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Augmenting healthcare

Wai Mun LIM

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Augmenting *Healthcare*

Lim Wai Mun of Doctor Anywhere weighs in the importance of customer education and persistence when dealing with a conservative market.

It would take someone like Lim Wai Mun to establish Doctor Anywhere, an integrated tele-healthcare service that connects consumers to healthcare professionals through mobile video consultations. Steadfast in ambition and eloquent in purpose, Wai Mun combines entrepreneurial grit and corporate insight to connect with his many stakeholders, from healthcare providers and investors to team members and end consumers.

The business did not, however, have an easy start. Says Wai Mun, "I remember when we first tried to talk to doctors. I had so many doors slammed in my face that I can't remember how many [there were] already. Doctors were usually skeptical and thought that Doctor Anywhere would never work in Singapore because clinics are well penetrated in the housing estates."

Things have changed radically since. In 2018, Doctor Anywhere experienced tremendous user growth, amassing more than 50,000 active users mostly from word-of-mouth recommendations. Doctor Anywhere is now part of the Ministry of Health's Licensing Experimentation and Adaptation Programme (LEAP) and also harbours hopes of venturing beyond Singapore — truly bringing doctors, of all specialties, anywhere.

It is very flat and it's meant to be that way. We want to make sure we maintain the characteristics of a startup, where we minimise red tape and everyone stays hungry. That's why we never stop anyone from giving new ideas in meetings. As cliché as it may sound, we believe a good idea can come from anybody.

I was trained as a mechanical engineer, started work as a real estate investor, and then went on to manage investments in energy, oil, and gas. I think the beauty of being an outsider in the industry is seeing

Wai Mun, what motivated you to start Doctor Anywhere?

When I was still working with Temasek Holdings, I signed up for a charity programme where I went door to door distributing lunch boxes in older estates. I saw there were people unable to get out of their houses to seek basic medical assistance. That was when I thought I should come up with something to help them access doctors, so this actually began as a social cause. Over time, though, I realised Doctor Anywhere would be more sustainable if we had a commercial twist.

Doctor Anywhere is about bringing healthcare to you. We are not just selling an app which we throw out there; we are selling a care service.

What do you mean by that?

There are other healthcare applications that allow you to talk to robot doctors — these serve the purpose of educating the consumer. But we're selling a healthcare service, so we need to have that human touch. We are only able to gain trust by engaging with people.

That's why we have a dedicated care team that follows up with a call three days after users use our service. When we make that call, we don't ask if they had any problems with the service; we ask how they're presently feeling. Asking how they're feeling is caring, but asking if they're satisfied with our service is a hidden agenda of asking for feedback on our system.

In healthcare, we need to listen to our users carefully because healthcare is not something we can radically disrupt. We have to understand what a user is experiencing today, and then we slowly augment it and change user behavior. That's why I tell people that healthcare is a long game.

Healthcare services also have to be robust and can't rely on a single product. It's different from traditional startups in other sectors where they try to do only one thing well. When we began, we had users asking us if we could do more on "healthcare" as "medical" alone is more reactive. When you fall sick, you see a doctor. But general healthcare involves creating a link between your primary healthcare, your allied healthcare, and your specialist. So that's why we launched more verticals to create a better ecosystem for users.
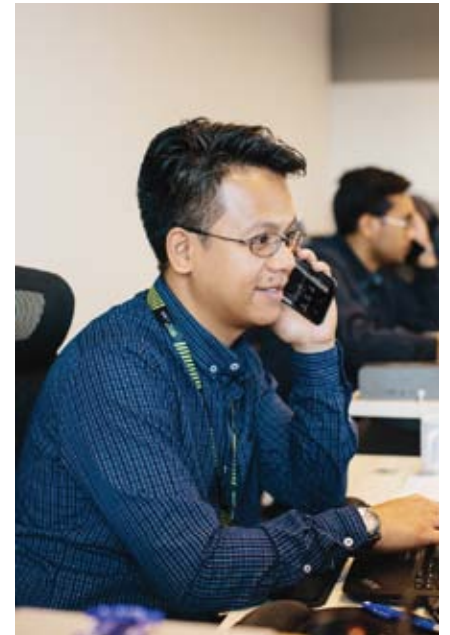
things from a fresh perspective and thinking of wacky ideas that could potentially change the way things are done. When we started, a lot of people here didn't have a medical background. More recently, we started hiring people who have more experience in healthcare, and it's been interesting to see how the team interacts. I always say that the people with little experience in the sector are idealists who represent the consumer, while people who have been working in the sector could be influenced by what they've been experiencing on a day-to-day basis, so they represent the current system. The question is: how do we marry the two perspectives so we can begin changing behaviour?

And how are you doing that?

Singaporean healthcare providers and end consumers here are still very conservative. We know this because we've been marketing our services in various parts of Asia, and Singapore consumers have been very slow in adopting changes.

What we try to do is offer the education and confidence to try our service. This has a lot of do with marketing and consumer touchpoints. For example, we have come up with informative and interesting blog articles, which in a way, help to educate users. These articles aren't just about healthtech too; they can also be about health tips.

What's in store for Doctor Anywhere?

We really want to see how we can use technology to come up with something that is more predictive. You've probably heard about mass production, but what about mass personalisation? All of us have different healthcare needs. How can we use technology to make sure that we provide people with unique treatment plans in a more efficient way? How can we bring personalised healthcare to you more quickly? I think that will be key to unlocking a more successful augmented healthcare system.

Finally, we don't just want to be in Singapore. People always say that Singapore is a very small market and should only be a springboard to other markets, but I think otherwise. Singapore is a very sophisticated but conservative market. If you are able to solve the challenges the Singapore market gives you, you're able to go anywhere else in the world, or at least, anywhere in Asia. That's how I see it.

> *"We are not just selling an app which we throw out there; we are selling a care service."*