



Effective Internet and Web Revenue Drivers

By Henrik Nielsen, MSc
President of Blueprint Solutions

Hearing healthcare practices across the globe are implementing new, modern ways to communicate with their patients. This article will review how new communication methods and Internet services can drive incremental revenue to your practice.

Let me start by debunking the myth that our target patient population does not use information technology or access the Internet. According to a

US Census survey conducted in 2015¹, 70.9% of households, with a head of household 65 years or older, have a computer in their home and 63.1% of households, in the 65+ age group, have Internet access (this being the lowest percentage of any age group). It is only reasonable to deduce that that number is higher today.

It is no coincidence that a number of Internet-based marketing initiatives are seeing a dramatic increase in popularity and revenue impact. Let's look at the research and see how

online reviews, online appointment bookings, utilizing patient data for re-sell opportunities, and drip marketing can positively affect a hearing healthcare practice's revenue.



ONLINE REVIEWS

According to a survey conducted by Search Engine Land², 88% of consumers say they trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations. However, this trust is only sustained if there are

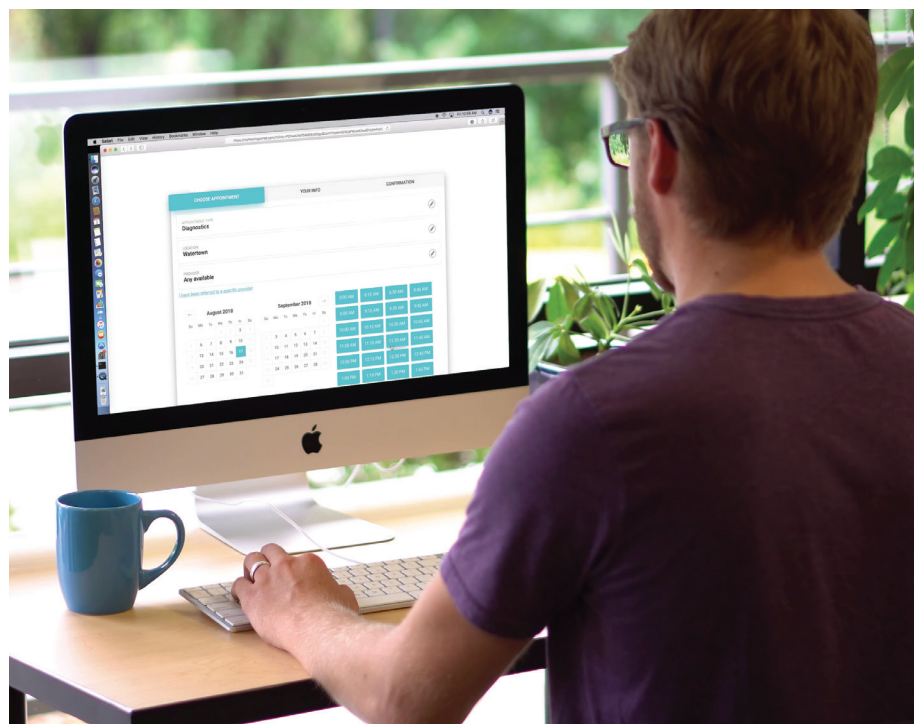
multiple reviews and the reviews are authentic. In other words, quality and quantity matter equally. This finding is supported by a Zocdoc study that found 25% of doctors with the most patient reviews received five times more appointments than the bottom 25%³. 72% of consumers say that positive reviews make them trust a local business more. 77% of patients looking for a healthcare provider will read online reviews prior to deciding to book an appointment with a provider⁴—granted this number is smaller for the hearing healthcare patient population due to difference in age distribution as compared to the population in general. However, this is still significant and cannot be ignored.

So, what about negative reviews? Most businesses will likely receive some negative reviews over time. The data indicates that patients are happy to book appointments with providers receiving some negative reviews, as long as the reviews are not overwhelmingly negative. The most important factor, and likely not surprising, is the overall star rating. As an example, an increase from a 3.5 out of 5 star average to a 4 out of 5 star average showed an increase in appointments by 37%.

Can we as consumers trust these reviews, or are they considered 'too managed' in terms of what reviews get posted? This past summer, Google tightened their policy for posting online reviews. They have set new restrictions on the filtering of content, spam, fake content, impersonation, or misrepresentation—so that consumers can more accurately rely on online reviews as a true representation of other consumers'

experiences with a local business. It is no surprise that our industry has seen a dramatic growth in the use of online reviews. Many practices I speak with report that online reviews are one of the top reasons for an increased number of new patient appointments.

appointment information to the online review service, which will then automatically send the patient an invitation to provide a review. Once put in place, your practice will start seeing online reviews generated with little to no effort on your part.



So, how does your practice engage in getting online reviews? A number of marketing companies offer services that will generate an email invitation to your patient to rate their appointment upon completion of the appointment. Once submitted by your patient, the review is posted on major sites, including Google and Yelp, as well as on your practice's website. The entire process of inviting and encouraging patients to provide online reviews can be completely automated with integration from certain office management systems (OMS). Upon completion of an appointment, the OMS will forward the patient and

It's an automated way to maximize your word-of-mouth referrals at a very low cost, especially compared with traditional consumer marketing activities, such as advertising and direct mail.

ONLINE APPOINTMENT BOOKING

Potential patients are, in increasing numbers, using the Internet for research. Not only are they paying great attention to online reviews submitted by your current patients, but they are also visiting your website at all hours of the day and night.

Continued on page 16

While your website should be a great representation of your practice, your services, and your staff, it should also allow your potential patients to commit to a visit to your practice by booking an appointment online 24/7. Our data indicates that 30% of online appointment bookings are done outside of what we consider regular business hours. Online appointment booking gives both your potential and existing patients, the ability to commit to an appointment with your practice, rather than waiting and calling when your practice is open. Additionally, your practice can then collect patient contact information for easy, paperless intake and follow up.

In today's connected world, online appointment booking is a must-have feature on your website. It signals that your practice is on the forefront with technology, and it provides options for how your patients want to interact with your practice. The best online appointment booking services give you complete control of available providers, appointment types, and appointment times that can be booked online, while also ensuring that valuable resources, like a sound booth, aren't double-booked.

LEVERAGING RE-SELL OPPORTUNITIES

Having a strategy for consistently communicating with your patients serves two purposes. First, it allows you to leverage re-sell opportunities that occur over time for each patient. Second, it ensures that your patients do not forget about your practice as their primary source for hearing healthcare. The key to effective patient marketing is the ability to deliver the right message to the right



patients at the right time. Examples of consistent communications include annual hearing evaluation recalls, birthday cards, and clean-and-check notifications. Staying in communication with your patients helps increase the chance that your patients will return to your practice for another hearing aid consultation when their hearing aid approaches a given age.

Most practices these days have an office management system (OMS) in

place. This contains essential patient data, such as past appointment history and device information, which can be used for leveraging re-sell opportunities. Your office management system should allow you to easily generate patient lists that can be used for mailings, emails, and telemarketing. Examples of effective marketing messages are warranty expiration notifications, tested-but-not-sold mailings, and technology upgrade information for patients with hearing aids 4 years

or older. The objective is not to generate mailings en masse, but to target specific patients with relevant messages. It is the relevance and timing of the communication that make it effective. A patient-marketing oriented OMS, along with a basic communication plan executed consistently is the key to getting this done. I see too many practices ignore consistent marketing to their current patient base as a way to generate incremental revenue. It is worth pointing out that the cost of acquiring a new patient in order to generate a hearing aid sale is tenfold in comparison to the cost associated with re-selling to a current patient.

AUTOMATED DRIP MARKETING

Executing a patient marketing communication plan takes discipline. How about simply automating it? We are seeing an increasing interest in marketing automation services. Marketing automation allows your practice to use predefined communications for various situations, such as a patient not seen in a year, tested not sold etc. Drip-marketing or marketing sequencing, as some will call it, allows automated correspondence to be sent from your practice to the patient through a number of emails at a set interval, each enforcing a specific message. Patients can be contacted in a combination of ways through email and/or print, with print obviously being significantly more expensive. For example, a patient identified as ‘tested, not sold’ will receive a number of emails regarding the benefits of amplification. Once the patient is fitted, the marketing sequence will stop as the ‘tested, not sold’ condition is no longer valid.

Instead, the newly-fitted patient will automatically start to receive email tips on how to get the most out of their new hearing aids.

Drip-marketing is a very powerful tool to ensure that your patients always get the right communication at the right time. Marketing automation can be integrated with some of the office management systems available, so patient data triggering different marketing sequences is automatically fed to the marketing automation system. This will fundamentally put all your patient marketing communications on autopilot.

SUMMARY

The new technologies and communication strategies covered in this article can be implemented in your practice to various degrees. A very simple first step for your practice

is to collect email addresses from your patients. This will allow you to implement new communication methods like drip-marketing. Not all patients currently have Internet access or email as stated in the beginning; however, the share of the patient population that does will continue to increase. Your practice should get ready to utilize some of the tools described. These technologies will drive incremental revenue to your practice at a low cost per touch point. Patients, in increasing numbers, prefer to have options for how they interact with your practice. Features like booking an appointment directly on your website, receiving email confirmations for recalls and appointment reminders, and easily sharing rave reviews of their appointment experience with other prospective patients can help hearing healthcare professionals increase their appointments and their revenue. ■

Henrik Nielsen, MSc, President of Blueprint Solutions



Henrik Nielsen, president of Blueprint Solutions, has over twenty years of experience within the hearing healthcare industry holding management positions in information technology, sales, marketing, and operations. He has published several articles on improving operational practice efficiency and holds a masters degree in economics. Nielsen thanks Meghan Pendley, Business Development Director at AudiologyDesign, and Bridget Fritzke, Director of Sales at Blueprint Solutions, for input for this article. Communication can be directed to henrik@blueprintsolutions.us

References

- [1] www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2017/acs/acs-37.pdf
- [2] www.searchengineland.com/88-consumers-trust-online-reviews-much-personal-recommendations-195803
- [3] www.thescript.zocdoc.com/doctors-should-leverage-online-patient-reviews/
- [4] www.thescript.zocdoc.com/how-patients-use-online-reviews/