Telehealth Innovations

Adapting Your Product Roadmap for 2021 Telemedicine Trends

VICERT

Prologue:

Will telemedicine be one of the emerging drivers of product development in 2021? The short answer is no, because it's already arrived. As far back as 2019, consumers were excited about telemedicine—an American Well survey found that 66% of respondents were open to using it. This was before the pandemic.

Now, the AMA's VP of digital innovation estimates that up to 90% of physicians are using telemedicine in some form. McKinsey calls it a "quarter-trillion-dollar post-COVID reality", citing a 76% interest level among consumers. This means that healthcare technology companies are facing a huge opportunity—and it's one that's going to require rapid, pinpoint adjustments in product development to keep up with competition and customer demands.

But this is where the complexity comes in.

During the pandemic, telehealth was critical to slowing the spread of COVID-19. Now, innovative companies will need to take a close look at emerging and multifaceted factors to guide their product roadmaps. This will support a necessary refresh of product strategy in a way that both fosters agility and keeps you prepared for the future of telehealth in the far-term.

Pre-pandemic, telemedicine advancement was broadly stunted by regulations and administration—challenges like geographic restrictions, reimbursement questions, determining appropriate services and providers, and deciding who would be able to administer the services at all.

Well, COVID forced us to respond with temporary flexibilities. After getting a taste of how telemedicine works, industry stakeholders are pushing for more. In December of last year, the Connected Health Initiative and the American Telemedicine Association joined with other industry groups to send a letter to Congress, urging them to extend those flexibilities through the end of 2021.

While nothing's definite, this is a very solid indication of where we're headed. The industry sees long-term value in telemedicine and the heaviest hitters are willing to put their weight behind it.

Trend #1
Progress Toward
Permanent Reform

Product Strategy Response

Your current product roadmap was likely built in response to a telehealth ecosystem—one that looked very different than it does today, let alone in a post-COVID future.

There's white space out there, but you'll need to move before the dust settles. Now's the time to invest resources in not only identifying emerging opportunities in telehealth innovation but also refreshing your roadmap to eliminate any stale components and catch up with an emerging reality.

Related to the reform question is the challenge of legislation.

While COVID-19 accelerated telehealth adoption, many legal questions remained. For example, take state licensure for clinicians like nurses, doctors, mental health professionals, therapists, and social workers. If a nurse practitioner in Texas is working with a patient in California, do they need to be licensed in the state of the originating site? Historically, the answer has been "yes", but in the past, the relatively limited use of telemedicine has meant that this wasn't too pressing an issue.

Of course, COVID changed things. The federal government issued a limited waiver of HIPAA sanctions while multiple states loosened restrictions, issued guidance, and offered their own waivers, most of which simply allowed out-of-state providers to treat patients without being licensed. But these will eventually expire, leaving providers and patients to navigate shifting telemedicine barriers.

Trend #2
Emerging Legislation
Complicates Planning

Product Strategy Response

Even if the legislative future isn't certain, it's possible to prepare. Review your existing roadmap, asking how current offerings would be impacted by future changes, paying particular attention to the possibility of a return to previous standards. Will your products be flexible enough to meet customer needs, whether things tighten or continue on a path of openness? Will they keep you competitive if restrictions open up permanently?

Take the Expanded Telehealth Access Act as an example. The act ensures Medicare coverage for services provided by licensed professionals including audiologists, speech language pathologists, and occupational therapists. Is there an opportunity for you to build out new functionality to cover these disciplines? Would that functionality mean the potential to expand into new markets where these services are in demand? Can you ensure interoperability across systems and borders?

Telemedicine has traditionally been heavily provider-driven, but expect that to change quickly.

All of healthcare has been shifting under the pressure of patient consumerization, and you can expect telemedicine to follow suit. Pushed by public health needs, patients are more driven to protect themselves and the people around them—meaning they will actively request advancements in telehealth offerings, as well as an experience that mirrors what they're used to in sectors like retail and banking.

Trend #3
Patient Control Materializes
as Telemedicine Evolves

Product Strategy Response
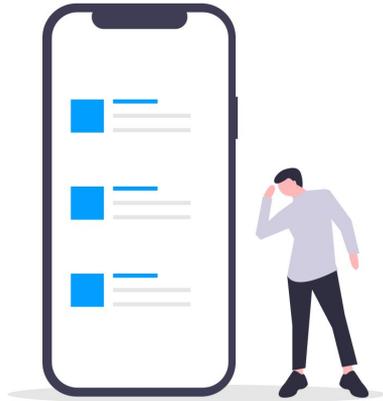
A review of your product roadmap will let you know whether your solutions are biased toward the provider-facing side or whether you've begun to acknowledge the reality of patient consumerization.

Are you missing opportunities to help providers collaborate with their patients? Do you have plans to build patient-facing solutions, or at the very least, functionality like patient-centered dashboards and mobile portals that empower patients and help providers support an improved patient experience? If the answer is no, it might be time to talk with your customers about what they see coming down the pipeline and what new pressures they're working with as a result of the pandemic.

Not too many years ago (think pre-Meaningful Use), EHRs were a lofty goal and a sign that an organization was technologically advanced. Those standards changed quickly though, pushing organizations to interoperability and beyond.

EHRs eventually became the bare minimum and you can expect telemedicine to do the same.

As telemedicine becomes the norm, expect to see forward-thinking companies push into value-add services like behavior tracking, asynchronous communication, and vitals monitoring.

Trend #4
Telemedicine
Becomes the Floor

Product Strategy Response

There's a good chance your competitors have already moved on this. Now is the time to evaluate what they're offering and decide whether it's worth responding to through your own roadmap.

Additionally, consider research to evaluate how customers are using your current products and what you can change to help them keep up with demands and leverage telemedicine to facilitate an end-to-end virtual care experience.
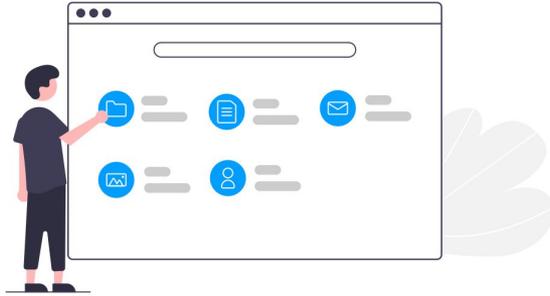
Getting Ready for Telehealth in 2021
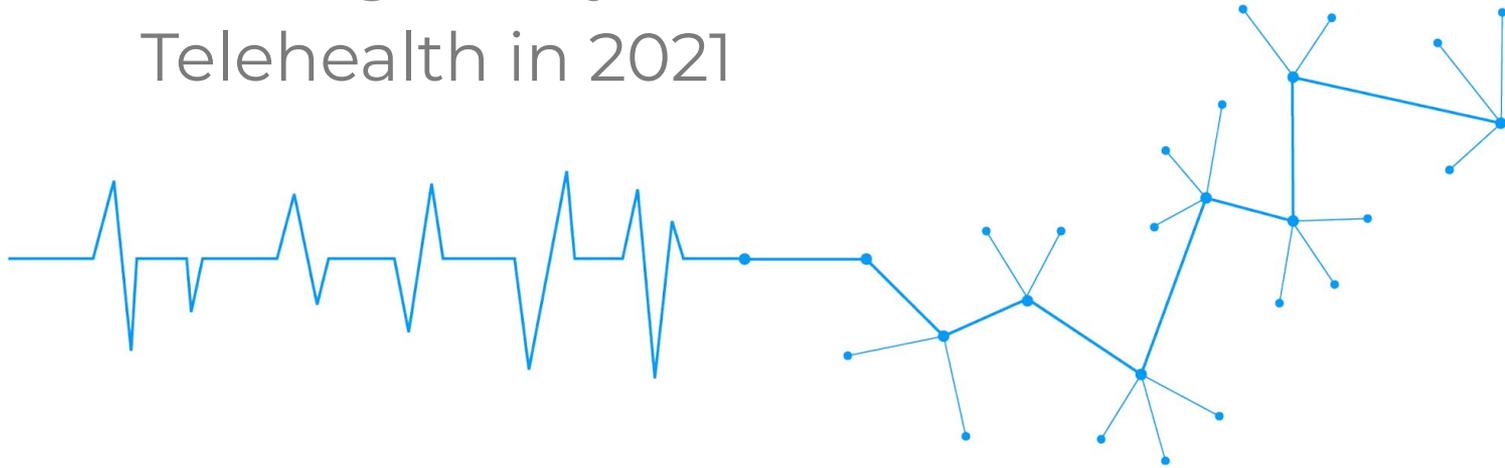
We've got a long way to go in the evolution of telehealth. As we move into 2021 work on prioritizing the following competencies.

1. Support of Customer Implementation

As we transition out of an active pandemic, customers will need support in identifying, integrating, and implementing telehealth in ways that meet patient and stakeholder needs.

2. Understanding of the Telehealth Landscape

Since changes will likely happen quickly, market insight will be invaluable. You can access this in multiple ways, ranging from formal market research, voice of the customer surveys, and partnerships with industry specialists.

Prioritize the Competencies
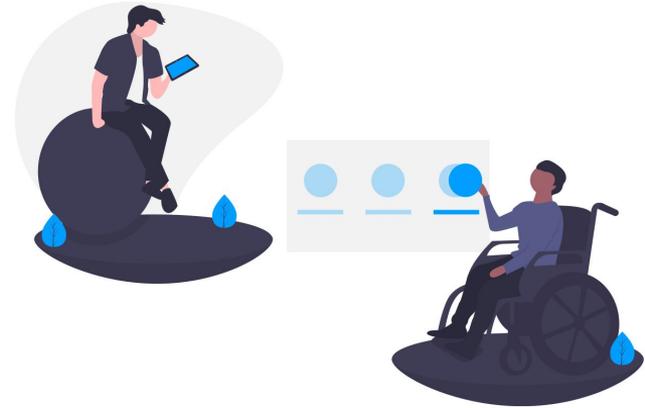
Prioritize the Competencies

3. Long-Term Agility and Sustainability

Product development that keeps up with telehealth will require rethinking your resources, especially in answering the build, buy, or partner question and determining whether it's smart or even possible to maintain the necessary talent internally.

4. Partner Ecosystem

Now is an ideal time to review partner relationships and adjust them to optimize your product development strategy. Keep in mind that a fast-moving space like telemedicine will require leveraging partnerships with experts who've built deep specialization in the healthcare industry.

For example, we stay up-to-date on state telehealth laws and reimbursement policies when building solutions (like a Virtual Compliance Manager) so our clients have more room to focus on their core competencies.

Your decisions in the coming months will lay the foundation of your future outcomes in telehealth. To help you get off to your best start, we'd like to offer this blueprint for telehealth and remote patient monitoring product development for your review.

Get Blueprint
for Telehealth and RPM
Product Development
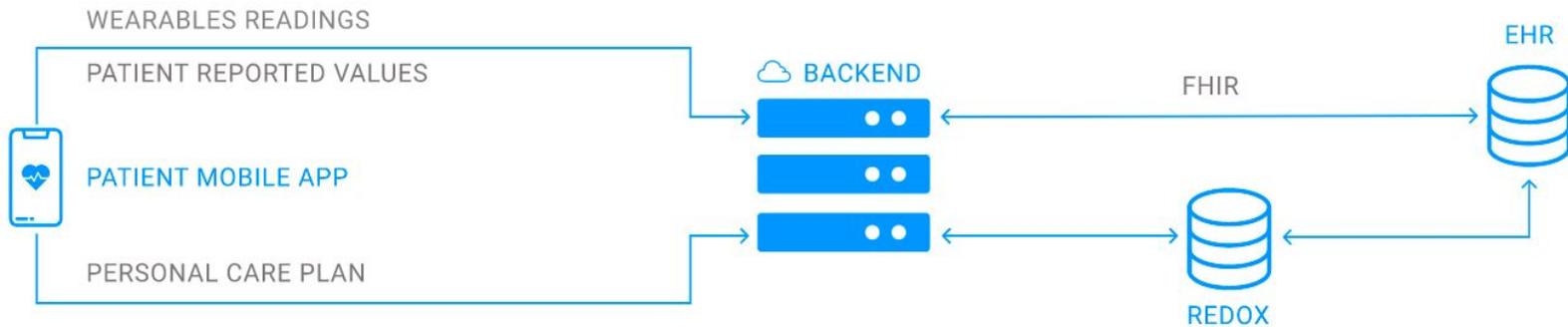
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