

Use Technology to Gain New Patients and Improve Efficiency

Daniel Ruscigno

From the smartphone in your pocket to your microwave oven, advancements in technology have made almost every aspect of our lives easier. Your work life is no exception, as there has been significant growth in technology that affects the day-to-day life of an acupuncturist.

First, consider the impact of technology on your patients and potential patients. While in the past, they may have turned to the phone book to find an acupuncturist, today they turn to the Internet. So what does this mean for you? It means you need a website so that when a potential patient goes looking online, you are there to be found.

A basic website is an easy starting point; there are plenty of DIY website options and web design companies with affordable pricing. When visiting your website, potential patients want to know who you are, where you are located, what services you offer and how to get in touch with you. However, truly savvy clinics go above and beyond a basic website to grow their business by taking advantage of a current trend in healthcare: online appointment scheduling.

Online scheduling has actually been popular in other industries for years. Think of your last vacation. You likely booked both your flight and hotel online. Perhaps even your last haircut was booked online. With self-serve options becoming commonplace, many customers have grown to expect the convenient option of online scheduling. By catering to your patients' wants, you're setting yourself up for repeat business - the key to a successful clinic.

The benefits of online scheduling are not just for your patients. Often packaged with a complete practice management solution, online appointment scheduling allows your potential patient to book an appointment directly from your website. That means there is no risk of a missed call because you are with a patient and it also means that a potential patient visiting your website at 11 p.m. still has the ability to schedule an appointment, even though your office is closed. When it comes to your online calendar, the best systems are no longer local desktop applications but are rather "cloud" based, meaning you can access your schedule from anywhere - like from your home computer or smartphone.

In addition to online scheduling, practice management software will help reduce no-shows with email appointment reminders. While you may already call patients to remind them of upcoming appointments, a transition to email reminders can reduce your administrative workload by up to an hour each day - time that can be used to take on an extra appointment or towards more productive administrative work.

When your appointments are stored in an online calendar, it becomes fairly easy to keep track of your all-important repeat business. Clinics have a lot of moving parts and one business practice that often gets lost in your busy day is tracking which of your patients have not visited you recently. The more advanced practice management software packages will automatically track which of your patients are due for their next visit and send them an email to request they book

their next appointment online. This process is known as "recalls" and being able to automate this process allows you take advantage of a previously untapped business-growing strategy without any extra effort on your part.

There is a common theme to each of these features; using technology reduces the amount of manual effort required to operate your clinic, reduces stress and keeps things organized. Practice management software will keep a history of each patient, including any associated appointment notes, invoices and statements, all in one easy to find electronic file.

When thinking of electronic files, we can't ignore advancements in technology regarding insurance and the option to submit claims electronically. While many clinics choose to have their patients file their insurance claims themselves, billing insurance companies directly can attract new patients who do not want to pay up-front and wait for reimbursement.

There are three options for submitting online insurance claims: 1. Connect directly via the insurance company website; 2. Sign up for a clearinghouse which allows you to submit to several (usually thousands) of different insurance companies from one place; or 3. Sign up for a practice management software that partners with a clearinghouse so everything you need for your clinic is in one place.

Integrating new technology to improve clinic management does require you to go through a learning curve, but from the examples above, it's clear an investment in technology today will reap benefits for years to come. And with today's rapidly advancing technology, it's important to make that investment now before falling too far behind.

JUNE 2015