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### Need to Grow Your Clinical Practice? Create an App for That!

Tim Rush:

As a busy cardiologist doing what you love, you still need to think about how to grow your business. How do you balance being a physician while at the same time building a successful practice. I'm your host Tim Rush and joining me today on ReachMD is Dr. Michael Weber, a Cardiac Electrophysiologist from Long Island, New York. He's here to share us his story about the balance of practicing medicine and entrepreneurship. Dr. Weber, welcome.

Dr. Michael Weber:

Thanks so much. I'm excited to be here.

Tim Rush:

Well thanks. We appreciate that. Well, you're an entrepreneur and a physician. I'm an entrepreneur and I have thoroughly enjoyed watching a company grow. Let's begin with you sharing a little bit about yourself and how you chose the specialty that you practice.

Dr. Michael Weber:

So, I started medical school actually being really excited about emergency medicine and from there, obviously as medical school started we explore different specialties in our third and fourth year and one thing I found myself really drawn to were the relationships that I was having with patients, so I felt that in emergency medicine I would lose out on that a little bit. So, I ended up being really drawn to internal medicine and then from there the physics of cardiology and then within that the technical aspect of cardiac electrophysiology involving pacemakers and ablations and things like that. And then from there, I went to a meeting talking about what people were looking for in a job and one thing I wrote down on a card was that I wanted to build something. So, when I looked for jobs following my fellowship training, I really looked for a practice that would give me the ability to do what I want, in terms of build the practice the way I saw fit and I work for a hospital now, but ultimately I'm under my own roof and I can do whatever I want to try to gain business, in terms of meeting with physicians and providing a service I think is best for all of that. So, it's really given me a chance to grow my practice and that's where I ended up and I'm really happy I'm here.

Tim Rush:

What was the need that you saw unfulfilled that brought you to a place to design and build a concept in and around this product that you've developed?

Dr. Michael Weber:

I developed a product that I call DirectLineMD and the problem that I saw was...I'm at seven hospitals and when I would be at one hospital I really found that I would...all my consults tend to be clustered in certain hospitals, so I would get called to the ER for a complete heart block and then while I was there somebody would say, "Oh, I have two more patients for you to see," and as I'd be seeing those patients other people would see me around and the consults would tend to be clustered. Then it would kind of get picked-up at another hospital and so I'd kind of be moving around, never really having a lot of consults at all hospitals at all times and so what I realized really is that it was really kind of an out of sight, out of mind. I needed to find a way to be on the forefront of everyone's mind at the same time and that's really where DirectLine was born.

Tim Rush:

So, tell us a little bit about this service.

Dr. Michael Weber:

Sure. So, it has two parts. The first part are for the users and essentially what it does is in any hospital the hospital directory, so all the

numbers for the operating room, for the emergency department, all the patient care wards, get put onto a very easy to use and interactive app. There's a place to suggest new numbers, a place to mark favorites so that you can go right back and even across different hospitals being able to create your own favorite list of numbers. And then within that app it really provides a platform for making sure that everyone in that hospital has your number. Being able to call with a single tap, your service and be able to get a hold of me or whoever uses the app in a given hospital. And so, on the front page when someone loads it up there's a small description of my bio, different bodies and what services I offer, a place to click that connects them directly to me and then within the app there are places for other doctors to advertise and really being able to broadcast your message across many hospitals all at the same time.

Tim Rush:

So this product is designed for an internal directory, not for patient's to find your services. It's more for keeping in front of other physicians, other colleagues?

Dr. Michael Weber:

That's correct. And so, the app actually works by having a code that each user inside the hospital has to enter to be able to access those numbers. And so someone...say looking them up on the web or just downloading the app by accident, wouldn't have access to all the internal numbers within the hospital. There are cards and flyers that are distributed in the hospital and people are able to look at those and access the app once they have the access code that's provided by that flyer. So, its' really just made for other colleagues and really just stays within the health care community.

Tim Rush:

If you're just tuning in you're listening to You're Career in Healthcare on ReachMD. I'm your host Tim Rush and joining me today is Dr. Michael Weber, cardiologist and entrepreneur. Okay. So, what drove you to develop the product especially as a busy physician?

Dr. Michael Weber:

I think a lot of that drove from the fact that...despite the fact that I run my own practice, there's still some frustration in terms of having to work with healthcare system and my healthcare system is great, very reactive, very proactive, but that being said, there's still a lot of limitations because of all the regulations in healthcare and obviously having to make sure everything is up to par before committing to something. So, owning my own business like this, was really a way to do things at the speed of business. It's just refreshing that there have been over fifty iterations of this app to date. I'd put it out there and people would have suggestions and I can update the app over the weekend. If someone has a suggestion about my webpage I can update it over night. Things like that were just a great break and a really great contrast from trying to grow my business in the medicine world. So, that was really one of the main reasons that drove me to start this business.

Tim Rush:

I started my business when I was working a day job. The business I started ultimately made it such that I couldn't keep my day job. I had to move into the develop of my business full time. It sounds more to me like this was built to enhance your current business. How are you balancing it, how do you keep focused on the development of the app, the products, the distribution and still stay focused on your patients and your medical career?

Dr. Michael Weber:

There are two things. One I think about, is that a friend of mine was looking to actually kind of start his own franchise or kind of continue a franchise and when he went to the franchise fair they gave him a flyer that talked about all the things he was looking in, such as capital investment, contribution and time, expertise in a specific field, things like that and when I thought about that, how I would have filled out that form, one of them would have been that there needed to be the ability to take breaks. Because when my business heats up and it becomes very busy, obviously patients always come first and that is always going to be the priority. And the nice thing about DirectLineMD is the servers are always running, the website is always running and once people sign up for the service it runs really autonomously. That being said, I have help. Between my family and friends people definitely chip in and are able to \_\_\_\_\_ (07:12) and help keep the app going, even when I can't tend to it for a couple of days in a row. Generally, it works out very well with the two, both with my practice and being able to run this business. And as things get busier I'll need to hire more help.

Tim Rush:

How many years ago did this concept first come to you?

Dr. Michael Weber:

It came to me about 3 years ago and over that time it was really an effort to both, number one develop the app and develop the business in an effective way, but also figure out the best way to do it that was compatible with my life and my finances. I had another friend who was trying to start a similar app, more similar in complexity just a different type of target audience, and when he had presented to somebody, to an agency, they had quoted him a 100 thousand, a 150 thousand dollars to try to get it launched and that was just not

something compatible with the amount of time that it would take and the amount of money. And so, really a lot of that time over the past several years has been trying to figure out a way to do this more economically, much smarter and at the same time, before I launched it to the public, really refined it as much as I could by putting it out on limited release, getting feedback, iterating the concept, putting it back out and just doing that and over thirty, forty times you get the product that we have today.

Tim Rush:

So what advice do you have for other physicians or other people within healthcare that have identified a need and they feel that need is to the point where they have a solution. What advice would you give for the other budding entrepreneur?

Dr. Michael Weber:

One of the best pieces of advice I could give was, there are these services online and this is really where the internet has made opportunities like this possible for a lot of people. There are ways to hire freelance designers, programmers, copy editors, all online. The one that I use is called Elance and that enables people to go online, you post a job, say you wanted an app built or a website built and people bid on it. And a lot of this work gets bidded out overseas, which really can bring down the cost. So you can get these prototype products and then refine them going forward, really at a fraction of the cost. And so, it's useful to know rather than spending a tremendous amount of money to get a finished product out there, rather get prototypes, judge the market and if it looks like an idea that works, you can put more money into it and you can really engage an idea in a stepwise fashion and that's really what I've learned from this process and doable both for myself in timelines and financially.

Tim Rush:

So, as you continue to roll out DirectLineMD, what various different distribution chains have you already developed, what are you looking to do to get the word out, to get the product out throughout larger hospital systems across our country?

Dr. Michael Weber:

The big thing is to right now, is just developing my website and a lot of...in my opinion, and as I've looked at different methods that people have done this is content marketing. So, in terms of putting good information on a website that people find looking for information and then they happen to say, "Oh, there's a product here that I might be interested in," which is another reason that I enjoy this business is that it's a relationship of sharing what I've known and what I've learned with people in the public that come to my website, make comments on it and share their experiences with me and then I repost it back on the website. So, it really becomes a network and that's what I'm developing as much as my idea is a great one, I think, and really offers a unique way for doctors to broadcast their message and advertise their services and for hospital systems to really consolidate and to get people on the same page as their mission. It also is a way for people to kind of come to one place to learn practical advice in terms of growing their practice. So, I think as my website grows and the community around that website grows more people will be drawn to the product going forward.

Tim Rush:

For administrators or physicians that would want to get in touch with you Michael, what would be the best way that they could reach out to you and ask more questions?

Dr. Michael Weber:

They can go to my website DirectLineMD, you can also type the search into Google and either way you'll end up on my webpage and there's a whole story about how I developed the product, there's a video explaining how it works and a contact page with my email address and a phone number if they'd like to call me directly.

Tim Rush:

Well, tell us a little bit more about the hospital side of the app. Clearly as a physician and you telling your story about the way that you were needing to be in front of people more often, tell us a little bit more on the hospital side of the app what benefits that, that would have or value propositions that would have for them.

Dr. Michael Weber:

Sitting in a lot of meetings talking about strategy and developing service lines, one of the things that keeps coming up and one of the ideas that keeps coming up is it's so difficult for hospital systems to align their physicians with their goals. So, if there's a new service being offered, the hospital just bought a da Vinci Robot and they want to let everyone know about that. Getting that word out is incredibly difficult even for physicians that are owned inside the hospital, or making sure that everyone in the hospital knows the referral line or knows the transfer line to the larger hospital that's center for cardiothoracic surgery. Getting that information into all the physician's hands is incredibly difficult and DirectLineMD lets people do that. And so, essentially a hospital, when physicians are part of a system, can be given this app and for example, they can be told, "Listen, when you need to send out a referral, when you need a consult on one of your patients use the doctors in the app." If there's any doctor in that app they are the ones who are with the system and it can start to direct volume and direct services to where the hospital thinks is best and then that way it can really start to align the goals of the hospital

with the goals of the physicians and all the users. And that's still something very difficult to do, despite emails and flyers and meetings, it just takes repetition and that's what DirectLineMD does, because everyday doctors are looking at this app, getting the numbers they need and at the same time getting those messages that they need from the hospital.

Tim Rush:

Well, where do you see DirectLineMD going from here, 1 year, 3 year, I mean, what's in the future?

Dr. Michael Weber:

As it spreads to more and more hospitals it will create a network and there are added features...that a lot of features kind of being discussed in the future. One in particular is really being able to have real-time conversations with the users. So, lets say that JCAHO was coming on a surprise visit on a Tuesday. The app would announce to everyone within all the users, "Just letting you know JCAHO is in the hospital, we want to make you guys aware," or being able to reach out to the specific sets of users when they open the app instead of having just a static presentation the way it is now, having an interactive feature to be able to say, "Did you know about the new services we offer, yes/no," and then people can actually take that information back and are able to change their strategic direction and really make decisions, really actionable data, real-time data. It will be a way for both doctors to connect with the users and also, more importantly, I think hospitals to connect with the users interactively and that's really, really hard to get in healthcare nowadays. We are so busy, just bombarded with emails, that a lot of us just delete without even reading. So, it becomes a way really to connect and bring everyone back onto the same page.

Tim Rush:

Well, Dr. Weber I sure do appreciate you being our guest today. We've been discussing work life balance, balancing a career in medicine and pursuing an idea, a dream, a business. As a reminder, you can visit Dr. Weber at [www.DirectLineMD.com](http://www.DirectLineMD.com), to learn more about his service.