

What Patients Want to Hear: Top Five Influential Components of Successful Telephone Conversions

Based on survey results, this article identifies the elements that practice staff can incorporate in fielding telephone inquiries to increase the likelihood of callers scheduling an appointment.

By LAUNA HANKINS

In light of heightened attention around the importance of a patient’s first impression, it is essential that front office staff be impeccably trained in telephone skills. Understanding and effectively delivering the information that patients want — and need — should never be underestimated. Proactive physicians recognize and appreciate that maximizing telephone inquiry opportunities is the foundation for a successful, sustainable practice.

When potential patients dial a practice’s number, what do they want to know? What information influences callers to make an appointment? What inspires callers to select a specific practice? With the help of insightful statistics and examples in this article, practices will be one step closer to being able to answer those important questions.

Survey Says

Since 2008, BSM Consulting and Allergan have conducted a telephone mystery shopping program for practices nationwide. In early 2015, the program’s data collection was enhanced, with added specific information being collected to more effectively demonstrate what call components have the most impact on callers who ultimately commit to an appointment. Based on data collected from more than 2,000 survey calls to 372 practices across the United States, several factors that directly contribute to successful conversion have been illuminated. (Please note that calls were made to the following types of practices: 61.1 percent specialized in medical aesthetics, 23.9 percent were medical dermatology practices, and the remaining 15 percent were medical spas. In addition, approximately 65 percent of the calls made were for facial injectable treatments while

34 percent were for various surgical and non-surgical procedures.)

At the end of each mystery shopping call, the surveyor (acting as a prospective patient) had to decide if he or she would have made an appointment with the practice. Of the 2,000 calls conducted, 39.8 percent of the callers/prospective patients agreed or strongly agreed that they would have made an appointment based on the quality of the call while 38.2 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that they would have scheduled an appointment. Meanwhile, 22 percent remained undecided.

Using these results, it is possible to determine the key, influential factors and, perhaps most important, identify what makes a caller say yes to an appointment with a practice — potentially your practice.

Top Components

While there are a variety of factors to evaluate, the survey program identified the five most influential patient committing components — engaging the caller, credentialing the procedure/product, credentialing the practice, creating excitement around the procedure or product, and providing a testimonial (see table “Saying Yes” below).

Please note that there are several factors that may impact the validity of the results including, but not limited to, the fact that each surveyor may interpret the elements differently. This means that a given caller may place heavier weight on some call elements rather than others, independently and when compared to other callers. In addition, the relationship between specific call elements and the call resulting in an appointment may not be a direct correlation. As such, practices are strongly encouraged to view the report results and correlations as

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Saying Yes: The Five Most Influential Components to Patient Commitment

Rank	Report Question	Yes*	Correlation*
1	The staff member answered questions with probing questions. <i>(Engagement)</i>	16.3%	93.1%
2	The staff member credentialed the procedure/product. <i>(Credential)</i>	25.6%	89.3%
3	The staff member credentialed the practice. <i>(Credential)</i>	18.0%	89.1%
4	The staff member created excitement around the procedure or product. <i>(Excitement)</i>	29.0%	88.3%
5	The staff member provided a testimony. <i>(Testimonial)</i>	18.1%	84.8%

*Yes: Percentage of telephone mystery shopping callers who were engaged by staff in the specific influencing component.

*Correlation: Percentage of “engaged” callers (Yes, above) who indicated they would have made an appointment.

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directional in nature. With that in mind, however, it still appears there are several key components that, when executed properly, increase the likelihood that a caller will make an appointment with a practice. In order of influence, below is a look at each of the most impactful components:

Engagement. While it appears the most important element is engagement — to actually engage in a conversation with the caller by asking him or her questions — only 16.3 percent of callers in our survey indicated that the staff member attempted to engage them by asking questions to better understand their needs and concerns. Meaning that around 84 percent of the calls were basic question-and-answer sessions where the potential patient asked a question to which the staff member provided a brief answer with silence ensuing ... until the caller asked another question. Of the calls where interactive engagement did occur, there was a 93.1 percent positive correlation that the caller would have made an appointment with the practice. When the call is conversational and engaging (i.e., using questions like: “Have you had the treatment before?” or, “What area are you interested in treating”), the staff member shows the caller that he or she is actively listening and cares about the individual’s needs, which leads to better rapport and increased call conversion.

Credentialing the procedure/product. Properly credentialing the procedure or product is important when explaining to callers why they should choose the practice for a specific offering. Of the 25.6 percent of shoppers who said they received credentialing around the procedure or product, 89.3 percent responded that they would have made an appointment with the practice. One important way to credential a procedure is to tell the caller how many procedures the provider has performed. This delivers strong reassurance, since consumers frequently associate quantity with quality (i.e., the more procedures a practice performs, the better it must be in execution). In addition, when a staff member relays how pleased patients are with their outcomes, the effectiveness of the procedure, or how minimal downtime is a benefit, the employee is providing emotional assurance that the treatment is worthwhile.

Credentialing the practice. Of the 18 percent of shoppers who said they received credentialing of the practice, 89.1 percent indicated they would have made an appointment. Understanding what makes the practice

Smile: Delivery is Key

While having product/treatment knowledge is important, **how** the information is delivered by a staff member to the caller is really the secret to a successful telephone-initiated conversion. It follows the adage, “It’s not what you say, but **how** you say it.” Providing the sought after information with a smile and a friendly, welcoming tone goes a long way with prospective patients.

unique from others is an important factor in a caller’s decision-making process. It is critical that the staff member confidently conveys that the potential patient has, in fact, called the right place. Reassuring the patient that he or she will be in good hands, or that the practice has a 90-plus percent patient satisfaction rate, for example, is a way to credential the practice.

Excitement. When a staff member created excitement around the procedure or product, there was an 88.3 percent correlation with callers stating they would have made an appointment. While excitement was only indicated to have occurred in 29 percent of the calls, it was an influencing factor. When there is passion behind what a staff member is saying, it’s infectious and callers are positively influenced. For example, stating to the caller, “Well, you called the right place. We have wonderful providers who will take great care of you.” Or, “I can assure you, you will be in good hands. We provide beautiful and natural outcomes.” Affirming statements such as these create excitement and emotional reassurance that the caller is choosing the right practice.

Testimonials. While only 18.1 percent of staff members provided a personal testimonial of some nature, those who did had a positive impact on the result of the call. When a staff member provided testimony, there was an 84.8 percent correlation with callers who indicated they would have scheduled an appointment. Simply stated, when a personal story was shared, it helped educate the patient and made the interaction more personalized. Callers are seeking information and emotional assurance when they call, and having someone to talk to who has had the procedure provides comfort, inspiration, and answers.

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Real and Meaningful Conversation

As the data reveals, callers want to have a real and meaningful conversation with a staff member who is genuinely engaged and expresses excitement about having them as a patient of the practice. To move forward (make an appointment), callers want to be reassured that they have called the right place, that they will be in good

hands, and that the treatment or procedure is one that is regularly performed by an experienced team of professionals. All these call elements are interrelated in procuring a conversion. To be the practice callers choose, it is important that staff understands what is important to potential patients and what influences their decision.

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