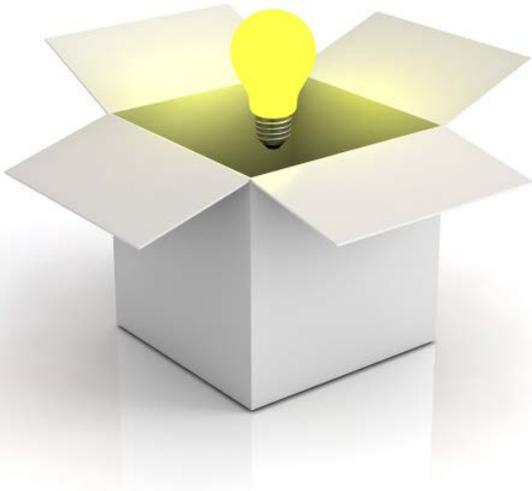


NEW INNOVATIONS



How to Make Great Mental Health Apps

JAY OSTROWSKI

Do you have a great idea for a mental health or therapy App? Do you want to create a great looking, user friendly App that consistently works across all major platforms and truly transform the lives of users?

Me too.

→ It seems like Apps are the new “books” in mental health these days. Just about everyone has a great idea about publishing one. But, like books, only a few become successful. So, here are some ideas to help you get started in creating a great mental health App and avoid some known problems along the way.

1 You CAN Build A Great Mental Health App.

There’s a growing market need for mental health Apps as the world is becoming more technologically mobile and more consumers worldwide are seeking mental health

care online. The Department of Defense and the Veterans Association have created some great mental health Apps and so can you. If you truly believe that your App idea will create positive change, don’t be deterred by the work involved. If it was easy, everyone would be doing it. Many software tools are on the market and many experts are at your disposal. Reach out to others who have the skills and experience you need to create a great work. There is method behind the “magic,” so learn from those who have gone before you to make a great therapy App.

2 Trash Talking Apps.

The last thing you want to do is spend a lot of time, money and energy on an unused or un-purchased app. It kills the spirit. In the last month we found more than 600 mental health related Apps in the iTunes and Android stores alone. Most have few stars and very few downloads. The majority of them are garbage, and that is being generous. Like most mental health or self-help books, the author has competency in one area and a lack of awareness in other areas that make a book, or an App, marketable or successful. So, invest your time and expertise wisely by counting the cost of creating a great counseling or therapy App. Prepare to go all the way with your idea before you start.

3 Don't Trust Your Mother.

Friends and family fall into the category of "Fan Club" rather than target buyer market (I

hope). Clearly identify the felt needs or use cases of the clients or user groups you hope will buy your App. See if your app idea already exists by reviewing a list of all the major mental health Apps at www.telementalhealthcomparisons.com/apps (which includes the better Apps of the bunch we researched). If your App idea already exists, consider how you can significantly improve upon an existing App or outsell it through sales and marketing efforts (more on that later). If this is a journaling App, for instance, find ways to make yours uniquely different by adding a certain protocol or a certain set of questions or functions that make journaling easier or more of a pleasure than other journaling Apps. Before you start making a mental health App, make sure that your App idea is truly appealing to your target market.

4 Build A Bad App, a Great Team, or Both.

One of the biggest mistakes

of mental health App makers is creating the App alone. This usually leads to either failure to launch or a lousy app that never sells. It creates heartache, it's expensive and it harms your credibility. When creating an App, it is helpful to have a team with different competencies that rely on and respect each other. A healthy tension among design, programming and therapy expertise will guide you to create great looking, user friendly Apps that consistently work across all major platforms (both now and in platform updates) and truly transform the lives of users. Consider your strengths and collaborate with those better than you in the other areas.

"User Experience," for instance, is actually a science and an art that few do well. Yet, it is critical for success in App creation. Programming bugs, crashes, failure to update and poor functionality will kill your App in the marketplace within days. You can contract with talent or allow them to share in the proposed revenue. But

decide who will own the rights to the App and make a written agreement on the limitations of use before you begin. It may be worth giving up some rights or profit to ensure your success.

5 Avoid Hidden Costs in App Development.

Maintenance is the hidden cost of App development. It is very expensive to retrofit functions and the expense grows with each platform update. Think of

the future functions and needs of the App and make plans to meet those needs. It will cause you to make some sacrifices up front, but it will be worth it in the long run. Apps don't sustain themselves and they don't adapt to new IOS or Android updates on their own. Consider the features you will want in the future and build in the options for those capabilities from the start.

Your Apps Retirement Plan.

Apps are more like children than books. Neglecting the future needs of your App will cost you. They need feeding and caring to be successful. So, make a business plan for your App (most therapists cringe when they hear that sentence). In essence, a business plan is a treatment plan and relapse prevention plan for your App (plus a few other items).



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Like retirement planning, estimating and planning for the needs of your App will help you be successful for the long haul. Do some research and estimate costs and revenue based on similar Apps that are in the market. Is the venture worth the likely costs? After the first year, if you don't update your design, content or functionality, you'll be lucky to get your own mother to buy your "old" App. So, make a plan for when you will update the design and the content so that your App stays fresh and relevant to consumers. Consider when your App will be ready to "retire" or require a makeover.

6 Use Stranger Danger to Your Advantage.

You would be amazed at how many Apps have been created without asking the target audience to give feedback on the usability of their App. It is easy to fall in love with your App idea and ignore the reality of consumer sentiment. But like most affairs, reality comes

crashing in and blows the fantasy. Avoid this tunnel vision by asking strangers in your target market to be brutally honest with your idea and your beta version before you launch your App in the marketplace. So, invest in User Testing. Your audience will help you see your blind spots and show you refinements that will make your App a success.

7 Restarting.

Some of us have to learn the hard way. If you have already made these mistakes, you are not alone. Forgive yourself and call it experience. Then humble yourself and pick a great team. Learn from your mistakes and start again. Consumers still need your help.

Even with the plethora of "Create your own App" software programs, creating and selling

JAY OSTROWSKI

is a Telemental health and marketing innovator with www.BehavioralHealthInnovation.com. BHI created www.telementalhealthcomparisons.com to help professionals choose technology. He lives in Charlotte, NC, USA.

an App is much more difficult than it first appears. For all of you fellow Do-It-Yourselfers out there, consider counting the cost of your time and your potential mistakes before taking on this project. For the tenacious few who are going forward to make great Apps, stick with it. There's a lot of room for improvement in self-help and therapy Apps domain. It is difficult but rewarding work with a global reach. So, let's make some Apps that will change the world. ■