SPOTLIGHT

The Maya app

USING Maya.com.bd's plethora of information and BRAC's expertise, the two have recently launched the Maya app. Given the burgeoning popularity of Maya.com.bd, the two organisations realised how much more effective the website would be if it was made available as a mobile app.

With the continuous expansion of ICT use and services in Bangladesh, BRAC, one of the largest development organisations in the world, started to explore innovative new approaches through media and technology to extend outreach to women and girls, especially on the issue of gender discrimination and violence. As Maya worked with a similar platform to provide access to information on women's health and social issues, the two organisations found a common ground to synergise and bridge the digital divide.

In 3 months time, Maya.com.bd's team of two female engineers developed and delivered the Maya app. Not only is the app itself useful, it also challenges the social perception that men are better at coding. With few opportunities for female engineers, especially in terms of coding, Maya.com.bd, along with BRAC, used the app to show how female engineers, even in Bangladesh, are equally capable. Shubrami Moutushy, Lead Software Engineer, Achia Khaleda Nila, Product Manager and Syeda Prima Rasnim, Software Engineer joined the team and became focal points for the app.

The Maya app builds on the popularity of the "Maya Apa ki Bolen" column and was designed keeping the importance of a simple user-interface and functionality in mind, but its key objective remained providing the information the users need. As with the website, the app too maintains total anonymity for its users, who only need an email address to register. The email address is kept thoroughly confidential. The app, which can be directly installed on your cell phone, makes the process of posting questions much easier. Anyone from anywhere can post any question related to health, legal issues, nutrition, fitness and so on and expect a tailor-made response in about 48 hours. Users are notified of when their questions are answered so the process does not become tedious.

Furthermore, the profile a user creates is instantly viewable when s/he opts to post a question. The amount of information to be provided on the user's profile is up to their discretion. An option for image upload is also kept. However, even without providing details, one instantly becomes part of the community. This allows a scope for discussion with not only the medical or legal experts, but even those who have faced similar situations. Hence, the entire thing works as an actual community, with ample interaction. While some may worry about what kind of responses certain questions might generate, the Maya team works conscientiously to screen questions, queries and discussions. Along with the ability to post questions, one can also view the numerous articles and interactive areas available on the site. Therefore, there is always an ample amount of information to be gleaned, if one wishes.

The app is also useful in numerous other ways. With everything discussed being available a few taps away, the app becomes a useful tool for patient management. The app also has a feature where one can simply re-ask a question they posted earlier or add to it if they have further questions. In fact, it's a system that ensures that access to knowledge is neither restricted nor limited. There is also a filtering tool available with a search box, for users to easily peruse topics they are interested in. In addition, there are generic questions and answers one can view even if they do not have a question themselves.

"Maya has been working to empower women through technology and access to information on women's health and anything of relevance to a woman's life on a daily basis for the last three years," explained Sheepa Hafiza, Director Gender Justice and Diversity, BRAC Migration Programme. With the growing popularity of Maya.com.bd and with BRAC's experience and outreach at the field level, they believed that the Maya app could be accessible to users all across Bangladesh. "BRAC instantly got the idea of what we at Maya.com.bd were trying to achieve. It was the ideal partnership," Ivy H. Russel, founder of Maya.com.bd explained.

"We hope that the information generated through this app will promote advocacy for the formulation of new policies or the revision of existing policies in favour of women's and girls' rights," said Sheepa Hafiza. "The Maya app is a unique output of BRAC and Maya's partnership. Together, we intend to reach out to more women and girls in quickest possible time and with an effective mode of interaction for sharing, learning and empowering," she added. The Maya app will be launched on the 3 February 2015 in both English and Bangla.

By Osama Rahman

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Launching Maya Apa APP

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