



Digital Health Meets The Voice: Startup Contest Puts VCs On Stage

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When [Morgenthaler Ventures](#) partner Rebecca Lynn organized the first “DC to VC” startup and healthcare policy showcase in 2010, there weren’t any competitions, challenges, or hackathons for digital health companies. Heck, there were barely any digital health companies, period. Now almost every big tech hub has a digital health startup accelerator, and “every time you turn around there is a new health app challenge,” says Missy Krasner, an executive in residence at Morgenthaler.

And that’s great—but it meant Morgenthaler wanted to give a different spin to the fourth edition of its [DC to VC Health IT contest](#). The twist for this year’s competition, which will be take place on September 30 as part of the [Health 2.0 Conference](#) in Santa Clara, CA, is that venture partners will be competing in the event, rather than judging it.

The contest format—unveiled by Morgenthaler today—calls for VC “team captains” to coach the eight finalist teams for their presentations and then introduce them on stage at the event. Krasner says it’s the digital health world’s answer to *The Voice*, the reality show where music celebrities like Christina Aguilera help newcomers get their acts together for televised sing-offs.

In the Aguilera role will be Morgenthaler’s Lynn, as well as Ted Maidenberg, general partner at the Social + Capital Partnership; Mohit Kaushal, a partner at Aberdare Ventures; Lisa Suennen, founding and managing member at Psilos Group; and Marty Felsenthal, partner at HLM Partners.

“The goal is not for VCs to get up and give a rah-rah for the company, entirely,” Krasner says. “It’s really to have them give the market exposition—‘Hi, I’m an expert, I’ve done a lot of research, here are the incumbents in this market, here’s why this company is different, I’d like you to hear who they are.’”

Befitting its title, the DC to VC event will also including a panel of healthcare reform experts, who will offer advice on how startups can take advantage of policy changes coming in Washington, DC, as more portions of the Affordable Care Act come into play starting in 2014.

From now until August 26, Morgenthaler is accepting applications for the competition from early-stage health IT companies (applicants cannot have raised more than \$3 million in angel and venture funding). The firm plans



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to select four finalists in the enterprise category—companies selling products or ideas to hospitals, doctors, insurance companies, or large self-insured employers—and four in the consumer category, meaning companies making products that are for use by consumers, even if insurers or providers are paying for them.

Health industry professionals, investors, and journalists are expected to be in the audience for the competition, and the grand prize winner will be selected by a panel of judges representing big players in the healthcare marketplace, including Google, Philips Health, Dignity Health, Safeway Health, and Sprint. For the first time, there's a cash prize at stake: \$8,000.

The big idea, as with most other digital health startup showcases, is just to provide exposure for outstanding health IT companies. But Krasner says her own experience as an advisor to startups at Stanford's StartX accelerator has taught her how valuable the experience can be, both for startups and for the venture partners they're paired with. So for this edition of the DC to VC contest, she wanted to get the VCs out from behind the judging table and put them to work with the contestants.

"A lot of startups gave us feedback last year that while they like to get up in front of VCs and pitch, they don't really benefit from a deep mentoring experience that way," Krasner says. "It's 'Hit hard and leave,' and you don't get a lot of feedback. This year we thought it would be fun if we actually paired a VC with a startup and asked the VC to pitch with them on stage."

Companies can apply for the competition at www.dc2vc.com. The eight finalists will be announced in mid-September, Krasner says.