

ADELAIDE TO HOUSTON: DIGITAL HEALTH STARTUP TAKES THE LEAP

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Spending time at Houston's Texas Medical Center (TMC) – the world's largest medical precinct – helped digital health company Personify Care achieve its US objectives.

In early 2017, Personify Care was one of three Australian startups to participate in the four-month TMC Accelerator Program (TMCx), supported by Austrade through the BioBridge Initiative.

After being immersed in TMC's medical ecosystem with its campus of 60 member institutions, the digital health startup is gaining a foothold in Texas.

CEO and founder of Personify Care, Ken Saman, attributes his company's US success to completing TMCx, understanding that each US state is a different market, and investing time in-market to establish strong personal relationships.

Personifying the best in digital health

Established in 2014, Personify Care is based on the belief that patients deserve the best possible care even when they're not in a hospital or clinic. The company's proprietary web-based software allows nurses, specialist practices and hospitals to detect when a patient is at risk of a complication and intervene before their condition (and associated costs) escalate.

Personify Care's digital platform is used by both patients and health professionals and integrates with electronic medical records. In just the last 12 months, the platform has been used by providers to monitor more than 330,000 patient interactions and screen 110,000 patient clinical risks.

In a recent study, the software was shown to reduce 68 per cent of the cost of delivering clinical protocols before and after a hospital stay. Furthermore, the support and information provided to patients post-



Ken Saman (centre), CEO and founder of Personify Care

'Our proven results in Australia assisted us with our US market entry. Interestingly, we discovered that our work in the US also gave us additional credibility in Australia, resulting in growth back home.'

Ken Saman, CEO and founder, Personify Care
personifycare.com

discharge aims to reduce re-admission rates and improve patient experience scores.

Establishing credibility

As a digital health startup, Personify Care was 'born global' with an eye on the US from day one. But establishing credibility in Australia first enabled the medtech company to enter the US with experience.

'Working with the TMC Innovation Institute provided an additional badge of credibility, opened doors for opportunities and allowed us to have valuable conversations in the US,' says Saman.

Personify Care is making strides in the US having secured investment in the US and Australia and securing its first pilots with surgical centres in Houston.



Australian Government

Australian Trade and Investment Commission



Journey to the US

After spending time in the US, Saman understood the growth opportunities and the market.

'We developed the platform in Australia for Australia, but always knew the same problem of poor patient preparation and post-op readmissions existed in the US at a much larger scale,' says Saman.

Prior to joining TMCx, Personify Care explored US market entry opportunities and investigated US compliance and legal requirements. Talking to potential partners in Boston and Minneapolis, they hadn't considered Houston.

Personify Care was invited by Austrade to meet TMC Chief Operating Officer Bill McKeon (now Chief Executive Officer) and was provided with information about TMCx and BioBridge.

'Without Austrade's connection to TMCx and the Australia-TMC BioBridge we would not have known about the program,' Saman adds.

Working with the TMC Innovation Institute and its associated long-term benefits has helped Personify Care beyond the formal four-month program.

Saman notes that being part of TMCx saved the company six to 12 months compared to entering the US market without structured assistance.

'TMCx highlighted the value of networks and relationships, especially for an Australian company expanding into the US,' he says. 'We learnt about the commercial side and launched our first pilots in the US during the program.'

'Our first US investor came via a TMC introduction, allowing us to go back home, raise additional private investment and secure support from the Australian Government through the Accelerating Commercialisation program, and then come back to the US. This enabled us to hire our first two people in the US, both locally based in Houston via our TMC networks.'

Understanding the market

Six months after the TMC Innovation Institute program, Personify Care hired local staff in Houston that understood the local culture and had invaluable industry connections.

'Working with staff that know local business practices and cultural differences helped break down barriers and increased our credibility,' says Saman.

'On-the-ground experience showed us the US is not one market. Each state has its own way of doing business and it's important to tailor strategies accordingly.'

The company is working hard to build relationships and expand its US customer base.

'We are currently in a growth phase and know that success doesn't happen overnight,' says Saman. 'It's a process we've gone through in Australia and are now going through in the US.'

Austrade continues to offer Personify Care support, including invitations to networking events and facilitating introductions to contacts in its Life Sciences network.

Advice for others

For other Australian digital health companies looking to enter the US, Saman offers the following advice.

'Find locals who know the market and piggyback off this,' he says. 'Get people on the ground early and spend time in the market yourself.'

'Invest time and effort to establish relationships and credibility. When you're trying to introduce something new into the US, you can't do it part-time.'

'Come over here, build relationships, talk to people and figure out how to approach the local market. I highly recommend applying for programs like TMCx.'

'There's a lot of noise in the US so you also need to be clear about how you're different. Tweak your model to suit the market and ensure your product is always solving a real problem.'

Austrade has six US offices, including one in Houston, with advisers who can provide support to Australian startups looking to enter the US market. Austrade also manages the Australian Landing Pad program in San Francisco for market-ready startups and scaleups, operating out of WeWork.

About Austrade

The Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade) is the Australian Government's international trade promotion and investment attraction agency.

We deliver quality trade and investment services to businesses to grow Australia's prosperity. We do this by generating and providing market information and insights, promoting Australian capability, and facilitating connections through our extensive global network.

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