


# **Engaging Your Patients: How Effective Communication Can Improve Profitability**

Presented By:

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## **Learning Objectives**

- Understand advantages and limitations of the most widely-used patient communication methods
  - Recognize security and compliance considerations related to patient communication
  - Leverage various patient outreach opportunities to build relationships, save communication costs and increase revenue
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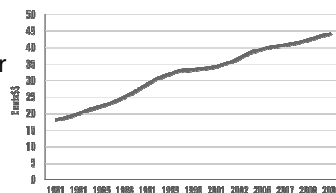
## How are you connecting with patients outside of the practice

- Standard mail (letters, postcards, etc.) - **TRADITIONAL**
- Phone calls from staff members - **TRADITIONAL**
- Text messages – **EMERGING**
- Emails – **EMERGING**
- Automated phone calls - **EMERGING**

## Challenges of Standard Mail

- **Long delivery times**

- “Snail mail” can take 2-3 days depending on geographic area you serve. Even longer for bulk mailings.
- Other contact methods are instantaneous by comparison.



- **Rising postal rates**

- September 2010: Postal Regulatory Commission denied USPS proposal to raise postage rates by 5.6%...but it's coming!
- Would have taken first class postage from 44 to 46 cents per piece.
- USPS also pushed to cut service to 5 days per week.

- **No guarantee of contact with patients**

- Each year, 40 million Americans change their address according to the National Change of Address (NCOA) registry.
- You are likely not notified until the patient's next visit.
- We receive an average of 16-20 pieces of junk mail per week.\*

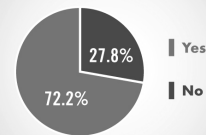
\* SOURCE: [www.41pounds.org](http://www.41pounds.org)

## Challenges of Staff Phone Calls

- **Limited bandwidth of current staff**

- In a survey of 3,000 practices who deliver manual reminder calls, 72% feel staff could be best utilized in other areas.\*
- Can only complete 20 calls per hour (based on 3 minute average)

Manual phone reminders:  
Can staff be best utilized in other areas?



- **Unable to add staff**

- 54% growth in operating costs for multispecialty practices over the last 10 years.\*\*
- 1.9% decrease in total medical revenue in 2008.\*\*

- **Limited reach during daytime hours**

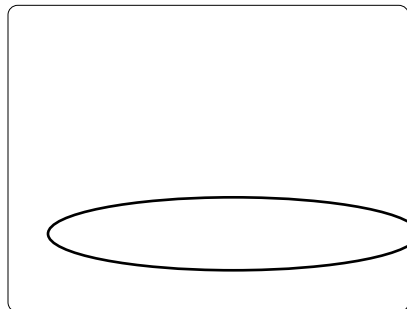
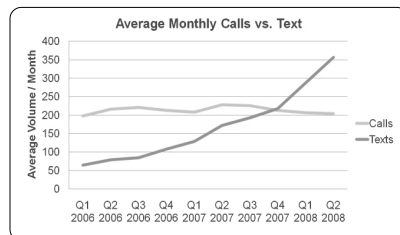
- If calling between 8:00 and 5:00 p.m., 85% of calls reach answering machines.
- This defeats the “personal touch” notion of manual staff phone calls.

\* SOURCE: 2010 TeleVox Survey    \*\* SOURCE: 2009 MGMA Cost Survey

## Emerging Channels

### SMS/Text usage has exploded!

- 91% of Americans are mobile subscribers.
- 72% regularly send and receive texts.
- As high as age 44, patients text more than they talk.



SOURCE: The Nielsen Company

## Emerging Channels

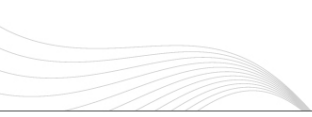
### Patients want text messages!

April 2011 Patient Survey:

- Multi-specialty clinic
- Age range of 16-92
- 38% of participants over age 40

Of the 91% of patients who regularly text...

- 81% prefer to receive text appointment confirmations
- 67% are most likely to respond to text vs. other methods



## Emerging Channels

### Email usage is just as strong!

- 79% of American adults use the Internet.
- 94% of these users regularly send and/or read email.
- Email is the #1 activity of Internet users.

	Internet users
<b>Total adults</b>	<b>79%</b>
Men	79
Women	79
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>	
White, Non-Hispanic	80%
Black, Non-Hispanic	71
Hispanic (English-speaking)	82
<b>Age</b>	
18-29	95%
30-49	87
50-64	78
65+	42
<b>Household income</b>	
Less than \$30,000/yr	63%
\$30,000-\$49,999	84
\$50,000-\$74,999	89
\$75,000+	95
<b>Educational attainment</b>	
Less than High School	52%
High School	67
Some College	90
College +	96
<b>Community type</b>	
Urban	81%
Suburban	82
Rural	67

**Internet Usage by Demographics**

SOURCE: Pew Internet and American Life Project



## Emerging Channels

### MGMA 2010 Performance and Practices of Successful Medical Groups

- 46% of “better performers” use an automated telephone call reminder system.
- Compared to 23% usage among other practices polled.



**But why???**

## Why Are We Adopting Them?

### 1 Positive patient perception

- Improved voice technology
- Increased acceptance among elderly populations

*“They don’t want to be left behind when it comes to technology, and our success to date shows that older patients are willing to take this step with us.”*

- Shepherd Eye Center, Las Vegas, NV

*“Seniors are apt to accept automated calls when they realize that it frees up our staff’s time to provide a more focused, one-on-one experience when they come to our clinic.”*

- Mountain Heart, Flagstaff, AZ

### 2 Low cost per notification

- Typically ranges from \$0.10-0.25
- Compares favorably to high postal rates and manual staff labor costs

## Why Are We Adopting Them?

### 3 Quick communication with patients

- Contact entire patient list within narrow timeframe
- Ideal for inclement weather and other emergency closings
- Outsourcing communication tasks

### 4 Interactivity

- PHONE: 1 to confirm, 2 to speak with staff, etc.
- EMAIL: Click to confirm, visit website, access directions, etc.
- TEXT: Reply YES or NO in response to notification



## Determining Profitability

### Look for a successful formula of price AND response!

- Price typically ranges between \$0.10-0.25 per notification
- Patient response rates outweigh minor differences in cost

Cost per notification is less important than cost per confirmed appointment.

**WHY THIS MATTERS:  
You'll make more money!**



## Determining Profitability

Example:

What you pay vs. what you get		
	Vendor A	Vendor B
Price per notification	\$0.13	\$0.20
Price for 1000 notifications	\$130	\$200
Estimated # of confirmations	160 (16%)	370 (37%)
Price per confirmation (price/confirmations)	81 cents	54 cents
Retained appointment revenue (Confirmations * \$100/appt.)	\$1,600	\$3,700

## Effective Message Delivery

### Voice Call Quality

- If it sounds pieced together, patients won't listen.  
Seamless transition between pre-recorded scripting and patient-specific data elements (names, dates, etc.)
- Listen for clarity and natural-sounding voices.

**WHY THIS MATTERS:**  
**You'll have happier patients!**

# Effective Message Delivery

## Text Messaging Methods

### Certified short code

Preferred by major carriers (i.e. Verizon, AT&T)

95% reach their intended target

Rigorous screening and compliance with Mobile Marketing Association rules – for your patients' protection

Offers easy Opt-In and Opt-Out capabilities

\*\*\* **PREFERRED** \*\*\*

### SMTP

Less expensive

Only 40-60% reach intended target

Risk having carriers deny the delivery of messages

Failure on even ONE major U.S. carrier can eliminate 33% of your patient base.

These are technically emails and subject to the FTC's CAN-SPAM Act.

# Effective Message Delivery

## Personalization

- **Patient-specific info**
  - First name, last name, date, provider name, amount due, etc.
- **Language preference**

Non-English speaking Americans according to U.S. Census data:

  - 1990: **14%**
  - 2000: **20%** - 62% growth
  - 2010: **???** - Another 62% growth would be more than ¼ of the U.S.
- **Volume controls**
  - Especially valuable when communicating with elderly patients
- **Appointment location**
- **Special instructions**

# Security and Compliance Essentials

## Adherence to Government Regulations

There many things you need to be aware of.

- You can't deliver unsolicited prerecorded messages that aren't directly related to patient's care (FTC).
- You must have prior, express consent before sending a prerecorded call to a cell phone (FCC).
- If it is a solicitation call, it must follow federal and state calling hours, include an opt-out and other specific message structure rules.
- You can't deliver messages that are threatening (Fair Debt Collection Practices Act)

# Data Security and Compliance



## Transfer

- Multiple secure channels for sending your data
- 128-bit Secure Socket Layer (SSL) encryption protocol (at minimum)
- Data and Network Security layers



## Storage

- Dedicated Information Risk Management
- Yearly Internal HIPAA and External SAS 70 Type II Audits
- Physical, Network, Logical and Application Security layers



## Delivery

- PHI protection and Federal & State Regulation adherence
- Legal team and Technicians to counsel on message structure for maximum response and compliance
- Data and Network Security layers

# Security and Compliance Essentials

## Importance of External Audits



Anyone can SAY they're HIPAA-compliant.

Working with a vendor who has undergone an EXTERNAL audit gives you two major benefits:

1. Further confirmation that controls, procedures and processes are in place to protect and secure your data.
2. You don't have to incur the cost of sending auditors to evaluate the vendor.

### Examples of external audits include:

- SAS-70 Type II
- ISO 17799/BS7799



# Engagement Opportunities

## Post-Visit Communications

- Test results pickup
  - What % of your visits result in lab work?
  - How are those results communicated to patients?
- Rescheduling broken appointments
  - National average no-show rate is 5-7%
  - How are you reconnecting with those patients?



**WHY THIS MATTERS:**  
It's like having extra staff members

# Engagement Opportunities

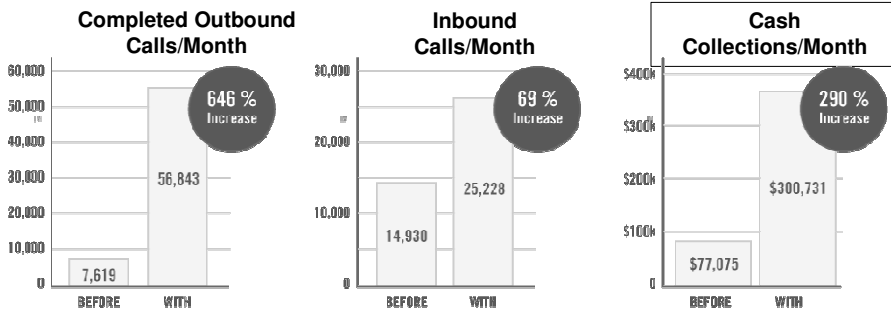
## Collections

- Can offer immediate transfer for payment
  - Up to 20% direct transfer from live answered phone calls
- Most effective with early delinquency
  - Quick reminders for “lazy payers”
- Outstanding ROI on account balance notifications



# Case Study: Collections

## University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC)



**\$2.5 million**  
annually

# Engagement Opportunities

## Wellness/Ongoing Care

- Seasonal campaigns
  - Flu shots
  - Childhood immunizations
- Align with National Health Observances calendar
  - <http://www.healthfinder.gov/nho/>
- Strengthens relationships with patients
- Revenue generator for your organization



# Engagement Opportunities

## Recall Opportunities

- Annual visits and exams
- Great way to reactivate single-visit patients
- Large revenue potential



## Case Study: Engaging Through Recalls

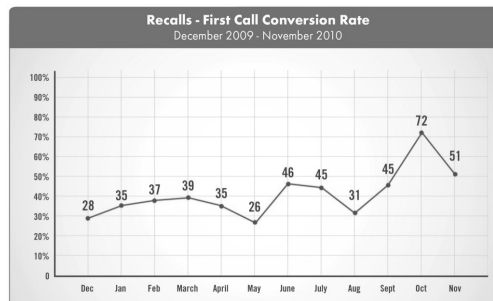
### Northeast Ohio Eye Surgeons

41% first call conversion rate from automated recall messages

104% success rate improvement over postcard communications

#### Current recall timeline:

- 30 days before due date – Automated call #1
- 30 days past – Postcard #1
- 60 days past – Postcard #2
- 120 past – Automated call #2



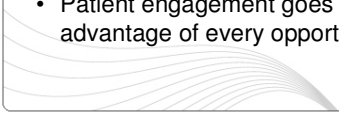
## Things to Consider When Selecting a Vendor

#### Not all vendors are created equal.

- Pricing
- Functionality
- Notifications channels (phone, email, text)
- Company stability
- Communication strategy expertise
- Security and reliability

**These can all impact your success!**

## Major Takeaways

- The “better performing” groups are shifting from traditional communication methods to more immediate, effective and cost-efficient methods of engagement.
  - Price and response rates should BOTH be considered when evaluating financial feasibility.
  - Numerous elements contribute to patient acceptance and deliverability of these communications, including voice call quality, personalization and text messaging methods.
  - If you don’t know the essentials of protecting PHI and adhering to communications regulations, find a partner who does!
  - Patient engagement goes beyond everyday appointment reminders. Take advantage of every opportunity to build relationships and grow revenue.
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# Thank You for Your Time

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