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A Product Manager's Guide to Healthcare Data Integrations

Here's what you need to know when building your provider data platform to power care decisions

As a product manager working at a digital health company looking to start up or scale, you might be wondering about whether to build or buy data integrations to power your platform. Ribbon Health has partnered with many product teams contemplating these decisions, allowing us to derive four critical steps for evaluating data integrations like ours.

Four key steps when determining whether to build vs. buy data:

1. Evaluate your product roadmap and technical team's bandwidth

Care navigation teams often bear the burden of stringing together incomplete provider data from multiple systems, spending countless hours and mindshare focused on finding the best referral for a patient. On average, it takes three to four weeks[1] for full-time software developers to build a new pipeline of provider data and three to six months to get that infrastructure off the ground. For example, if company goals are focused on navigating patients to the proper care, technical teams can spend countless hours acquiring, interpreting, and maintaining data on providers and networks. If there are gaps in that data, care navigation teams may spend extra time and resources stringing together incomplete information, which inevitably will affect the patient's experience. As a product manager, there are two primary

questions you should ask yourself. One, can your technical team tackle this data problem? And two, should they? What else would they be working on if not this? Even if your team has the bandwidth to dig into this time-consuming groundwork, it could be challenging to get your hands on the most comprehensive and accurate data available. Additionally, you want them to focus on building a reliable solution that will differentiate your platform from the competition and ultimately offer the most value to your end-users. Purchasing an off-the-shelf solution can provide you with comprehensive and validated data that would save your team tons of time, and allow them to focus on how to best leverage that data for patient-centric solutions.

2. Assess potential partners, including their data distribution models

When looking for potential data partners, it's essential to evaluate the various ways data can be distributed so you can select a model that meets your product goals and optimizes your company's workflows. Third-party data providers can distribute their data in various formats, including APIs, flat files, and user interfaces (UI). APIs allow for faster integration, customizability, and real-time updates. Flat files may require less technical bandwidth but risk becoming stale and outdated, causing a fragmented patient experience. Suppose your company lacks technical resources to distribute the data coming from the API. In that case, you might want to consider going with a partner with a UI option that will allow you to provide this data to your end-users seamlessly.

3. Educate yourself on data accuracy and quality

Currently, more than half of the data on medical providers is incorrect[2]. Better infrastructure powered by relevant data is necessary for next-generation healthcare solutions. It's far from simple to ensure that a patient sees a doctor that is in-network, high quality, and cost-effective. Outdated, disaggregated, and limited data prevent patients from finding the proper care, and it takes a village to drive up the accuracy and quality of healthcare data across the board. While no solution out there today will ever be 100% accurate at any point in time, as a product manager, it's your responsibility to educate yourself on what is possible with various data partners. Ask what types of inputs they use in their own data pipeline, what scalable methods they use to verify their data, and if they are taking advantage of network effects from their broader customer base. Additionally, if you already have access to an in-house solution, spend the time to benchmark your own accuracy and quality before assessing others. Doing so can help you understand where data accuracy gaps may exist, and what kind of vendor would provide the highest ROI. What would success look like if you chose to integrate with a third-party solution? How does that data partner plan to improve their own accuracy and quality

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over time? When deciding on whether to buy vs. build, take the necessary time to assess your current situation and needs to ensure you ask the right questions.

4. Explore the two "c"s: customization and customer support

Partnering with a third-party solution at its core is meant to save you time, while also providing you with the necessary infrastructure to build an innovative product. It's essential to evaluate a third-party data provider's level of customization and hands-on support. A third-party data provider that offers flexible distribution models should be able to walk you through options for customization during the evaluation process, allowing you to integrate their data set with your company's preferences. Additionally, make sure to ask the partner if they will offer dedicated support to your team, including what implementation typically looks like and how they manage new enhancement requests from customers. Beyond just a data vendor, you want a partner that is invested in your organization's success, will listen and incorporate your feedback, and will help solve challenges affecting your team.

Find patients the right care faster, with Ribbon's API data platform.

Are you a product manager on a mission to help people get the right care at the right time? Ribbon's API data platform is built to save you time, so you can focus on what's important - guiding patients to the best possible care. Using Ribbon's data, our customers have seen up to a 250% increase in referrals, with 40 minutes of time saved per referral. Ribbon offers verified and detailed data across providers, facilities, and insurances to enhance your tool and improve your referral management or care navigation processes. Our data gets incorporated into your existing workflows quickly and easily. Plus, we constantly improve our data and ensure it is up-to-date allowing patients to find accurate, cost-effective, and quality care.

Try Ribbon's Data

[1] Source: https://www.sprinkledata.com/blogs/3-factors-to-build-or-buy-data-pipeline
[2] Source: https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Health-Plans/ManagedCareMarketing/Downloads/Provider_Directory_Review_Industry_Report_Year2_Final_1-19-18.pdf