

WHAT IS HEALTH 2.0?

Just what the doctor ordered?

HEALTH 2.0 IS THE USE OF WEB TECHNOLOGY TO DELIVER CONSUMER-DRIVEN HEALTH SERVICES. IT USES THE SAME WEB 2.0 TECHNOLOGY THAT DRIVES THE MOST SUCCESSFUL INTERNET SERVICES SUCH AS EBAY, FACEBOOK, EXPEDIA AND AMAZON.

Healthcare is one of the few markets where the power of the consumer is still heavily limited. The internet has transformed even the conservative finance market, providing access to a range of tools that enable comparison of services on offer. Consumers can see what others charge, examine the track record of the investment, or even read the customer service comments. There is currently no similar capability in healthcare. Patients cannot compare the services offered, but most significantly they do not have the information needed to make informed choices about the cost of their care.

Whilst the future may be uncertain, the strong drivers in this area mean that it will pay to be a leader rather than a follower. Consumers increasingly have the chance to vote with their feet with regards to healthcare, and leveraging new technologies to attract and retain consumers will be key. If patients and healthcare providers require an interface to online health databases from Google Health and Microsoft, for instance, those without such a capability will be left out in the cold.

New technologies also open the door to commercial opportunities in the direct recording of patient monitoring information, showing adherence data and giving targeted advice and feedback. People increasingly expect feedback, and social networking sites, such as Facebook, show that people are not afraid to post even the most personal details. Feedback is not only of interest to patients though. Companies can make the most of this high degree of connectivity to get direct feedback from customers and users on their products.

Revolution Health is a good example of an emerging Health 2.0 company. It provides an access point to health information on the web, and a community that encourages discussions between patients. Tools are also provided for tracking personal health parameters, such as blood pressure or weight. Finally, a user can search for, and rate, the performance of a doctor, health provider, drug, device, or other treatment. The system provides a single point where patients can gather medical information and act upon it to achieve the best results for themselves.

Other start-ups that provide services to patients include 'PatientsLikeMe', a community for those with chronic conditions, and 'Doublecheck MD', which provides a service to allow prescriptions to be checked for adverse drug interactions. Established industry is also getting involved. Microsoft has demonstrated its commitment to health with the acquisition of Medstory, a health search engine, and the development of HealthVault, an online personal medical records platform.

It is not only about patients and providers though; physicians can benefit too. Physicians can use these new technologies to increase the efficiency of consultations, particularly in the context of ever-greater recognition for reimbursement of virtual consultations.

Sermo is a free service, open only to qualified US physicians, which provides an online forum for asking and responding to medical questions. Sermo generates revenue by selling access to the knowledge generated within its community. In a recent deal, Pfizer have paid Sermo to gain access to anonymous data on



their pharmaceutical products from the community. This provides Pfizer with a direct line to the key consumers of their product.

These new health start-ups present a disruptive challenge to established medtech companies. A drug or device that has spent years in development could be dismissed by communities in days if the benefits are not clear to the patient or physician.

All of these changes are symptomatic of two wider moves in the major healthcare markets that are both closely intertwined with Health 2.0. The first is increasing consumerism and the rise of patient power. Empowered by the healthcare information available over the internet, patients are increasingly able to challenge their physician in an informed way and drive the healthcare decision-making process. This is moving the centre of gravity away from the physician and towards the patient. Giving patients the ability to develop and maintain a set of patient-specific records that can also provide tailored healthcare information will have an ever-greater appeal.

This strong consumerism thread is coupled with the second major trend in healthcare – a wider desire to keep a lid on healthcare costs. Improving patient lifestyles and treatment adherence are seen as key methods of achieving this without compromising patient care. The high degree of flexibility and connectivity afforded by Health 2.0 systems is central to extracting this potential, especially in chronic disease. This view may be gaining ground at the most influential levels. Even Hillary Clinton is on record as supporting the agenda of ‘The Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease’. This is a US coalition that is looking to improve

chronic disease prevention, diagnosis and management, as well as cut long-term healthcare costs, through a plan built around maximising the value of healthcare-related information technology.

What can I do to benefit from Health 2.0?

For any established medical technology company, engaging with a new market trend presents risks. Many companies have a long-established brand and reputation to consider. Also with long product lifecycles, the market into which your next medical product is launched could be very different from that of today.

For start-ups or established medtech companies, the opportunity to achieve significant market share lies in engaging with the online communities to understand the perception of your product, and in providing products and services that deliver value directly to the consumer.

Since this is an emerging area, preparation is the key to success in order to capitalise on what is about to become a rapidly changing market. A comprehensive assessment of the emerging trends and opportunities lays the foundations for the development of innovative product and business strategies.

Whilst people worry about the impact of our ageing population, the strongest drivers for change in health will come from the consumer generation. To succeed in this market you will have to engage with them before they start looking for something better on Ebay.

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