



How UX is keeping healthcare companies sane during the technology gold-rush

As healthcare providers scramble to adopt digital tech to rapidly adapt to the pandemic, good UX design is fundamental to ensure applications and interfaces are easy to use and add value.

The Covid-19 pandemic forced companies in every industry to accelerate their processes of digital transformation. For some, even, to start this process, moving from analog to digital.

Perhaps no industry was put under more pressure than that of healthcare.

With hospitals and clinics in crisis mode, collapsing under the volume of critical patients being wheeled into ICU units, people were advised to stay at home and switch to online appointments for non-Covid-related illnesses.

Before the pandemic, telemedicine was a slowly emerging trend. But the user experience (UX) was often rudimentary, having never been really put to the test. Until 2020.

"Not only did companies have to adapt but there was a rapid change in mindset in terms of the general public, who became open to using telemedicine", said Santiago Tribbiani, UX director at Making Sense.

Where to invest?

Healthcare centers focused their initial investments on the first point of contact with the patient – in communication.

There was a rush to start using free and paid video call software like Zoom, with more customized versions later appearing.

Optimizing scheduling and calendar interfaces and keeping Covid-19-related information up to date was a priority in order to be able to keep up with the spike in demand for online interactions.

Artificial intelligence tools like chatbots became the norm for answering frequently asked questions and organizing appointments.

Another area of investment seen in the last year is in wearables for patient self-care. Sales of fitness and sleep tracking devices like Fitbit, Apple Watch, and Oura Ring soared.

According to a 2019 study by Pew Research, 21% of US consumers regularly use smartwatches and fitness trackers. Meanwhile, new types of smart devices like the Oura Ring sleep tracker are gaining popularity.

Data and more data

If investment in digital transformation was the first, immediate, impact of the pandemic, the second phase was to start trying to process, analyze and understand the tsunami of data regarding patient behavior, demographics, and needs that were flowing in from online interactions and devices. More data means greater challenges but also new opportunities to customize services.

"The opportunities in the digital world are far greater than in the physical world. Many companies are working in the areas of business intelligence to offer tailor-made services that suit patients' needs, context, and behavior," said Tribbiani.

According to Hernán Fino, head of UX, physical contact with a patient still has advantages over a virtual meeting. The challenge that lies ahead is to be able to narrow that gap.

Medical professionals will have to learn to handle digital tools in a way that allows them to observe patients accurately and avoid misdiagnosis.

A recent study showed that 77% of customers are going online to book medical appointments.

Also, governments had to relax state bureaucracy on requiring original, paper, versions of prescriptions, and to allow the use of virtual ones," he added.

A lot of the investment in digital systems had to be done in a rush, which meant that there was a lot of trial and error in systems at the outset.

Startups appeared out of the woodwork, rapidly adapting to the circumstances and inventing new functionalities.

According to Tribbiani, in the early days of the pandemic, a lot of applications went on the market in their beta versions.

"The concept of done is better than perfect became acceptable in this highly competitive market," he said.

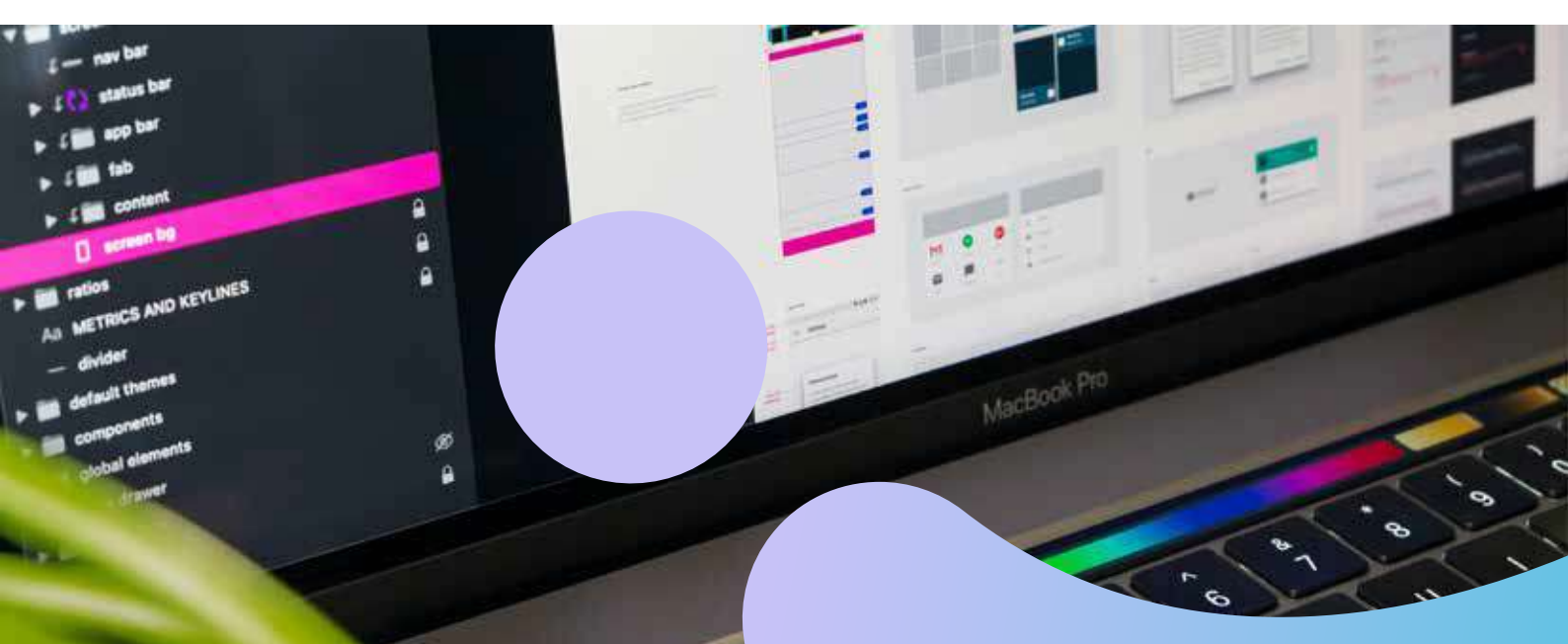


"There are many multimedia formats of video and audio that medical professionals could take advantage of in their interactions with patients," said Fino.

"And this goes beyond the context of the pandemic but is about leveraging information to provide services based on data."

Often very sophisticated technology is not required for these sessions, simply video, which gives physicians the ability to review the content later and maybe detect certain behavioral trends that might have been missed. The fact that the sessions are recorded in the patient's own home may also result in other types of behaviors.

"The online context is more direct and medical professionals are learning new types of analytical work that can be applied in different situations," Fino said.



A new user experience?

What changes are occurring in the patient user experience (UX) in this new emerging telemedicine scenario?

According to Tribbiani, it's not really about reinventing the wheel. Best practices in UX are constant across industries and in some ways are agnostic to circumstances like a pandemic.

"The most important thing is that information is reliable, clear, understandable, and delivered in a way that is digestible for the average user as well as all age groups and social classes," he said.

The executive adds that the important thing to keep in mind with UX design is that it does not overload the user with information but keeps a clear, balanced, and open communication channel that is predictable and generates trust.

However, one has to keep in mind that users access platforms from a variety of devices, both mobile and fixed, meaning that good integration is essential to ensure a seamless experience.

Where good UX is fundamental is during the times we are currently experiencing, when innovation and technologies are coming out at light speed and often not fully tested, meaning errors are inevitable.

"UX helps us understand how users are utilizing these new technological solutions, what value they provide, to measure that and quickly learn how to improve the experience," said Tribbiani.

UX is a discipline that strongly connects the idea and solution with the market reality. It provides valuable insights into what is happening with the user when they use the solution and helps point us in the direction we should be going in to add more value.

"UX helps to humanize insights," adds Fino. "The role of UX is to add value and reduce the gap between the technology and the people."

"Applications should not be cold, complex to use, and contain over-technical language. They should be clear, trustworthy, and encourage greater adoption."

The role of technology

According to Tribbiani, technological solutions are facilitators of interaction between human beings. Even Zoom was not invented with the idea of attending to patients or providing classes in mind. But it has become a facilitator. And now, many custom-made solutions, adapted to the circumstances, are starting to appear.

Some 47% of healthcare organizations are already using patient data predictive analytics and 57% of healthcare companies think predictive analytics will save them 25% per year, according to a study by Society of Actuaries.

"Technology plays a fundamental role in helping us provide rapid answers to urgent situations. Human beings don't like surprises. They like predictability and when something like a pandemic appears out of nowhere, technology is the best tool to help us adapt rapidly," he said.

Recently, Making Sense participated in a hackathon, in Silicon Valley, in which they had to create an application, in three days, that would encourage people to get inoculated in areas of the US where there is a lot of skepticism about vaccines.

One of the ideas that emerged from the hackathon was for an app that uses gamification methods where people can build up points from convincing family members and friends to get their Covid shot. They can then cash in those points for entertainment events and merchandising later.

"By working together this idea emerged in three days. This shows that technology plays a fundamental role in providing rapid solutions to the challenges that are constantly appearing on our horizon," Tribbiani said.

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