3 Things Physician Founders Must Know Before Launching a Product Transcript

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The hidden trend among physician founders

Welcome to the Startup Physicians podcast, where we explore how doctors lead healthcare innovation. Please like and follow our show to join our community of physicians contributing to meaningful change.

Over the past couple of months, I've talked with dozens of physicians who are building something. There is a trend that I keep seeing, and I think you need to know about it. These are doctors who have spent six months, sometimes five or six figures of their own money developing a product, and they feel ready to launch. When I ask them a question, "Who is the buyer?" the answer keeps coming back the same. They're not exactly sure.

Three things to know before you fall in love with your product

They may have a assumption of who's going to buy it, but they have not had any stakeholder conversations. It's a pattern. If you are a visionary with a prototype already in motion, because product really excites us as visionary, this episode is your protection. Last episode, I told you all about visionaries and let you see yourself in that setting, and today I'm going to give you three things to know before you fall in love with your product.

Build it

Why building first is still the right instinct, why a product without a buyer is a hypothesis, and why the product is just one small component of a successful venture. I've sat on both sides of this as a founder who built a company on paper before we built anything else, and as an advisor watching brilliant doctors get crushed by conversations they had too late. By the end, you're going to know the difference between building a product and building a business, and exactly which conversations to have before you spend another dollar. Number one, do build it. That instinct is right. You've all heard stories about startups that started on the back of a napkin with a sketch, a a vision trapped in your head can't recruit anyone. So, get it onto paper or onto a screen so that other people can finally see what you see.

Everything gets easier from there. And this is the best moment in history to be a visionary who builds. AI and vibe coding put software creation at our fingertips. And what used to take a fully funded engineering team 6 months can now be done by vibe coding in just a weekend. You should sketch it, build the mock-up, make the MVP.

A product without a buyer is a hypothesis

If you recognized yourself in the last episode, this is your lane. I will never tell you to slow down in it. You should always be creating. Number two thing to know, a product without a buyer is a hypothesis. So the trend across dozens of conversations, many founders, they're deep into creating a product and they are convinced they're ready to launch. And there is a little bit of hubris that I see and I say that with love because I understand it from the inside. It sounds like people who say, "I have a product, I'm already planning my launch, I'm past the basics, I think I'm pretty far." And underneath the same picture keeps emerging. They haven't identified their buyer, they don't have stakeholder conversations, they have not built a financial model. It's all being guided by their point of view and their vision. And why it's invisible from the inside, they live the problem every day. And their conviction is probably spot-on, but conviction from one vantage point is a hypothesis, not a business case. And the market does not buy hypotheses. When they finally do have conversations and they find out like, "Oh my gosh, there's all these other companies who have tried this or here's all these reason it's failed or here's this trusted expert in the field who just met with me after I spent 6 months making this and they said this is never going to work.

Identify the buyer, not just the user

" Or the person you're imagining as the buyer legitimately does not think this is a problem that they would pay to

solve. And the problem is so obvious to you, but not to the person who thought was going to buy it. So part one, what you need to do. You need to identify the buyer, not just the user. Maybe the product that you're envisioning patients need it and clinicians love it and you you really need to win over all the stakeholders. Maybe it's something that a hospital CFO would buy. You have to talk to a hospital CFO. You can't just talk to the user of the product.

Healthcare is really unique in that there ends up being all these stakeholders and sometimes the people who get the service are not the ones paying for it. So, part two, you have to have stakeholder conversations that sting on purpose. This is actually how we compress time. I would so much rather you find out in month one all the reasons why your idea is not going to work than find out in month six. What do you use today to solve this? Would you pay for this? Out of what budget?

Have stakeholder conversations that sting

Who else has to say yes before you could buy this? What almost made you buy the last thing like this and then why didn't you? You know, again, these are discovery conversations. You start with discovery, you move to validation, you do all that before you pitch. As opposed to I made a product, I put my head down for six months, I put money into it and now I'm going to pitch it and shoot, nobody likes it. You want to do discovery, you want to do validation. No with a reason attached is the cheapest education you will ever get as a founder. You have to capture that and then you have all these conversations, you synthesize them, you identify which ones you're seeing across the board and which ones are kind of outliers and maybe you should take them with a grain of salt and then you use that to iterate and evolve your model.

So, my proof point, when we built my first company on paper before we built anything else, my co-founder turned my vision into a spreadsheet, which became our financial model. We pitched it to payers. They told us everything wrong with it and we changed it. We changed it almost every day for eight months.

Discovery before validation before pitching

And we talked to stakeholders and payers trying to get feedback and then trying to get people to buy it for months. And we changed it constantly. And by the time we built the real thing, the market had already stress tested it. The discovery process is the product development.

You have to stay flexible. So your vision holds, but the details bend. So you keep that notebook, your notebook of thousands of ideas of how things fit together and how it could grow and where it could pivot. The discipline is never take one idea into this deep expensive development without constant feedback.

So the third thing to know, a product is one small component of a venture.

How feedback shapes a better product

One of the things I teach in the incubator is the 10 functional departments of a venture. And we're constantly giving prompts and skills and tools and things for each department cuz at the beginning you're all of them. But the product, which we talk a lot about that design thinking, the divergent and convergent on coming up with the problem and then with the solution, all the stuff about product development and design thinking sits inside a much larger set of questions about who's the buyer, what do stakeholders say, what does the market already know that you don't, do the economics work? Who's on this team? Uh who operates this thing when it grows past the design phase?

A product is only one part of a successful venture

You have the vision, you have to run with it, and you're great at being creative and developing things. But you need the right people, the right resources, a real framework around you. The venture needs to become more than just something you built by yourself. If you want to make something really impactful and scalable, there are about nine other departments you need to be giving attention to or bringing someone in to help you to get the business case

right and not just focus on product. Here are the three things one more time.

Definitely keep focusing on product if you're a visionary. Build it because getting the vision out of your head is the right first move. A product without a buyer is a hypothesis. So, find the person who signs the actual contract and have the conversations that are going to sting. We have to develop thick skin to learn and grow. And product is only one small component of a venture. The rest is the finances, the legal, the business case, creating the evidence, the economics plan, the team, and eventually the operators.

And remember the trend from the start of this episode. Months of work, real money spent, no stakeholder conversations, and no business model. That order of operations is what crushes these founders, not their talent and not their ideas. So, if you want a framework for this instead of learning it the expensive way, we did build one. It's called the concept pitch builder.

The three biggest takeaways

I love it because it treats the problem, the solution, and the product as one piece in an eight-phase assessment. The other seven phases are the questions that most doctors don't yet know that they need to answer. Walking through them will show you exactly where your concept stands.

Keep creating. I mean that. The world needs what you can see, and it also needs you to find out who's buying. Join our email list and check us out at startupphysicians.com and I'll see you next time. Thanks for listening to the Startup Physicians Podcast. This community was built for doctors who want to contribute to the future of healthcare.

We offer support for physicians who are ready to make the next step towards building the career they've dreamed of. Visit startupphysicians.com to learn more.

The Concept Pitch Builder framework

And if this episode resonated with you, share it with another friend who needs to hear it. Let's change the future of healthcare together.