

Mobile Apps that Really Add Value

There are over 318,000 healthcare apps in the UK¹ and on average, 200 apps developed daily. Pharma-specific apps present a significant opportunity to educate, improve patient outcomes, and reduce cost of patient care, but with only 4% of mHealth apps achieving more than 1 million downloads (a year)², a large proportion of them will ultimately fail.

Apps that succeed show us that getting it right requires three key elements: a clear ambition, a deep understanding of customer needs, and the ability to iterate content, quickly. Only by addressing these can an app ensure longstanding impact.

Defining the Ambition

Often app innovation is too focused on exciting or novel features, losing sight of the wider objective. Focusing on what a business wants to achieve helps to design the right product. This is the first step: to define the vision and identify specific measures for success. Is the ambition to increase brand usage? Drive disease awareness? Reduce disease burden? Improve company reputation? Or collate patient reported outcomes to inform clinical trials?

Take IBD patient support services, for example. These are in abundance and pharma companies are competing within a highly saturated market to add value to patients who are overwhelmed with choice. To add real value, apps must not be designed as a hygiene factor, rather focused on what they want to achieve.

In collaboration with Crohn's and Colitis UK, Takeda recently developed an app called 'In My Shoes', an immersive IBD experience. It has a clear ambition to help users (friends, family, and HCPs) better understand IBD. When the app was piloted among Takeda employees across Europe, Asia and the US, a study conducted by the University of Westminster found that those who used the app had as a result acquired greater disease understanding, could more easily connect/advocate for IBD patients and developed a greater belief that their role can positively impact others³.

Delivering on a clear unmet need

To be of value, an app must address a problem that is not yet served.

Take for example, the growing burden of diabetes on the NHS. This condition is of significant interest for mobile app solutions to empower patients to take an active role in their own health, yet many are not specific enough to truly add value.

The true needs of the intended user, therefore, must be uncovered. An example of this is Livongo's diabetes disease management app that analyses patient data so that HCPs can give real-time advice or alert patients when their blood sugar is dangerously low/high.

This is something that can't currently be tracked through diet management apps. Eli Lilly recently teamed up with Livongo to conduct US research, that revealed the app could reduce medical costs by \$88 per person, per month⁴. The app has therefore, identified a clear patient need from both a disease management and cost saving perspective.

Such opportunities must be uncovered to inform design and development decisions. Using specific frameworks for this ensures that innovation is purposeful, relevant and grounded in the customer voice.

Ensuring long-term engagement

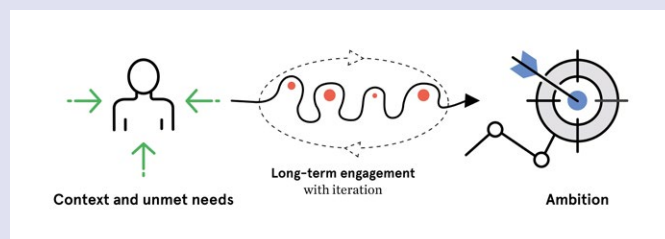
In 2017, research showed that 30% of pharma apps had never been updated by their developers⁵. Currently, many healthcare apps launch, remain static, and get lost in the ether.

Dedicated healthcare apps must be intuitive or risk low/no uptake. Constant customer feedback and distinct success criteria are imperative for a high-quality user experience. Without these, apps run the risk of quickly becoming irrelevant as user issues aren't resolved, and improvement opportunities are missed.

Pharmaceutical apps also need to ensure they have an ongoing reward system to drive repeat usage. The Babycentre pregnancy app, for example, updates content throughout the journey to ensure it is relevant to each stage, then switches to parenting advice once the child is born. Critically, it has an integrated reward system which gives parents vouchers and special offers throughout.

Long-term engagement requires ongoing investment and resource. It is vital that the feasibility of this continuous outlay is considered and built into the business strategy by integrating a feedback loop into the development cycle.

It is also important for pharma companies to have a holistic understanding of the patient journey so that they can develop apps that remain relevant.



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¹ Aitken M, Clancey B, Nass D. The Growing Value of Digital Health. New Jersey, USA: IQVIA Institute for Human Data Science; 2017. [2018-11-23]. Evidence and Impact on Human Health and the Healthcare System <https://www.iqvia.com/institute/reports/the-growing-value-of-digital-health> website. [Google Scholar] [Ref list]

² mHealth Economics – How mHealth App Publishers Are Monetizing Their Apps, Research to guidance, <https://research2guidance.com/product/mhealth-economics-how-mhealth-app-publishers-are-monetizing-their-apps/>

³ Front. Psychol., 12 November 2018 | <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02124>

⁴ <https://www.mobihealthnews.com/content/north-america/lilly-funded-study-shows-livongo-diabetes-program-can-save-employers-20-50>

⁵ <https://blog.prioridata.com/big-pharma-doesnt-understand-the-app-market>