

Digital health: 3 steps to make business case and move ahead

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Looking to implement a new technology in your practice or health care organization but not sure where to start?

The AMA created a Digital Health Implementation Playbook to serve as a thorough guide on the key steps, best practices and resources to help physicians and their practices integrate technology efficiently and effectively. The Playbook's first six steps can be used to implement any digital health solution while the second six steps focus on adopting a specific digital health solution. Download the Playbook now.

The 12-step Playbook is based on input and lessons learned from more than 80 physicians, care team members, health care administrators, patients and digital health thought leaders nationwide.

The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) recently recognized the value of the AMA Digital Health Implementation Playbook by including it in its own Health IT Playbook, which is a searchable "tool for administrators, physician practice owners, clinicians and practitioners, practice staff and anyone else who wants to leverage health IT." The addition of the Digital Health Playbook continues ONC's recognition of AMA-developed tools, such as AMA STEPS Forward™ modules on EHRs, as important resources for physicians.

The AMA Playbook includes firsthand stories from practice leaders who have been through the process and lays out the most efficient path to implementation of this technology. Once you have defined your organization's need, formed teams based on who should be involved and defined what you are setting out to successfully achieve, it's time to evaluate your vendor options, make the case for the technology internally and get the right contract signed.

Here's how to tackle those next business steps and avoid three potential missteps along the way.

Your vendor as your advocate

When considering vendors, think about a long-term partner and not just someone who will execute a transaction. This ensures you will have support from start to finish during the implementation process and beyond, giving you a partner who is as motivated as you are for a successful outcome.

Once you have this mindset, create a short list of quality vendors by talking to leaders at organizations or practices similar to yours, attending health care technology conferences to find potential vendors or leveraging the AMA Physician Innovation Network to connect with one of more than 400 companies.

Develop a request for proposal (RFP) that clearly outlines your goals to vendors that closely align to your goals and review their responses with key representatives from your organization's or practice's core and advisory teams that were created earlier in this process. You also should:

- | Ask for case studies and referrals—don't just rely on sales pitches.
- | Schedule live vendor demonstrations.
- | Evaluate vendors across six critical factors: business, information technology, security, usability, customer service, clinical validation.
- | Narrow your options to one or two preferred vendors to include in your pitch to leadership.

Plan your presentation to decision-makers

You need to make a persuasive case to your organization to ensure you get valuable input to improve your program, get the funding you need and have others who are enthusiastic about the new technology so they can champion the success of the program throughout the practice.

Here are some helpful tips to get started:

- | Clearly define what resources will be needed, including funding, additional staff and bandwidth, political support, official approval and more.
- | Estimate the value the solution will contribute to the organization if goals are achieved.
- | Align your implementation with organizational objectives and goals to justify why this is a priority.
- | Research coding and payment available for the chosen digital health solution.
- | Compile all necessary information in a proposal to key decision-makers to get approval and resources for the project.

Consider contract's full detail

Think of the contract as a “path to commitment,” which includes financial considerations as well as specifics for how you will work with the vendor going forward. This is legal protection for you and your vendor. Once you have approval to proceed with contracting, consider adding these in the legal document:

- | Negotiated terms such as financial investment, customer support, additional services, upgrade schedule and success metrics.
- | Clear and measurable definitions of success.
- | Outlined plan of how to scale the program and alignment on any relevant contingency plans.

Learn more about how the AMA's digital health leadership is ensuring the physician perspective is represented in the design, implementation and evaluation of new technologies.