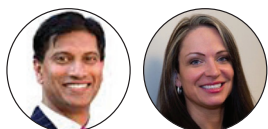


Technology to Improve Your Patient Consult and Experience



Look for ways to optimize technology for the good of your practice.

BY SUNEEL CHILUKURI, MD AND KIMBERLY CAMPBELL

>> Technology needs to be the primary focus for a practice looking to improve its patient experience. Customer experience technology provides consistent, efficient interaction between your practice and your patients. This includes websites, follow up, and any automated on-site services. By implementing new technology in your dermatology practice, you will be better able to serve your patients in a variety of ways.

ENGAGE PATIENTS WITH CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE TECHNOLOGY

Technology is a disruptive force in dermatology, and practices that utilize it effectively will be able to engage with their patients on multiple levels. Practices that put customer experience technology at the forefront create highly engaged customers by maximizing their interaction with the patient using tools that include:

- A website highlighting services and providing highly visible contact information for your practice
- Social media profiles, before and after imaging software, and apps to engage your patients
- In-office targeted digital media
- Automatic appointment scheduling and follow up options
- Mobile treatments and in-home care for people with mobility issues.

For the patient, these technological components enhance the experience, either by simplifying the process or bringing your practice to the front of their minds on a more regular basis. Highly engaged customers buy more frequently, spend more per purchase, and have a higher annual value (compared to the average customer).

SIMPLIFY THE PATIENT EXPERIENCE

Patient experience begins before the initial contact when the patient discovers your practice. Nowadays, this is for the most part an experience that involves technology—whether

by search engine, your website, or online targeted ads. Using technology to get the initial consults will help your practice stand out.

In some cases, a simple website update that focuses on patient acquisition is all that is needed. Often referrals, credentials, and reviews can be better used in conjunction with apps or digital marketing devices designed to get the information to a wider audience.

Your website should be a primary channel for branding, education, and patient acquisition. Make sure that it clearly outlines the treatments and services you offer. One of the most important aspects of your website is making sure it is easy to capture email and book a consult. Consider offering a complimentary service, an informational document (i.e., book chapter, useful skin care article, etc.), or in-depth access to before and after photos by having a prospective client enter his/her contact information.

Your practice's information should be highly visible. Ensure that your practice phone number and address are seen on every page. In addition, make sure that your practice contact information on Google, Yelp, My Business, as well as other directories and resources, matches your website. Otherwise, you may rank lower on internet searches.

GAIN LEADS, ENHANCE PATIENT COMMUNICATION

Developing patient/physician relationships, maintaining trust, and creating brand awareness for your dermatology practice requires constant communication that can be enhanced with technology, such as social media. According to We Are Social's "Digital in 2017" report, global social media use has increased by 21 percent in one year alone and now reaches at least 2.8 billion users globally. That means 37 percent of the world's population are active social media users. Social media provides a unique opportunity for practices to unify how their patients experience their brands, especially considering how fragmented a customer journey can be today.



A screen built into the wall at Dr. Chilukuri's reception desk allows for patient education.

For social media, focus on offering valuable content to your patients so they see you as a resource outside of your practice. New and existing patients have a higher likelihood of interacting with posts that incorporate photo and video, so use these platforms to share patient stories. People will be able to better identify with these highlighted patients. Make sure you or an assigned team member rapidly interacts with anyone who comments or direct messages you via your social media handles.

In addition to patient communication, utilize technology, such as online scheduling and online data entry. Consider saving one or two same-day appointments for those who are using your online scheduling service. In addition, partner with your EMR system to allow and encourage patients to enter their data (especially insurance information) online. This increases your front office's efficiency by having the most up-to-date information to perform insurance verification. In addition, by linking to your EMR portal, connected patients will have constant access to their medical data, such as biopsy or lab results. At the heart of online scheduling and client management is enhanced efficiency, customer loyalty and, ultimately, more revenue.

CREATE OUT-OF-OFFICE ACCESSIBILITY

Telemedicine has gone way beyond conference calls. While patients are slow to adopt telemedicine, virtual visits are increasing, due to the lack of availability of dermatologists in some regions. Combine that with rapid technological improvements, and telemedicine has extensive potential. Market research firm Forrester predicts there will be more virtual visits to healthcare providers in the United States than in-person visits by the end of 2020.

The arrival of fast 5G wireless network has opened up new possibilities for telemedicine. 5G helps increase image quality and definition, crucial for medical professionals to either provide personalized consultations or relay accurate and detailed

TELEMEDICINE BENEFITS include:

- > Good for skin-related and superficial procedures
- > Affordable and time saving
- > Enhances customer experience (reduces repeat visits)
- > Ideal for younger patients
- > Broadens services and accessibility

diagnosis. 5G cellular networks also greatly reduce latency—the time it takes to get a response to information sent—of wireless networks. Images and data are relayed almost instantly.

Telemedicine is good for patients because it increases access and decreases time. See the call-out for other telemedicine benefits.

According to John F. Nigriny, MD, who conducted a study on telemedicine in plastic surgery practice, most patients embraced telemedicine after they experienced it but not before (*Plast Reconstr Surg*. 144(2):507-516). While younger people were more likely than older patients to embrace the thought of having a telemedicine visit, nearly 75 percent of all the patients surveyed before their surgeries said they would prefer to have a traditional in-person visit for their follow-up appointments. In a follow-up survey, nearly all patients said they were satisfied with their telemedicine visits. A total of 96 percent said all their questions were answered during the visit and they would use the telehealth option for future follow-up care.

Implementing automated services is one of the best ways to enhance patient experience with technology. Reminders, specials, and information can be scheduled and sent to patients automatically. Reminders for things like skin checks, birthdays, product refills, and procedures can be made easily available to patients to view, purchase, and schedule as required.

GET STARTED

Get started by adding technology to your dermatology practice where it will have the most positive impact. Examine your current practice to uncover where opportunities are for automation. Review technologies to see how they address your patient engagement challenges, then identify three areas of particular importance for you, your practice, and your patients. Let 2020 be your most successful year. ■

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