easy and secure access to images at the office or on the go, cloud-based imaging may be the better option for you.

If you don't want to download large image files each time and prefer to make enhancements and manipulations on a web-enabled device, a cloud-based software will give you the 24/7 access that you need. Cloud-based software costs generally include an economical monthly subscription fee with no additional costs for ongoing IT consulting, support, upgrade, security, and backups.

On the other hand, if you prefer storing your imaging files on a server, then an on-premise solution may be a better fit for your practice. The software would be installed on computers at your practice. Image files would be stored locally in a server, connected via a local network between different operatories and the front desk. Since you will store the imaging files yourself, you will need to maintain a physical server at your practice location. To stay HIPAA compliant and protect your data from cyberattacks, you will likely need to invest in security software, support, backups, upgrades, and possibly IT consulting fees for on-premise software.

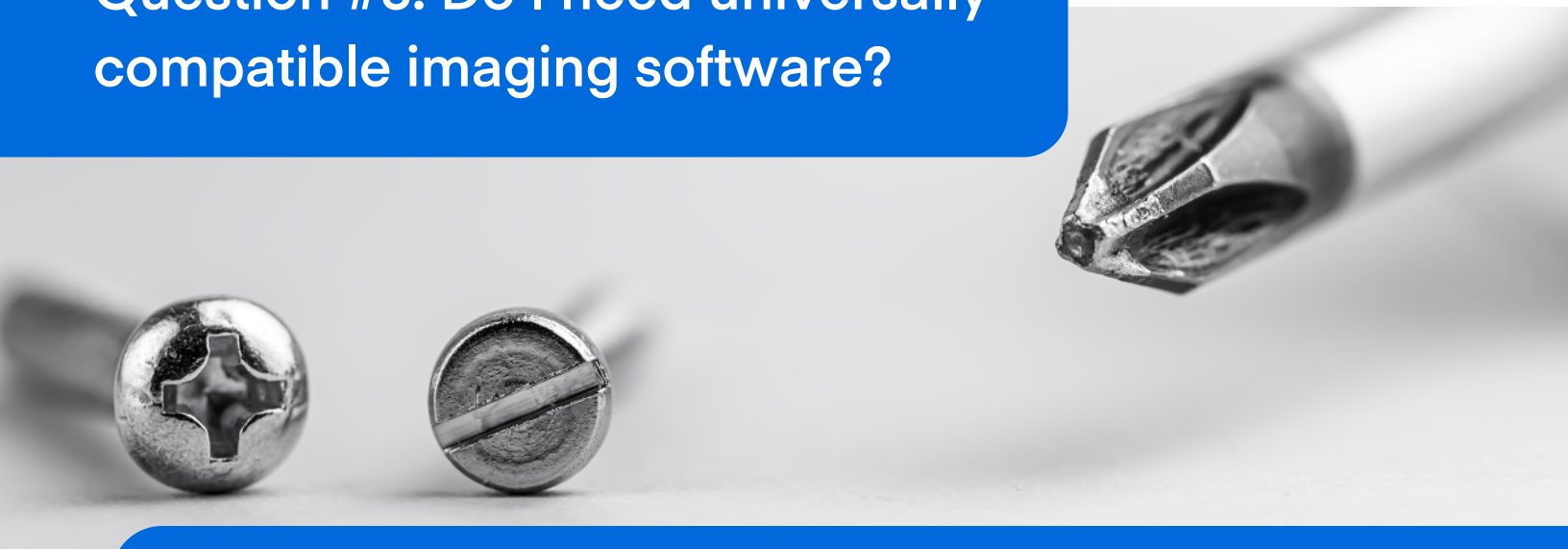# Question #2: Will I save more money with cloud-based imaging software?

One of the most significant benefits of cloud-based imaging is being able to cut costs by eliminating the need for servers. As technology improves the quality of dental images, file sizes get larger.

Depending on your state law, dental images from a patient record must be maintained for seven or more years. During that time, your imaging data could grow to 10s of terabytes or more. Since servers become obsolete and need to be replaced approximately every three years, this never-ending cycle of upgrading can significantly affect your practice's bottom line.

By contrast, cloud-based imaging software allows for unlimited storage for your growing image files. Additionally, servers require maintenance, support, backups, updates, etc., while cloud-based imaging gives you an all-inclusive subscription with unlimited data that can scale with your practice.

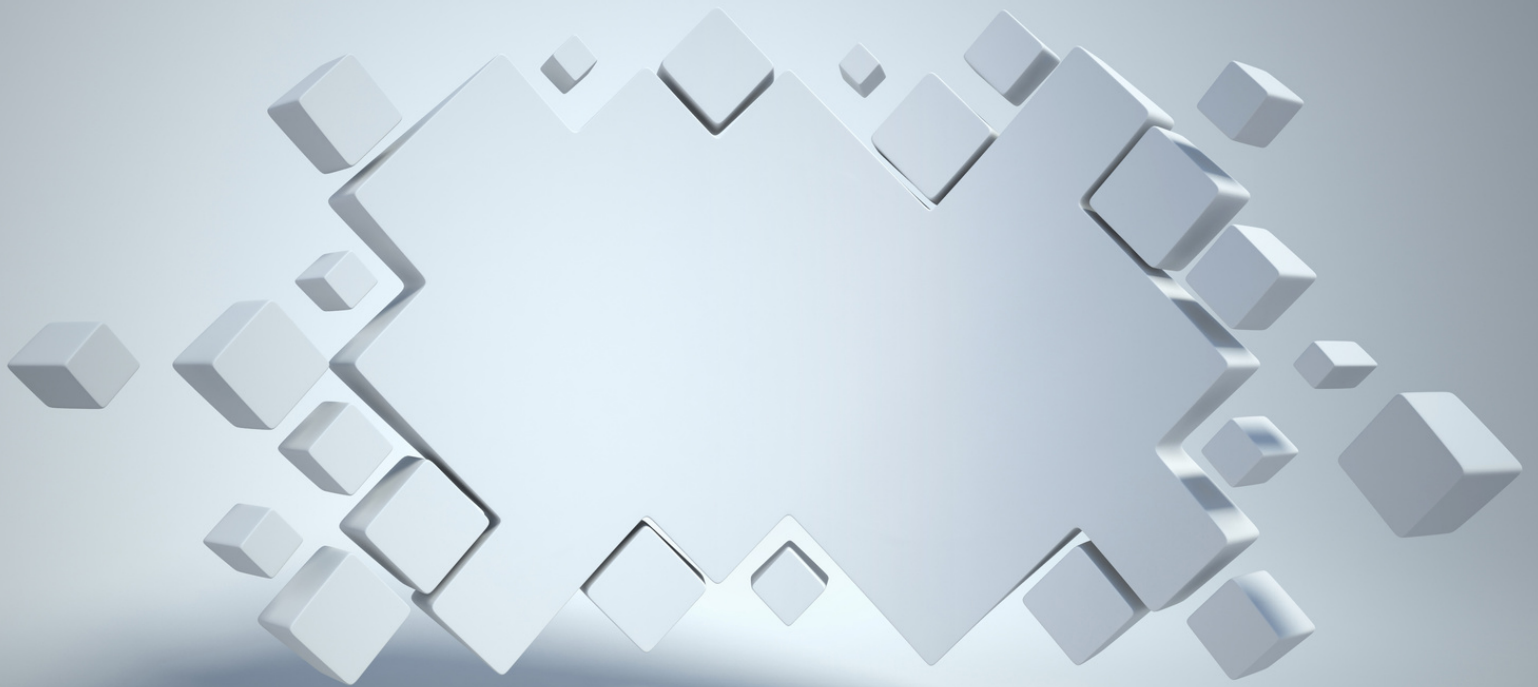## Question #3: Do I need universally compatible imaging software?

Software is usually developed under an open-architecture or closed-architecture philosophy. Software companies that develop open-architecture software are focused on interoperability and integration with a wide range of technologies and peripheral systems, even those of competing companies.

By contrast, companies that adopt a close-architecture philosophy develop software that is designed to work best with its own brand of technologies, which limits users to hardware and sensors within the same proprietary ecosystem. This may not be an issue if you have a solo practice, and you are certain that you are not open to be acquired and you are loyal to a single brand for hardware, sensors, and software.

If your practice needs the flexibility to use different hardware, sensors, and practice management solutions, then you will appreciate the wide compatibility of open-architecture dental imaging software. Ask whether the software will integrate with your current devices (digital sensors, intraoral/extraoral cameras, pan/ceph systems, etc.) and your practice management solution. Lastly, find out what data format the software uses: proprietary vs. DICOM (digital imaging and communications in medicine) to determine whether you will need to pay for conversion at a later date if you change systems or if your practice is acquired.

Question #4: Do I need 3D imaging capabilities?

If your practice uses 3D imaging like cone-beam computed tomography (CBCT) scans, you will need 3D imaging capabilities for your imaging software.

To help your workflow, find out if the software has an implant library and manufacturer list, investigate what annotation tools, image optimization, and treatment planning tools are included to give you more precision to diagnose and treat your patients.

Question #5: What does the conversion process entail?

Once you've learned about imaging software's features and functionality, you'll then want to find out about their conversion process and their experience in converting practices like yours.

Ask how much experience they have converting from your current imaging software and how many conversions they do in a year. To set the right expectations, ask for an estimate of how long the process is likely to take and a general overview of the conversion process. Ask if there will be downtime or other disruptions to your practice.

Ideally, you will want to work with a company that has had extensive experience in the conversion process so that you can have minimal disruption for you and your staff.

Question #6: What kind of support will my practice receive?

Another critical aspect of choosing imaging software is the support that you'll receive once you become a client. Completing the conversion process is just the first step in your relationship with the company that you choose. Their support team is just as crucial to your practice's success as the product features.

Find out whether you will have to pay for customer support or if it's included in a monthly subscription as with cloud software. Find out what support resources are available to you so you can get the most value from your imaging software.

Question #7: Do I need to pay for upgrades, backups, and support?

How imaging software is priced is another very important factor in deciding which software is the best investment for your practice.

Many cloud-based software is priced on a subscription model as part of a software as a service (SaaS) agreement. Subscription models provide predictable costs and eliminate ongoing costs such as upgrades, backups, and support, which are all included in your monthly subscription price. A cloud-based SaaS subscription also allows your practice to save high replacement costs for servers.

If you choose to go with a server-based imaging software, make sure to ask about pricing for upgrades, backups, and support. If they are not included in your recurring fees, request an estimate so you can get an accurate total cost of ownership.

Question #8: How much will imaging software cost?

Depending on the type of imaging software you're looking at, there are different costs to take into consideration.

For example, if you're interested in an imaging hardware and software bundle, a hardware supplier may include "free" imaging software with your initial hardware purchase. However, there are other costs aside from just the software that you should ask about. Find out if you need to pay for installation and set-up, data conversion, practice management bridging, training, support, upgrade fees, and add-on modules for other hardware.

Another less obvious cost to be aware of include higher hardware pricing to account for the development cost of the imaging hardware. In other words, the cost of developing your "free" software is built into the hardware cost. There may also be limited capabilities in the "free" software that hinder your ability to maximize your hardware investment. If you currently need 3D imaging capabilities or are interested in innovations such as AI enabled functionality, you'll want software that has the latest technology. As mentioned earlier, if you choose to go with a closed-architecture system, find out the limitations and costs of switching brands and converting in the future.

Conversely, with a cloud-based subscription, you can have predictable monthly pricing that includes free updates with newly released features, technical support, and upgrades. To start, find out the costs for server set-up, location set up, training, and conversion.

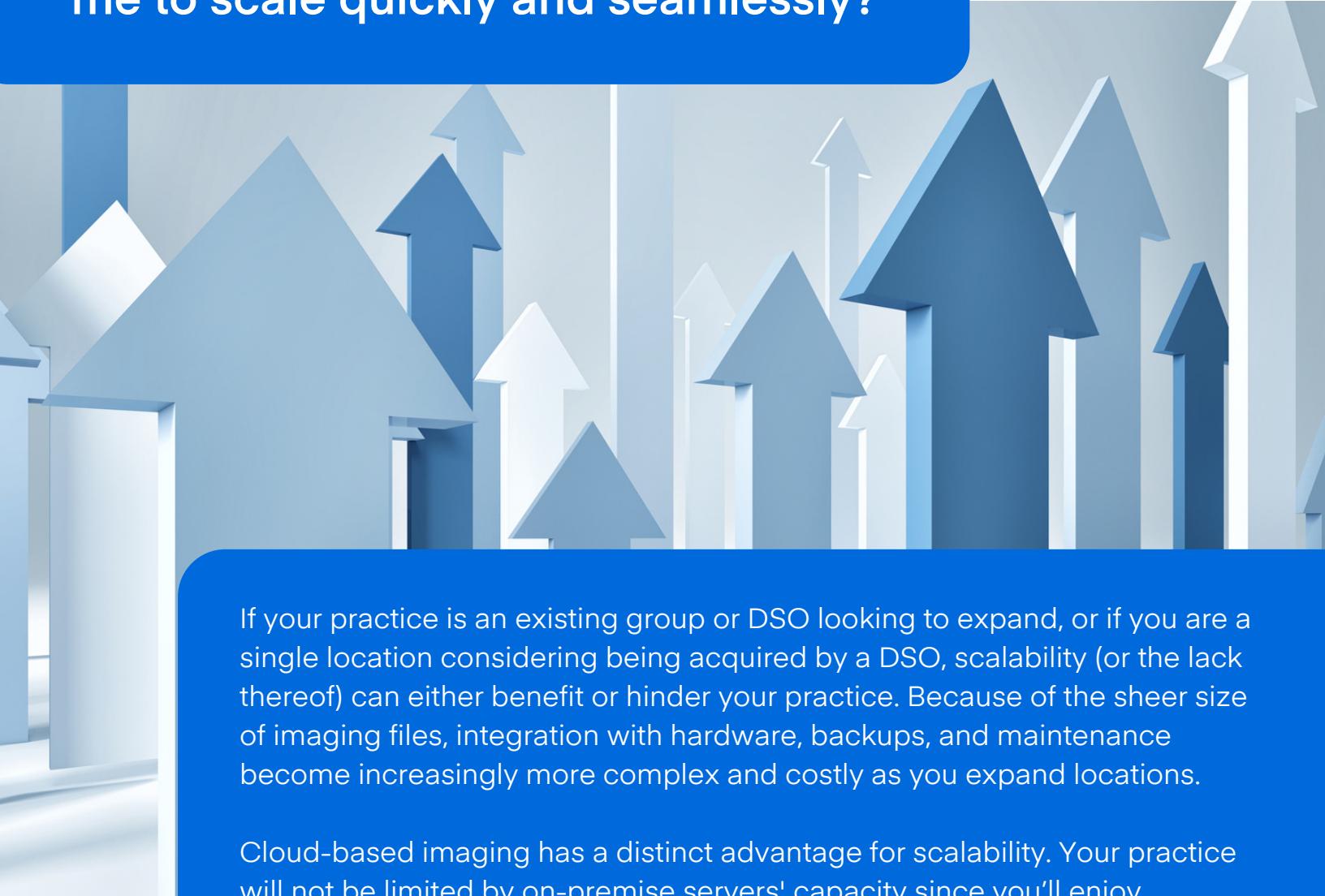## Question #9: How secure is the imaging software?

With cyberattacks on healthcare organizations on the rise, security is an important criterion when choosing imaging software. Dental practices, too, have fallen victim to very high-profile ransomware attacks in recent years.

For cloud-based software, find out what the software vendor does to protect your data. Ask if the software is HIPAA-compliant and whether they can provide a secure sharing portal for when you want to share patient data with insurance providers or referring doctors. A good cloud provider should have state-of-the-art hardware and security firewalls with continuous backups and regular checks for potential vulnerabilities.

If you choose a server-based software, it may be up to your practice to implement firewalls, antivirus software, disaster recovery, etc., to protect your patients' data. In your research, find out which companies will provide you with the most secure services as well as the costs for each.

Question #10: Will the software allow me to scale quickly and seamlessly?

If your practice is an existing group or DSO looking to expand, or if you are a single location considering being acquired by a DSO, scalability (or the lack thereof) can either benefit or hinder your practice. Because of the sheer size of imaging files, integration with hardware, backups, and maintenance become increasingly more complex and costly as you expand locations.

Cloud-based imaging has a distinct advantage for scalability. Your practice will not be limited by on-premise servers' capacity since you'll enjoy unlimited file storage capacity and continuous backups and automatic updates.

If you choose to go with an on-premise software, bear in mind the costs of rolling out upgrades, scheduling backups, and maintaining hardware at all locations.

Learn More

Now that you're armed with initial questions you should be asking for imaging software companies, you're ready to evaluate which software is the best fit for your practice.

XVWeb by Planet DDS is our cloud-based dental imaging software built to save your practice time and money. We look forward to answering all your questions and learning about your practice needs.

To learn more:
Call: 800-861-4098
Email: imagingsales@planetdds.com
Visit: www.planetdds.com/solutions/apteryx/