

Best Practices for Tech Companies Moving into the Health IT Space

Presented by MobileHelp

With excerpts from an interview with Rob Flippo, CEO, and Jean Robichaud, CTO, of MobileHelp®

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Executive Summary

An influx of new health IT companies have made recent debuts in the healthcare marketplace, the cause for which equates to standard economic theory: there is the widespread recognition that as regulatory forces alter reimbursements in the healthcare systems, IT companies can tap into the \$6 trillion healthcare industry by:

- Addressing rising healthcare costs;
- Responding to strong consumer demand for IT products to help manage health; and
- Aiding healthcare providers as they work to improve the quality of care.

But what are the challenges for tech companies entering the health IT space? And how can they be overcome? Taking a look at best practices affords the opportunity for a greater number of tech companies to ensure they enter the spaces of health and/or healthcare with the strongest possibility of success.

Crossing Over into Healthcare IT

With its inherent legislation, regulation and the general complexity of the patient care continuum, healthcare was not always a favorite for IT companies. However, the rapid changes occurring in the industry have changed that paradigm.

Among others, the following represent a handful of the reasons an increasing number of tech companies are breaking into the healthcare sector:

- **Affordable Care Act:** The ACA has been a catalyst for change in the health IT space, as it requires that data on cost and quality should be made freely available. The focus on big data, as well as consumers' growing comfort with tracking their daily habits, has cleared the way for the introduction of wearable technology, mobile apps and other high-tech digital applications.
- **Competitive Disruption:** Healthcare is an industry in need of innovative solutions – for both patients and providers. But not all innovation will get very far – for it to be the right type of technology solution, it needs to balance the needs of both patients and healthcare providers.
- **Revenue Generation:** As noted previously, healthcare is a \$6 trillion industry – tech companies do not need to snag much in terms of percentage of the market to reap the financial benefits of the space.

With all the potential the space holds, it is easy to understand why tech companies are willing to brave the murkiness of the healthcare system and all its various challenges to bring health and wellness solutions to the market.

Case in point: Leading tech companies Apple, Google, IBM, and Samsung are spending billions on digital health initiatives, especially around wearables, life sciences and smartphones. In fact, Samsung recently pledged to spend \$1.2 billion on Internet of Things research, with an emphasis on healthcare.

Responding to the investment, Samsung CEO Oh-Hyun Kwon said, "We can keep people out of hospitals and nursing homes. As our populations live longer, these benefits and cost savings for society cannot be ignored."

Making the Move into Healthcare: Caution Ahead?

Despite the clear indicators that the path for tech companies could be healthcare-focused, there are issues that should be addressed prior to making the move into the space.

“At MobileHelp we have recently launched a new division focused solely on healthcare and working with healthcare providers to bring solutions to the market that will help them manage their patients in the short- and long-term,” said Rob Flippo, CEO of MobileHelp. “But if you look at the product solutions and services we have had in the field for the past decade, we have been slowly paving the way toward this approach. It isn’t one we ventured into lightly.”

That said, he also highlights three best-practices as key drivers of the recent move, which can be implemented by tech companies considering the same business trajectory:

- Understanding consumer-facing markets
- Incorporating interoperability into products and services
- Embracing the role of the FDA.

To analyze, a deeper look at how MobileHelp has utilized each within the scope of its business strategy affords the opportunity to understand how best practices can be utilized across the spectrum of business development.

Understanding Consumer-facing Markets

“There are competitive challenges prone to consumer-facing businesses that business-to-business companies do not necessarily encounter,” said Mr. Flippo. “Many of the businesses in the healthcare space have not experienced the consumer demands related to research and development, product iteration, customer service or product fulfillment, for example.”

Mr. Flippo also points to the nuanced subtleties of working within the space: “One of the mistakes we have seen companies make is to overestimate consumers’ willingness for the use of technology in too many aspects of their lives.”

For these reasons, experts in the industry have observed the move into the healthcare space is best attained by companies already entrenched in the consumer space. Unity Stoakes, founder of StartUp Health, said, “The companies that are best placed to take advantage of these changes are those that really understand consumers.”

In looking at MobileHelp’s move into the healthcare space, it is evident that it was strongly founded on the company’s consumer-facing product solution – a mobile medical alert device and corresponding management portal/application.

“Many of the products and services proliferating in the healthcare space are ones we have been using for our customers for years,” said Jean Robichaud, CTO of MobileHelp. “Services such as consumer portals, sensors and wearable technology, wireless communication, real-time locating services and telehealth products are some of the most recent product explosions in the health IT space, and we have been providing those to our customers for almost a decade – so it makes sense that we would be able to extend those into the healthcare space.”

At the end of the day – it is patients who ultimately are guiding what does and does not move forward in medicine: In his book “The Creative Destruction of Medicine,” Eric Topol conveys how medicine is entering an age of democratization as power shifts from hospitals, doctors and other caregivers to patients, potentially leading to dramatic health care improvements.

This critical aspect is what will give companies who have an inherent understanding of the consumer psyche a leg up in the equation.

BECKER'S HEALTH IT CIO REVIEW

A recent article in **BECKER'S HEALTH IT CIO REVIEW** highlighted several of the latest **technological advancements in healthcare** in the past decade – the list includes several **products and services that MobileHelp has been incorporating for years:**



PORTAL TECHNOLOGY

Patients are increasingly becoming active players in their own healthcare, and portal technology is one tool helping them to do so. Portal technology allows physicians and patients to access medical records and interact online.



WIRELESS COMMUNICATION

This involves a transmission of recorded health information, such as x-rays, photos or pre-recorded videos, through a secure electronic communications channel to a healthcare provider. The provider then uses this information to evaluate the patient's condition.



SENSORS & WEARABLE TECHNOLOGY

This involves live video interaction between a patient or caregiver and a provider in real time. If an in-person encounter is unnecessary or impossible, a quick live video appointment can be a good substitution. Many RPM systems now integrate the use of video to augment clinical oversight and educational opportunities.



REAL-TIME LOCATING SERVICES

Another growing data monitoring tool, real-time locating services, are helping hospitals focus on efficiency and instantly identifying problem areas. Hospitals can implement tracking systems for instruments, devices and even clinical staff.



TELEHEALTH

Studies consistently show the benefit of telehealth, especially in rural settings that do not have access to the same resources metropolitan areas may have. A large-scale study published in CHEST Journal shows patients in an intensive care unit equipped with telehealth services were discharged from the ICU 20 percent more quickly and saw a 26 percent lower mortality rate than patients in a regular ICU.

Incorporating Interoperability

In so many respects, the confluence of technology and personal health are truly groundbreaking, and represent the threshold of human digitization. What not long ago might have been deemed science fiction is now commonplace: it is possible to remotely monitor every heartbeat while capturing (in real-time) vital signs such as blood pressure readings, body temperature, oxygen concentration in the blood, and activity levels.

And the capability exists to carry all that information in one place – on a phone. The Smartphone, with its wide array of devices all rolled into one (camera, video recorder, GPS, calculator, watch, voice recorder, photo album and library of books), is a marvel of telecomm convergence. Armed with apps, it can also accomplish multiple health and wellness functions – from blood pressure assessment to caloric

counter, manager and even work-out coach. Connected to a wireless network, a smartphone provides access to the Web and the world's knowledge. When this pocket-held device is capable of harnessing the information related to laboratory analyses, or acquiring ultrasound images of one's heart, abdomen or unborn baby, it will represent the next frontier of the digital revolution, getting to the most important but until now insulated domain – impacting our health.

And yet – without interoperability – or the ability of different information technology systems and software applications to communicate, exchange data, and use the information that has been exchanged – the personal storage of the information becomes considerably less valuable.

If an x-ray of a patient's broken arm cannot directly upload to his or her electronic health record (EHR) where their healthcare provider and a specialist can securely access it and discuss treatment, or the pharmacist can make pain medication recommendations based on the patient's personal history, there is a major breakdown in communication and the ability to impact health in the long-term.

And that breakdown exists at the various levels within the healthcare system – and outside of it, as the patient moves through the care continuum. According to Mark Dudman, senior vice president of healthcare company NaviNet, "As these [bigger] companies are moving in [to the health IT space], the biggest challenge remains that there are so many different parts of healthcare that are islands of expertise."

Connecting the silos of the healthcare system between the patient and their healthcare provider are what technology companies will need to consider as a primary factor before entering the healthcare space.

When MobileHelp created its new consumer-facing telehealth solution, MobileVitals™, the initial

goal was to provide patients with the ability to manage their own vital sign information, while also giving them the capability of sharing those data points with people they choose. But the company quickly realized they needed a way to make it possible for healthcare providers to use the solution as well, so they created a back-end infrastructure that allowed clinicians to incorporate MobileVitals™ in the same way they would with any telehealth platform.

The difference was in the long-term application: typically healthcare providers install a telehealth system in a patient's home for 30 to 90 days post discharge, after which the equipment is removed and goes back to be inventoried by the healthcare provider. With MobileVitals™, the system can be essentially "unhooked" from the clinician, and then monitored by the patient – who can opt to keep the equipment.

This represents a new level of interoperability, with the stream of information flowing first to a clinical source and then to a self-managed platform.

Embracing the FDA

For IT companies considering entry into the healthcare industry, working with the FDA can represent major challenges – but also major competitive advantages.

"When we were in the process of building our company, we recognized that the rigorous criteria the FDA used for testing and product implementation were guidelines we wanted to follow to ensure our product was as safe as possible – and then some," said Mr. Flippo. "It simply made good business sense to register with them."

This foresight has been instrumental to paving the way for their products and services into the healthcare space, as there are a variety of FDA regulations companies must follow when creating solutions specifically for healthcare organizations. For its devices to be FDA-cleared, and companies to be

FDA-registered, it requires following a very stringent set of guidelines in terms of quality control and testing for all the products they manufacture. MobileHelp was the first FDA-registered company in the mobile medical alert space. So very early on, the company pursued that line of credibility simply because it wanted to incorporate that level of testing and quality in its products.

Now moving into the healthcare space, the company has ideally positioned itself as being comfortable in working with the FDA already, and it knows what its standards for quality are. That makes MobileHelp a great fit for organizations that have a very high degree of emphasis on FDA approval.

“For tech companies considering moving into the healthcare space, we highly recommend embracing the work that needs to be done to become FDA-registered,” said Mr. Robichaud. “Though challenging, we have certainly found it to be worth the effort.”

Tech Companies: Healthcare Awaits!

Through the incorporation of standard best practices in the technology space, such as a deeper understanding of the consumer market, incorporating interoperability and embracing the FDA, tech companies can better position themselves to move into the challenging – yet rewarding – space that is the modern healthcare industry.



A Foundation for Expansion: How Building the Right Software Orchestrates Business Growth

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