



# **BUILDING & LAUNCHING TOOLS FOR THE NURSING & HEALTHCARE COMMUNITY**

**A Brief Guide to Product Development,  
Product-Market Fit, and Growth**

**By Zach Smith, BSN-RN**  
Founding Member of NurseGrid

# INTRODUCTION

I've spent years helping healthcare companies build products that nurses and healthcare workers actually use and love. If there's one thing I've learned, it's this: the healthcare space is uniquely challenging, but building something that genuinely helps these professionals is incredibly rewarding.

After helping grow NurseGrid from a simple idea to over 2 million downloads and eventually an acquisition, I've seen firsthand what works (and what spectacularly fails) when creating tools for healthcare professionals. In this guide, I'll share the real, unvarnished truth about what it takes to build successful products for nurses and healthcare workers.

Let me be clear - if you're just looking to make a quick buck off hardworking healthcare professionals, this guide isn't for you. The most successful healthcare tools come from a genuine desire to solve real problems. So let's dive in!



# UNDERSTANDING YOUR USERS

## The Nurses Station vs. Patient Room Phenomenon

One of my favorite concepts when marketing to healthcare professionals is what I call the "nurses station versus patient room" dynamic. Here's what I mean:

Most outsiders only see the "patient room" version of a nurse - professional, composed, and focused on patient care. But the authentic identity of healthcare workers lives at the nurses station - where they laugh, share dark humor, and connect with each other in ways patients never see.

To build successful healthcare tools, you need to understand this authentic identity. You need to build for the healthcare worker at the nurses station, not just the patient room.

I've watched countless companies fail because they built products based on their perception of healthcare professionals rather than the reality. These professionals have an inherent "us versus them" mentality toward outsiders - and for good reason. They've been burned too many times by people who claimed to care about them but were really just trying to profit off their backs.

**My advice:** If you don't come from a healthcare background, partner with someone who does. Nothing beats firsthand experience for understanding the unique challenges, language, and culture of healthcare workers.



# STARTING WITH THE RIGHT PROBLEM: VALIDATION BEFORE CODE

## Getting to the Heart of Healthcare Problems

I can't stress this enough - before writing a single line of code, make absolutely sure you're solving a real problem. Here's my process:

- **Talk to actual healthcare workers:** I spent years as a bedside nurse, which gave me incredible insight when building products. If you don't have that experience, shadow units, conduct interviews, or even better, add someone to your team who has this direct experience.
- **Join healthcare communities online:** Lurk in nursing forums, follow healthcare hashtags, and observe what people complain about repeatedly. Those recurring pain points are gold mines for product ideas. I've found that the most authentic conversations are happening within large online social account communities.
- **Analyze existing solutions:** If competitors exist, that's often a good sign! It validates the market need. Study what works and what doesn't in their approach. Of course, finding the white space in the market is a solid approach as well. Sometimes the white space is found because solutions for the general public don't apply to healthcare workers. Keep your mind open to new solutions!





## Design First, Build Later

One of the biggest mistakes I see healthcare entrepreneurs make is building a full product before validating their concept. This is a waste of time and money. Instead:

- **Start with mockups and prototypes:** Use tools like Figma or even simple sketches to create visual representations of your product.
- **Show these prototypes to potential users:** During early NurseGrid testing, I discovered something crucial by showing mockups to nurses. Traditional calendar apps displayed night shifts across two days (e.g., 7pm-7am shows as events on both Tuesday and Wednesday). But nurses think of shifts as single units - that 7pm-7am shift is just "Tuesday night." This insight led to a fundamental design change that made our app instantly more intuitive for nurses, aiding to it's viral growth.
- **Keep it simple:** Your initial design should focus on solving one core problem exceptionally well.



# WEB APP VS. MOBILE APP: START ON THE WEB

Now that you have validated your concept with visual images and designs, the next step is to start building. If you're creating a digital product that you intend to be a mobile app, start with a web app. Here's why:

- ◆ **Faster iteration:** Web apps allow you to push updates immediately without waiting for app store approvals
- ◆ **Lower development costs:** One codebase instead of multiple (iOS/Android)
- ◆ **Easier user onboarding:** No downloads required, just share a link
- ◆ **Perfect for testing:** Validate your concept before investing in native mobile development
- ◆ Early in your venture, you should be prioritizing learning and iterating until you reach product market fit. Web apps provide you the best structure to accomplish this quickly.





# CONCLUSION: IT'S ABOUT TRUST, NOT TECH

After years in this space, I've learned that successful healthcare tools aren't necessarily the ones with the best technology or the most features. They're the ones that:

- ◆ Genuinely understand the unique culture and challenges of healthcare workers
- ◆ Build trust before trying to monetize
- ◆ Solve real problems in simple, intuitive ways
- ◆ Create value that increases as more colleagues adopt the tool
- ◆ Maintain authentic relationships with their user community

The healthcare community is protective of its members, but once you've built trust, they become incredibly loyal. If you're genuinely committed to improving healthcare workers' lives through thoughtful, well-designed tools, there's no better community to serve.





**If you would like help building  
or marketing your product to  
the healthcare community,  
visit [www.ReachRN.com](http://www.ReachRN.com)  
to get in touch with Zach.**