



YOUR PRACTICE

Not Texting Yet? Your Patients Want You To

Steve Weber

When you are trying to communicate with patients, long gone are the days that email was king. The best and most reliable place to reach patients in today's mobile world is via text messaging. In April 2021, *Forbes* wrote about "The Anatomy of SMS Engagement,"¹ noting that 98 percent of SMS messages are opened and read, compared to only 20 percent of emails.

Now, more than ever, practices should be taking a look at the huge potential of text messaging. And the great news is, tech tools can make the process of switching to text messaging not only simple, but also effective, offering an avenue to reach more potential patients, grow and scale.

More Than Auto-Reminders

Many practices use the text reminders that are a part of their electronic health records - a very basic dip into text messaging. But texting can be far more robust than this bare-bones approach. Texts should be seen as an opportunity for two-way communication between a practice and a patient, offering simple ways to communicate. Examples of powerful uses of text messaging include:

- *Recall dormant patients.* A great text communication platform will allow you to set up an automatic text to patients who haven't been in for a specified amount of time, inviting them back to the practice.
- *Filtered reminders.* Remind patients about their appointments, with platform set-up options to send reminders at the right time, based on the appointment type and interval of visits. Set up custom reminders based on the appointment type.
- *Move or reschedule appointments.* Imagine a patient is running late or has missed an appointment. You text a reminder, and they are able to respond requesting a later appointment time or a rescheduled visit.
- *Gather feedback and encourage reviews.* Once patients have visited, use text to request a star rating. Encourage high raters to leave you Google reviews by sending them a direct link where they can easily post, then and there.
- *Send birthday videos.* Patients love videos of practice staff singing a birthday song; it's fun

and feels personal, building rapport with the practice.

Text Can Grow Your Practice



The above text ideas do an excellent job of maintaining your existing patients, who will be impressed with the convenient and helpful communication. The efforts also go far in filling your calendar, both by reducing no-shows and attracting new patients.

- *Reduce no shows.* The best potential patients are the ones you already have. An excellent reminder system, coupled with the ability to easily reschedule or push back appointments, keeps your calendar full.
- *Chat with potential patients.* Set up a web chat-to-text box on your website, where potential patients who are browsing can ask a question that launches a text conversation, and where you can easily reach them to answer - whether they stand up and leave their computer or not.
- *Onboard new patients.* When a new patient has a scheduled appointment, automatically send messages to ease them into the practice - new-patient forms, "meet the chiropractor" videos, directions, and what to expect.
- *Reviews attract new patients.* Reviews on sites like Google matter - not only the number of reviews, but also the regularity. While you can remind patients in person all you want to leave you a review, when they walk out of your practice, it is easy to forget. Text requests for reviews can bulk up your review count, impressing potential patients who compare you to other practices.

Free Up Your Staff's Time to Do More and Be More

Not only will your patients and potential patients love the results of your text communication, but your staff will also have more time to be even more effective. If your practice only uses email and phone calls, it's likely your staff spends a big part of the day answering phones. An excellent text platform can increase productivity dramatically.

- *Automate efforts.* With the right texting platform, reminders, pre-appointment information, review request follow-ups, recalls, and more can all be automated.
- *Stop the voicemail phone tag.* When patients need to reschedule, your staff and patients can spend a lot of time just in the effort to connect. A text conversation can be carried out over time, freeing up time while working toward a reschedule.
- *Communicate on an easy dashboard.* The right text-message platform will put all text communication on an easy-to-use dashboard where your staff can respond to messages, taking up minimal time.
- *Focus on providing excellent care.* With the time saved, your staff can be more present when greeting patients face-to-face, improving office visits and focusing on other efforts that can help your practice thrive.

The Bottom Line

The bottom line is, text messaging can be an incredibly robust, time-saving way to communicate with patients, fill your schedule and grow your practice. Text communication allows you to reach patients where they are, making communication simple for both patients and you / your staff. So say goodbye to email and even your EHR text platform if you have one, and put a text platform to use. Your patients - and your full calendar - will thank you!

Reference

1. Giacomini A. "The Anatomy of SMS Engagement." *Forbes*, April 14, 2021.

NOVEMBER 2021