

8 things mobile health entrepreneurs should know

December 2, 2011

By Stephanie Baum

At the mobile health technology conference [mHealthcon](#) held at [Rutgers University](#) on Dec. 1, one panel shared some interesting insights about their businesses and what entrepreneurs and adapters of mobile health technology could learn from them.

Patients are consumers first. The users of your product may be patients, but they evaluate new product choices the same way that any other consumer would. There's a lot the mobile health industry can learn from the gaming and shopping industries. Communications stressed the personal relationships people have with their mobile phones. Text messages is the most scalable platform. Avoid duplicating information users can get on their own by searching the Web. Chronic diseases may provide more opportunities to guide patients with data, knowledge and action — support apps are richer. [Richy Glassberg of MedHelp](#) said the 60 percent to 70 percent of customer service requests it receives are how can the company make it easier for customers to speak with their doctors.

Reach out to physicians you know or meet to test-drive your prototype. This will help inform whether your mobile solution is practical in a physician's practice and whether it needs to be tweaked or needs to be overhauled to fit in with the realities of how a physician works with her patients, health insurers and runs her practice.

Pediatricians are especially helpful. [Serge Loncar of CareSpeak](#) said the pediatric population and pediatricians can be an ideal avenue to try out a prototype, collect data and use that information to improve the product or as a great selling tool for your technology. Young people, particularly early teens to 21 years old, are heavy cell phone users. "It's easier to get a young person to accept mobile health than a senior. From a distribution standpoint, they are more likely to have cell phone with apps. They do not know life without a mobile phone." On a more human level, a child's emotions are more likely to generate a strong response with physicians and their parents. In a patient environment, children trust their pediatricians in a different way than adults do, Loncar says. Pediatric doctors tend to be more connected and in tune with mobile apps, are more likely to participate in a program and potentially be an early adopter.

Don't be afraid to seek out the biggest customer. Getting pharmaceutical companies to advertise can be a delicate issue, particularly because it represents a potential [minefield for this industry](#). Glassberg of MedHelp said when it was seeking pharmaceutical companies to advertise on the company's community pages, each company told it to get someone to test it. "[Pfizer \(NYSE:PFE\)](#) was the first to test our interstitials and the test has been a very successful one leading to our being included in their 2012 up-front spending."

Look at what the drugstores are doing. Drugstores are becoming much more aggressive players in the health IT/mobile health market. [Walgreens \(NYSE:WAG\)](#) and [CVS Caremark \(NYSE:CVS\)](#) allow users to refill prescriptions and view their prescription history through smartphone apps. What are they not doing? How can your mobile health technology address unfulfilled needs in a way that would fit in with their businesses?

Managing growth. One pitfall panelists observed, particularly for companies that are growing quickly is trying to do everything themselves. Recognize that you need partners to help your business. Sometimes a customer can be a collaborator as [Anand Iyer of WellDoc](#) pointed out. He recounted how AT&T had sought out his company's help to reduce healthcare costs and ultimately helped them with their data security.

Evaluate economic models. Will the physician or patient pay per use? How will a physician be reimbursed? If you create reimbursement codes, you can unlock significant value.

Technology is not a silver bullet. Iyer said his wife, who is a physician, says a main complaint is that many mobile health applications do not fit in with a physician's practice. Companies need to keep in mind they will need to show how their technology can fit into a physician's practice and provide cost savings, particularly because there will inevitably be a process of adaptation that needs to be as time efficient as possible. Any technology you develop needs to be integrable into physicians' systems.

Anand Iyer of WellDoc on integrating mobile technology in a physician's practice.



Anand Iyer of WellDoc talks about how WellDoc got started

