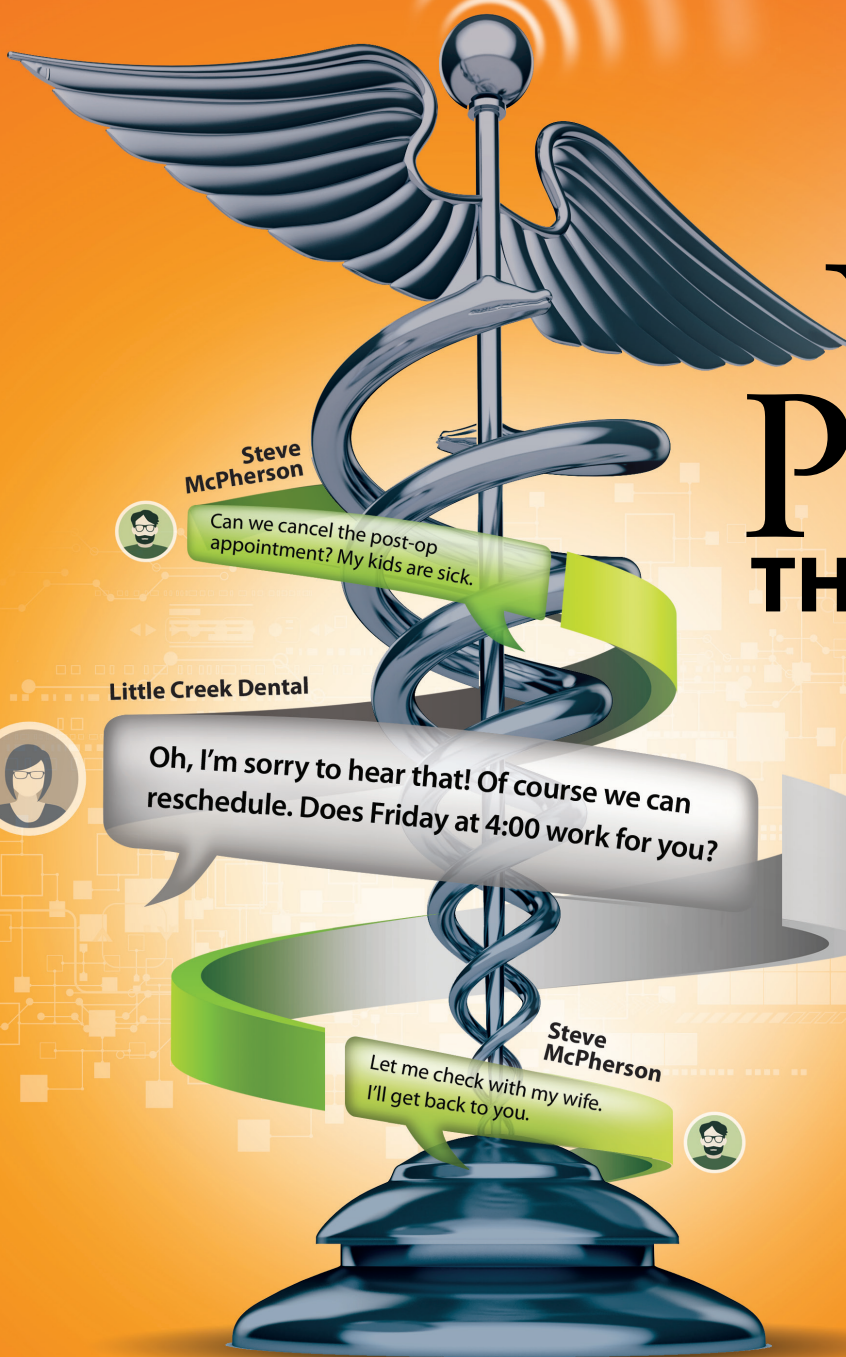


PHYSICIANS PRACTICE

YOUR
PRACTICE
YOUR WAY

Text Your Patients THE RIGHT WAY



Steve
McPherson

Can we cancel the post-op
appointment? My kids are sick.

Little Creek Dental

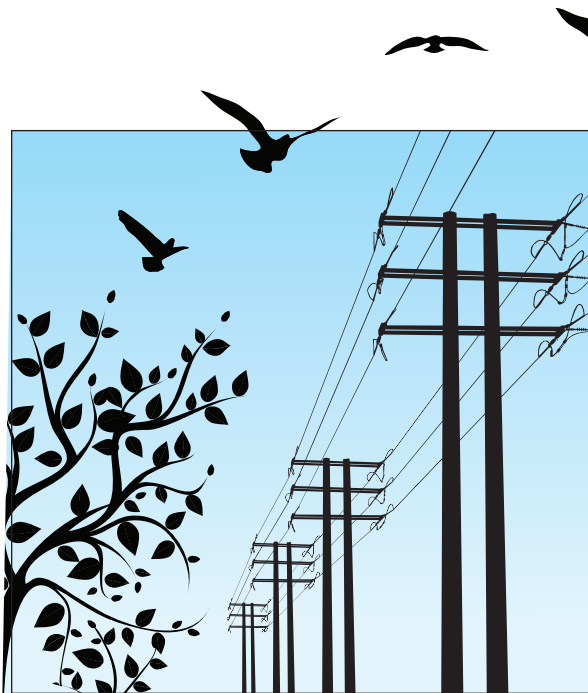
Oh, I'm sorry to hear that! Of course we can
reschedule. Does Friday at 4:00 work for you?

Steve
McPherson

Let me check with my wife.
I'll get back to you.

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4 Reasons Text-Enabling Your Landline is Essential

Make sure your texting platform is connected to your landline number. It's not only possible, it's a better look to your patients.

BY JUSTIN EVERETTE

When adopting a platform to text appointment reminders and other important information to your patients, you have

a choice. You can go with messages sent from a short code — that five or six-digit non-sensical stream of numbers that looks like it was generated at random. (Spoiler Alert: It was.) Or, you can take your game up a notch in terms of the patient experience and have those texts sent directly from your practice's landline phone number.

You might be thinking that using a short code has worked for you in the past, so what's the problem? Well, a short code isn't necessarily bad, it just isn't the best option. Those five or six digits in your short code

don't have any relation to your practice, they were picked randomly and assigned to you. Your patients don't know your short code from the one their pharmacy uses to let them know their prescription is ready.

Moreover, short codes are generally associ-

ated with automated messages, not the personalized texts your practice wants to be sending.

Still not convinced that texting from your existing practice landline is better than using a short code? Here are a few more nuggets that might help you see the light:

Well, a short code isn't necessarily bad, it just isn't the best option. Those five or six digits in your short code don't have any relation to your practice, they were picked randomly and assigned to you.

YOU WON'T LOOK LIKE A SPAMMER.

Even if you're texting a patient for a totally legitimate reason (which *of course* you are), any text that's delivered to a patient from a five-digit short code looks like spam. It just

does. In a time where patients are thirsting for deeper connections with their healthcare providers, the spammy short code approach isn't a good look for your practice.

EVERY TEXT IS A BRANDING OPPORTUNITY.

You spend a lot of time (or pay someone to spend a lot of time) fine-tuning your website to make sure you're making a great first impression for patients. You focus on getting amazing reviews from your current patients. You rock it out on social media. Yet if we look at where you'll connect with patients most often outside of their visits, it's these seemingly simple texts. Text-enable your phone number to give these touches the same attention you give your website, your reviews, and every other practice marketing element.

IT DOESN'T TAKE ANYTHING EXTRA.

In fact, it takes less effort than you are already putting in. Instead of listing two numbers on your website, one to call and a short code to text, how much easier would it be to just give one phone number and let patients know they

can call or text it. Including this on every email you send, and every conversation you have with patients doesn't take any extra time, but it lets your patients know they only need to remember one phone number to connect with you — no matter which method they prefer.

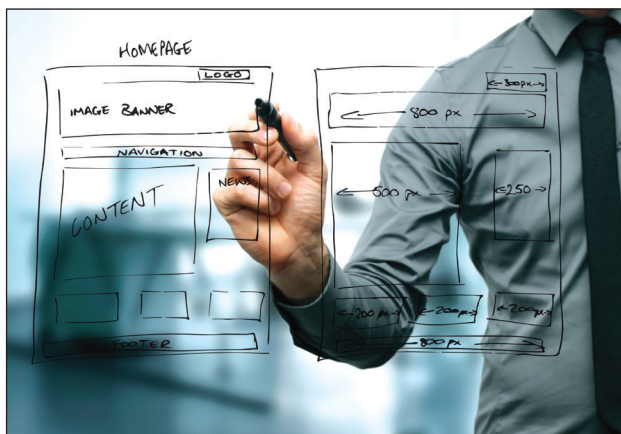
You spend a lot of time (or pay someone to spend a lot of time) fine-tuning your website to make sure you're making a great first impression for patients. You focus on getting amazing reviews from your current patients. You rock it out on social media. Yet if we look at where you'll connect with patients most often outside of their visits, it's these seemingly-simple texts.

BECAUSE YOU CAN.

That's huge because this wasn't always the case. Everything you've read to this point about *why* you need to text-enable your phone number should make total sense, but in the past, you didn't have the opportunity to do it. It wasn't even an option. It now is, and it doesn't cost extra to add another branding element to your patient com-

munication and prevent yourself from potentially looking like a spammer.

Justin Everett serves as Solutionreach's vice president of marketing, overseeing the company's messaging and communications efforts. Justin has extensive experience in the patient engagement and patient relationship management space, having worked in the industry for over 12 years. Justin is a graduate of the University of Alabama and holds a master's of arts in advertising and public relations. Follow him [@justineverette](https://twitter.com/justineverette).



7 Essential Elements for Your Practice Website

You only get one chance at a first impression, here are seven must-haves for a successful and engaging practice website homepage.

BY MICHAEL WOO-MING, MD

It goes without saying that you need to have a website for your practice. You have ten seconds to convince the average internet

user to stay on your website, how you present yourself online can determine whether someone chooses to visit your clinic. If a prospective patient spends significant time looking for what they need, they will move on to your competition. Having worked with hundreds of doctors and reviewed countless websites, here are seven must-have items patients are looking for when seeking healthcare providers online.

Services: When describing your medical services, it is best to understand the difference between benefits and features. Features represent the factual descriptions of the service, while benefits describe the

things a patient would gain upon purchasing the service. Let's take the example of a car. A feature of a car would be anti-lock brakes

or power steering, whereas the benefit is that you are keeping your family safe on the road. If you are a bariatric surgeon, offering lap band surgery to reduce a patient's BMI would be considered a feature. The benefit to the patient would be to transform their life both physically and emotionally.

About Us: Although you may have been in practice for 28 years, that fact alone may not impress your potential patient. What

You have ten seconds to convince the average internet user to stay on your website, how you present yourself online can determine whether someone chooses to visit your clinic. If a prospective patient spends significant time looking for what they need, they will move on to your competition.

the patient wants to know is why they should choose you over the competition. How you separate yourself from your competitors is known as your unique selling proposition or USP. If you need help defining what your USP is, here are some questions you can ask yourself:

- What does your practice do?
- Why did you start your practice?
- What do you enjoy most about your practice?
- What makes your practice different from others that provide similar services?

A prospective patient will gain more insight on your practice with a well-written 'About Us' page that answers those questions.

Contact Us and Hours of Operation:

This page is pretty straightforward. You want to list your best phone number and email address, as well as hours of operation. A current trend is communication via texting. This is especially useful if you have millennials in your practice. You may also want to improve patient reach through social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. If you have the resources to communicate, this can be a valuable marketing strategy.

Maps: The front page of every practice website should have the location of your practice via Google Maps or MapQuest. You can go a step further and add driving directions from the most common routes taken by your patient population.

Trust Badges: These are [badges](#) on your website that use third party associations to assure patients of your practice's credibility. Some examples are [McAfee Secure](#) and [TRUSTe](#). At my practice, we make a point of subscribing to the Better Business Bureau and add a prominent link on the bottom of our website where a visitor can view our current rating. Any credible associations or

certifications that you or your practice belong to should be properly displayed.

Testimonials:

Positive reviews and testimonials are something you should always be collecting from your patients. Everyone loves a good success story. Using video patient testimonials can add a strong sense of authenticity that written testimonials can't match.

Content: Search engines love new content, and having your own practice blog will help attract

new patients to your clinic. Announcing a new service, your opinion on relevant public health concerns, or promoting your latest event is something you need to do consistently.

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Michael Woo-Ming, MD MPH, is a family physician / entrepreneur, and founder of Rep-MD.com, a medical marketing consultancy firm helping physicians and clinics improve their ROI and increase their practice revenue, by attracting new patients via the Internet.



Are Your Patients Hearing You?

You might not realize it, but your patients want you to text them. This includes patients of all ages.

BY LEA CHATHAM

Technology in our world is always changing and improving. The latest-and-greatest item of the month can quickly

become slow and outdated. And of course as technology changes, the way people use it to communicate also changes.

Phones used to be connected to a wall in the kitchen, and if someone called and missed you, they had to call back. Then, we added answering machines — remember those? — and messages were checked when people got home. Then, came the introduction of cell phones. What a wonder — and a bit of a pain. Suddenly, you could reach people anywhere and they were carrying on conversations wherever they happened to be.

But things are a little different now. People are constantly on their phones and holding conversations, but not many of them are

actually speaking with another person. How is that possible? Because most of these conversations are actually happening through text messages. Thank goodness, now we don't have to listen to everyone else's conversations. Actually calling someone on the phone is becoming an outdated and ineffective way to communicate.

We've come so far from the days of three hour phone calls, that phone calls even feel intrusive. This is true with our business relationships as well as our personal ones. As people's expectation for

People are constantly on their phones and holding conversations, but not many of them are actually speaking with another person. How is that possible? Because most of these conversations are actually happening through text messages.

communicating with their friends changes, they are starting to expect the same thing from their healthcare providers. Patients don't want to stop everything they are doing to answer their phone, so as a result, they don't. In fact, about 90 percent of people just don't answer their phone, according to a report from mobile intelligence marketing platform provider Dynmark on big data. This is especially true for the newest — and biggest — demographic, millennials. Millennials actually believe calling someone on the phone can be rude. One millennial explained this reasoning to *The Wall Street Journal*, saying that calling someone “without e-mailing first can make it seem as though you're prioritizing your needs over theirs.”

Text messaging is far less “in your face” than calling. A text message is something patients of all ages can look at and respond to whenever they have a free minute. Most people check their texts pretty frequently. About 98 percent of text messages sent are read, according to the Dynmark report. If you want to get your message to your patients, your best bet is to send it in a way they will see, through a text.

Texting seems like a natural solution for your younger patients, but can be a great

way to communicate with patients of any age. You might be surprised to learn that the stats for people over the age of 65 who text closely mirrors the stats for all age groups, [according to the Dynmark report](#), with about 94 percent of seniors who own smartphones texting (about 97 percent of all smartphone users text). Making assumptions about your patients' communication prefer-

ences can mean you won't always be able to connect with them or give them the information they need.

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Lea Chatham is the Director, Content Marketing, at Solutionreach, the company that is revolutionizing the healthcare experience for providers and their patients. She is responsible for developing educational resources to help

medical practices improve the patient provider relationship. Lea spent over five years leading engagement at a small integrated health system. She also has 15 years of experience developing educational content for leading practice management and EHR companies. Lea specializes in simplifying information about healthcare and healthcare technology for physicians, practice staff, and patients. Follow her [@leachatham](#).



Improve Patient Access to Your Medical Practice

You don't need practice advice, software, or seminars to make patients happy and loyal. You just need to be there when they need you. Here's how.

BY JAMES DOULGERIS

On a recent morning, like pretty much every morning, my e-mail inbox was full of pitches for seminars, webinars, consulting, software, marketing, and hand-

books on improving patient engagement, customer service, patient relations, and a host of related treatments for symptoms that can be cured with a smile and a little common sense. Bet yours was, too.

The one thing those digital bromides missed completely is what patients want most — for you to be there when they need you.

Access to care is *overwhelmingly* the top patient complaint, and desire. If that seems like an impossible wish to fill in your overburdened, rushed, and demanding schedule, you are missing the solution, an opportunity and insurance to preserve your independence.

The old “doc-in-a-box” is now a corporate cookie cutter “NP-in-a-box.” The looming threat about how low-cost hospital and chain store mini-clinics will cause everything from patient poaching to relationship dilu-

tion to disruption in continuity of care is only seeing a glass as half full without realizing that you own the house that it's in.

You already own the box and you have a built-in advantage: you and your patient base.

Whether or not you decide to put strategies into place to extend your practice's services, at least do these things:

The looming threat about how low-cost hospital and chain store mini-clinics will cause everything from patient poaching to relationship dilution to disruption in continuity of care is only seeing a glass as half full without realizing that you own the house that it's in.

- Always keep a slot or two open each morning and afternoon for patients that need to be seen now; they will be filled or you will run on time, not a bad outcome either way.

- Educate your patients as to what an emergency is, and is not, when you relentlessly promote your new accessibility policy.
- When you say what you will do, do what you say. Virtually every patient is paying out of pocket for your services to one extent or another; most whole dollar. Their expectations have changed accordingly.

Now for the strategies to employ as an extension of your practice:

Strategy 1: “Call or Text Us First!”

Whether you use a texting or answering service or forward non-office hour calls to a designee’s cell phone, your office should be the first call, e-mail, or text a patient makes (texting is the best option — and a designated phone that is passed on to on-call personnel makes it easy, immediate, and less intrusive).

Strategy 2: Extend office hours. If you are a primary-care provider, you are the most vulnerable, especially if you are in a value-based program. Losing control of downstream dollars is money out of your pocket. Losing patients to other, more convenient

providers will be your undoing. It’s a new world, and it will be dominated by ease of access to care. Use the first strategy as cover.

Strategy 3: Transform your office into a dual urgent care. Really, this is just an extension of your practice and triage, but you

get paid a premium for providing the service, and, your patients will love you.

Obviously, this is just brushing the surface. If you don’t know what to do, you can easily find a peer or consultant to help you.

If you don’t want to do it, well, you’ll be bumping into your patients at the local big-box, pharmacy, or grocery store a lot more frequently. Just look for them at the in-store clinic.

One last thing: promote, promote, promote. The local NP-in-a-box will.

James Doulgeris *is the CEO of Osler Health Management, the management service organization for Osler Health IPA, a national physician and provider network. He has served in the CEO role in hospitals, large physician systems, medical device companies and as a healthcare turnaround specialist over his 40 year career in the industry.*

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Patient Relationship Management

Solutionreach gives you the power to deliver personalized messages to each of your patients. With easy-to-use tools that do everything from automating appointment reminders and recall notifications to sending customized newsletters promoting your services. Solutionreach integrates quickly and easily with existing office systems, measurably reducing costs and streamlining office workflows.

Solutionreach helps you:

- Increase revenue
- Eliminate no-shows
- Reactivate lost patients
- Promote special services
- Improve patient satisfaction
- Generate new patients



Smartphones Text Messaging and HIPAA Compliance

With smartphone use in healthcare on the rise — both by patients and providers — there are important steps to take to avoid a HIPAA violation.

BY DAVA STEWART

According to the Pew Research center, [nearly two-thirds of Americans own smartphones](#). People, including clinicians, are generally comfortable accessing information, sending text messages, recording information and scheduling, among other things, using a phone. However, in the professional healthcare setting, use of a personal smartphone or other mobile device can present challenges in remaining compliant with the regulations of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

In light of the recent announcement from The Joint Commission that [using text messaging to submit orders](#) is now acceptable within certain parameters, it is fair to say that technology has evolved to the point where there are fewer barriers for practices to use text messaging and other mobile applications. However, there are a few important steps to take that may increase the likelihood of remaining compliant.

One of the most important aspects of adding any new technology to a practice is to make sure that the people using it are happy about it. Al Villarin, MD, CMIO at the Burwood Group, an IT consulting firm headquartered in Chicago, says it all begins with a contract between the technological and the clinical. In order for adoption to take place across an organization, the new tool needs to fit into the existing workflow, and the best way to make sure that happens is to involve clinicians from the beginning.

Tim Needham, executive director for the healthcare solutions delivery practice at Burwood Group agrees. “Any communication system will only succeed as much as you can involve all participants,” he says. When physicians are asked to use additional tools that do not deliver additional value, they are less efficient, adds Needham. “They default back to the app they know,” which could be an unsecured SMS platform.

Perhaps equally important, only technologies that are shown to be HIPAA compliant should be under consideration. Since most vendors have been focused on compliance for the last several years, most of the tools they have developed are compliant. It's likely to be more difficult to find a tool that will be widely adopted across the organization and will also increase efficiency.

Once a platform is chosen, the next critical step is making sure that everyone is using it. Needham poses an interesting question: What if a vendor has done their part and made a tool that is compliant, and the practice as an organization has chosen to implement that tool, but after six months no one is using it? He says that any application under consideration should have an "intuitive auditing or reporting tool," and reports can show both how individuals are using it, and can identify any out of policy usage.

Health systems have a role to play, as well, because they are in a position to "fund a common tool," according to Needham, "as well as to bring additional value through things like physician rosters, care teams and availability and status notifications." Although independent practices can certainly benefit from the resources and support provided by

Since most vendors have been focused on compliance for the last several years, most of the tools they have developed are compliant. It's likely to be more difficult to find a tool that will be widely adopted across the organization and will also increase efficiency.

health systems, there is a price to pay. Villarin says that one of the ways health systems handle security of personal devices is through a mobility device management system [MDM], which "creates an automated firewall, so that if a phone leaves the hospital it can no longer access certain things."

However, one protocol most health systems have in place is that the administrator of an MDM can wipe all information from a device if it is lost or stolen. Villarin says, "It's a point of contention, looking through a health system's eyes," and in most cases it is mandatory. "It's not about the physician, it's about the patient," he said.

Needham points out that, for independent practices, the situation can be particularly difficult. "If you refer to three different hospitals in your area, you have three different systems coming at you. It's a very uncomfortable position to be in." Villarin adds that the way in which regulations are issued complicates the problem. "The government tells the healthcare systems to comply, but they don't tell them how. That's what's missing."

Dava Stewart is a freelancer writer based in Chattanooga, Tenn.



Text Messaging and Patients: Benefits and Considerations

As convenient as text messaging may be, there are certain issues for healthcare providers to consider when using any communication method with patients. Here are seven to think about.

BY ERICKA ADLER

Texting is convenient and something patients want. However, as useful as messaging may be, there are certain

issues for healthcare providers to consider when using any communication method with patients, including the following:

1. Be certain the number from which you text is not your personal number unless you intend to provide patients such access. Instead, text from a computer or consider a service that de-identifies the sender's number.
2. Remember that just because you have a patient's mobile telephone number in the record, this does not mean the patient has provided consent for you to send text messages. Specific consent should be obtained

from each patient to not only receive texts, but also the types of text messages that are acceptable. A patient may want to receive

appointment reminders or test results, but not welcome surveys or marketing materials. A practice must also make it easy for a patient to terminate consent, by text or otherwise.

3. There are federal communication regulations which prohibit

sending of unwanted text message to wireless phone numbers if the messages are sent using an auto-dialer. This law and others implicated by mass texting schemes should be reviewed with counsel.

Be certain the number from which you text is not your personal number unless you intend to provide patients such access. Instead, text from a computer or consider a service that de-identifies the sender's number.

4. Determine whether texts received by patients will result in a charge to them under their cellular plan, and make sure the patient is aware of such charge as part of their consent. Some practices also charge a fee to patients who participate in a practice program to manage medications or particular medical issues. All such fees should be clearly explained and agreed to in writing by the patient.
5. Regularly update the telephone number maintained for every patient since numbers change frequently. Patients should be regularly reminded to update this information with the practice at every office visit and each time they call the practice. Remember, the receipt of a text intended for a patient by another third party can pose a privacy risk.
6. How secure is text messaging and how is that risk being managed by your practice? Text messages can reside on your mobile device even if you think they are deleted. This information could also be exposed if the device is lost, stolen, or recycled. It's important that this risk be explained to patients. I highly recommend some authentication or password be required for patients to access text messages. A practice should also consider specific services that offer secure or encrypted texting.
7. Under HIPAA, protected health information includes all information "used, in whole or in part, by or for the covered entity to make de-

Regularly update the telephone number maintained for every patient since numbers change frequently. Patients should be regularly reminded to update this information with the practice at every office visit and each time they call the practice.

cisions about individuals." This means that if any information gained from text messages between the parties is used to make decisions about the patient's care, these messages may be subject to the patient's rights under HIPAA. As a result, the practice may need to save the texts it is sending/receiving in the patient record. If access to these text

messages cannot be provided to patients in order for them to review and/or amend the messages, there may be a risk of noncompliance with the law.

There is no doubt that messaging can be used effectively to collect patient information, pro-

vide greater oversight over a patient's medical condition and even provide tips and announcements to patients. Patients would even benefit from reminders to take medication, schedule follow-up appointments, or take care of a delinquent bill. However effective the use of texting may be, a practice should not get excited about its potential use without taking the time to create an effective and legal texting strategy.

Ericka L. Adler is a partner at the firm of Roetzel & Andress. Her primary practice focus is in the areas of regulatory and transactional healthcare law. Ericka advises physicians and other providers regarding day-to-day practice management, physician contract matters, compliance and other business issues.



Three Features of Great Texting Platforms

Thinking of adding texting capabilities to your practice's service offerings? Here are three features you should include.

BY LEA CHATHAM

Texting. It's become such a part of our lives that it's hard to even remember a time before we texted. Texting is the go-to method

for communication with friends, coworkers, and family members every day. A staggering 560 billion texts are sent each and every month, [according to TextRequest](#). In fact, text messaging is the most used data service in the world, [according to data from Nielsen](#).

Why is it so darn popular? Basically, it's just an easy way to stay in touch. Find yourself in an elevator? A crowded store? Public transportation? It is much less intrusive to simply respond to a text message

than it is to talk on the phone. But texting is not just for personal communication any more. It is becoming widespread in businesses as

well. Mechanics, accountants, grocery stores, and many other businesses text their customers to communicate with them on a regular basis.

Texting has become such a normal part of

Texting has become such a normal part of everyday life that many patients are wondering why their healthcare providers aren't jumping on the texting bandwagon.

everyday life that many patients are wondering why their healthcare providers aren't jumping on the texting bandwagon.

Cast aside your misconceptions, implementing a texting solution in your practice

doesn't have to be difficult. In fact, if you know what to look for, it can actually be pretty easy. Below are three features to look for in a texting solution for your practice:

1-Brand-specific

2-Two-way initiation

3-Easy access to messages history

Keep Your Brand

You've worked really hard on building your practice and your brand. When you're choosing a texting platform, you don't want something that will negate all that hard work. Your patients have already saved your contact information to their phone, so choose a texting platform that will allow you to keep your existing phone number. Don't make your patients learn a new one or memorize a short code, keep things simple by continuing to use your practice's landline phone number. As an added bonus, if you keep the same phone number, you won't have to change the contact information on your existing marketing materials.

Two-Way Initiation

Building connections with your patients takes more than just sending an appointment reminder. It's about having conversations with them. A texting platform should be just as easy for the patient to use as it is for your practice to use. If it lets your practice send messages to your patients that is great, but one that will let your patients make the first

move and send messages to you is even better. Think of how many phone calls can be avoided if your patients can text to confirm their appointment time, or get directions to your office instead of calling you.

Easy Access to Message History

Just like when you look at texts on your phone, texting in your office should give you easy access to all the past messages between two people. This way, no matter who in your office

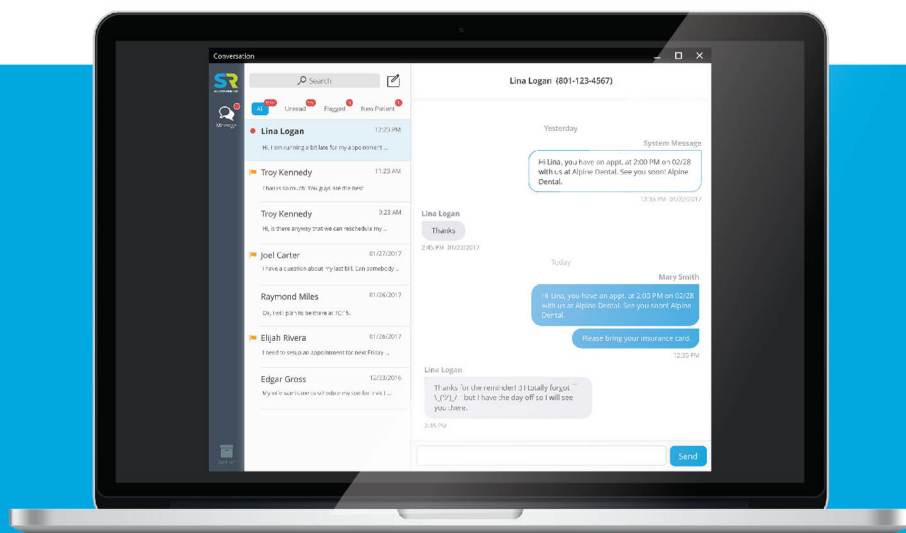
is responding to a text, they can read back through previous messages and understand the context. It's that simple. And you don't have to have one person dedicated to answering text messages. Anyone in your office can answer any of the texts that come in.

Building connections with your patients takes more than just sending an appointment reminder. It's about having conversations with them.

Lea Chatham is the Director, Content Marketing, at Solutionreach, the company that is revolutionizing the healthcare experience for providers and their patients. She is responsible for developing educational resources to help medical practices improve the patient provider relationship. Lea spent over five years leading engagement at a small integrated health system. She also has 15 years of experience developing educational content for leading practice management and EHR companies. Lea specializes in simplifying information about healthcare and healthcare technology for physicians, practice staff, and patients.



SR Conversations allows you to text back and forth with your patients, right from your desktop computer! It's seamless, easy-to-use, and your patients and staff will love it.



More reasons your practice and your patients will love SR Conversations:



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Reduce phone calls by 50% or more



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Patients simply text, no app or software

SR Conversations is so much more than simple two-way texting. It's transforming the way you connect with your patients.