



The
wait is
over.

10 best practices for automating appointment management

What it takes to deliver fewer no-shows, deeper patient engagement and greater ROI.





It's time to talk about appointment management

Let's be honest. Your appointment management solution's foremost job is to get patients to keep appointments. If it doesn't do that, the problems caused by no-shows continue to mount up:

- Clinicians' time is wasted
- Patients don't get the treatment they need
- Your staff has to handle a ton of rescheduling calls
- Schedules become needlessly complicated to manage
- You miss out on revenue from canceled appointments

A good appointment management solution is one that works for you and your patients.

For you, it lets you make the most efficient use of your vital resources: your clinicians' and administrative staff's time, your facilities and your equipment.

For your patients, it means they get the care and treatment they need at the optimal time to ensure their well-being (and a great experience, to boot).

In short, an appointment management solution should make life easier for you and your patients. What it shouldn't do is perpetuate the very problems it's meant to solve. And it certainly shouldn't create new problems you didn't even have before.

10 things an appointment management solution should do

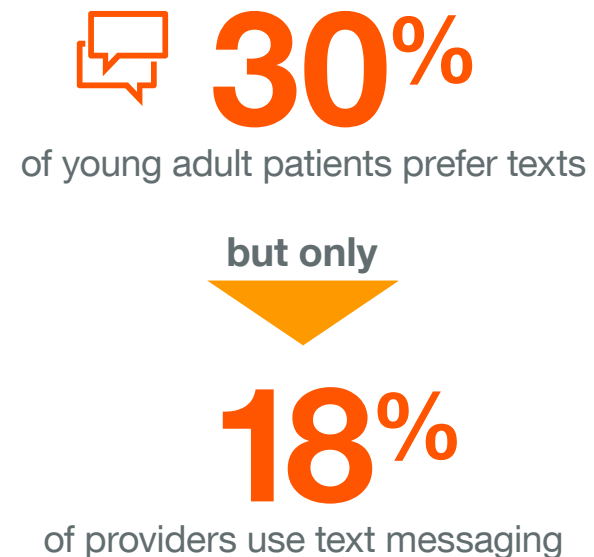
In this guide, we've listed 10 things you and your patients need an appointment management solution to do. If yours isn't currently delivering in these 10 areas, it could be time to look for an alternative. (That's a pretty strong hint to take a look at how Nuance can help — you'll find details on page 14.)

#1 Get the message to the patient in time

Patients lead busy, complicated lives, and getting a message to them at the right time isn't always easy. But it's a challenge your appointment management solution should be well-equipped to handle.

For example, if the system delivers an interactive voice message but the patient fails to answer, it should automatically shift to a

text message or email, until it reaches the patient in a convenient channel. (And, as we'll see later, the system should then start to build up a picture of which channel each patient tends to respond in, so it can get it right the first time.)



#2 Make it easy for the patient to engage

You can remind a patient of his or her appointment, but that’s only half the job. You also need to know they’re going to show up at the right time. That means giving them an easy way to reply to the message — whether to confirm they’ll be there or to let you know they can’t make it.

This is where a lot of automated reminder systems fall down — they’re “one-way-only” text-based systems that send messages but don’t understand patient responses, and patients can’t reply to these texts.

And some outbound voice messaging systems can’t distinguish between people and answering machines or voicemail, so they play the same message regardless of whether a human or a machine picks up. And if that message includes touch-tone prompts, the answering machine or voicemail system has no way of reacting, so the appointment goes unconfirmed, and patients are left frustrated and confused.

Automated, two-way patient engagement



#3 Treat every patient as an individual

In their daily lives, your patients welcome digital communications that “know” them and respect their personal preferences — and ignore those that don’t. The more your appointment management solution can learn about patients’ preferences, the more likely your patients will engage with it.

At the very least, that means contacting them in their preferred channel, in the right language and at the right time. It also means including or linking to information you know will be relevant and useful to each patient: the name of the clinician they’ll be seeing, for example, and details of any documents they might need to bring with them (while adhering to PHI/HIPAA requirements).

Contact patients when and how they prefer



In the channel of their choice



At the right time



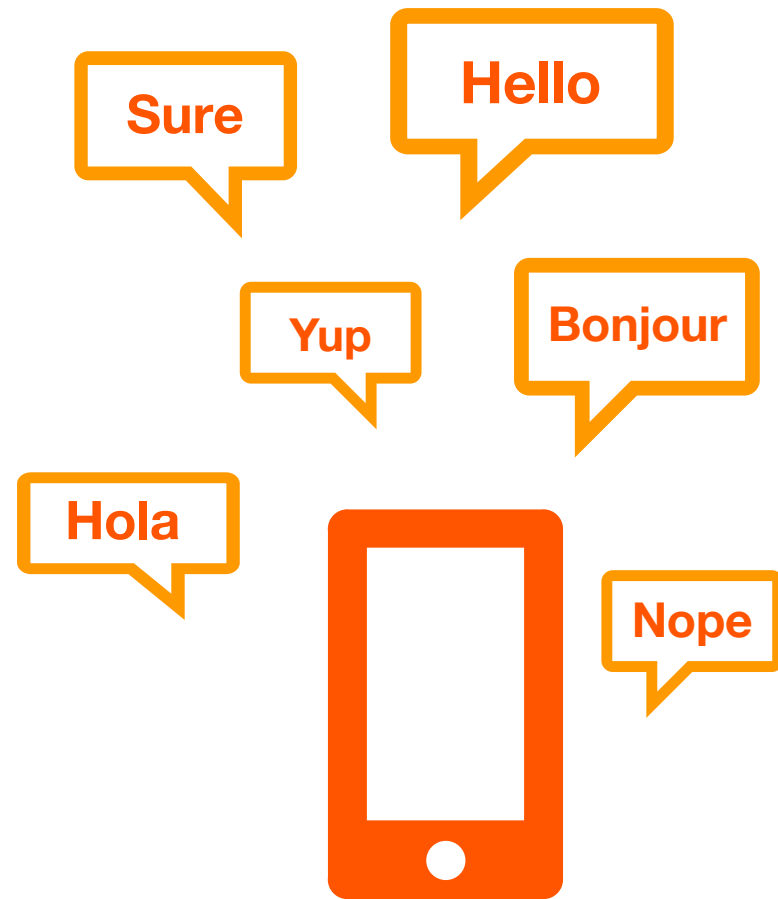
#4 Speak your patients' language

Nobody enjoys listening to a ton of irrelevant menu options before they reach the one that applies to them. That's why the best appointment management solutions use conversational interfaces to talk to the patient in a natural way.

Using Natural Language Understanding (NLU), these systems can understand what the patient says or texts, determine what they mean, and reply intelligently in almost any language. There's a lot of smart technology going on behind the scenes to make this happen — but all your patients experience is a natural, effortless conversation that gets them the results they want.

“When our patients get a call now, they're not listening to a robocall. They hear this beautiful message. We are able to greet them by name and respond in the way that is most meaningful to them and that will drive them to take action.”

— Patient Contact Center Director



Be conversational, using the right language



Case study: large US healthcare provider

How award-winning provider cuts no-shows to 3%

With more than 1 million clinic visits annually and nearly 2 million calls into its contact center, patient engagement was a big (and daunting) task for this large Malcom Baldrige National Award-winning provider. Their existing appointment reminder solution — which primarily delivered lackluster, unengaging robocalls — was unsophisticated and unreliable.

Once they replaced it with a modern appointment management solution that engages patients through an orchestrated mix of text, voice, email and smartphone push notifications, the results were immediate and ongoing.

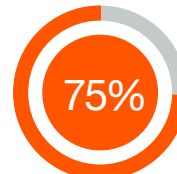
The impact on the patient experience has been equally notable. According to the director of the patient contact center: “When our patients get a call now, they’re not listening to a robocall. They hear this beautiful message. We are able to greet them by name and respond in the way that is most meaningful to them and that will drive them to take action.”



25% reduction in the no-show rate in the first 3 months — with no-show rates dropping to just 3%



\$2.3 million in recaptured revenue, thanks to real-time integration with other systems that allows canceled appointments to be freed up for rebooking



75% reduction in live-agent costs after starting to use the system to encourage patients to schedule cancer screenings and other services



126% improvement in patient engagement metric

#5 Don't just remind — reschedule

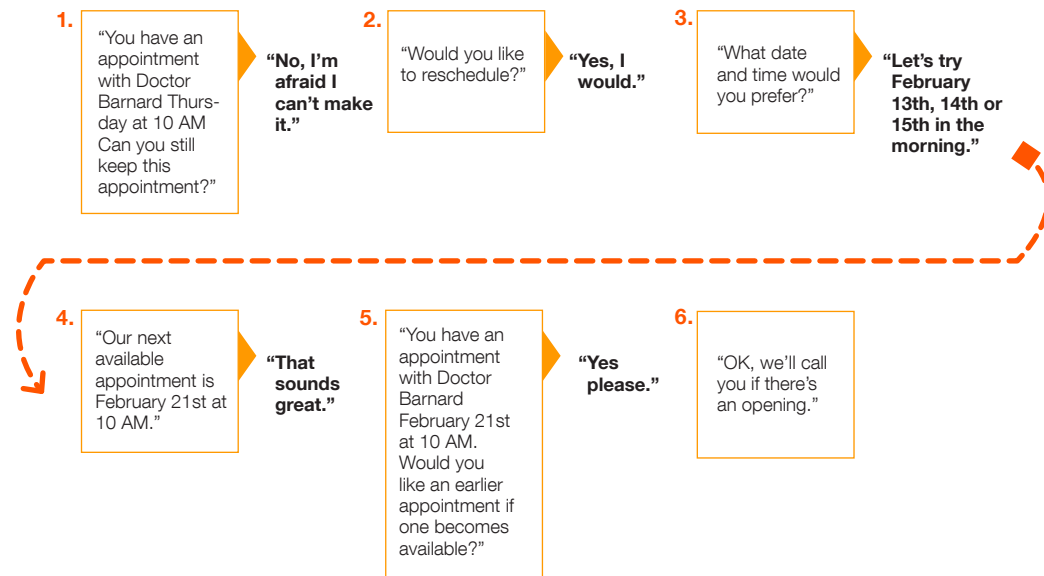
A reminder is of little use if the patient can't actually make the appointment time. A good appointment management solution will also allow the patient to reschedule on the spot.

A "reschedule" option makes life easier for the patient and avoids the merry-go-round of following up on missed or canceled appointments. One study found that giving patients the option to change appointment times via a text message reduced the number of no-shows by 20%.²

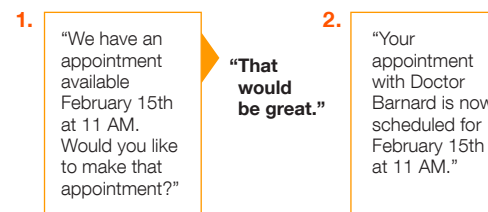
How automated rescheduling should work

A well-designed interface makes it easy for patients to specify a preferred date, gives a choice of available times and allows the patient to select a time or request another date.

Filling appointments through wait-listing



Rescheduling via conversational two-way text

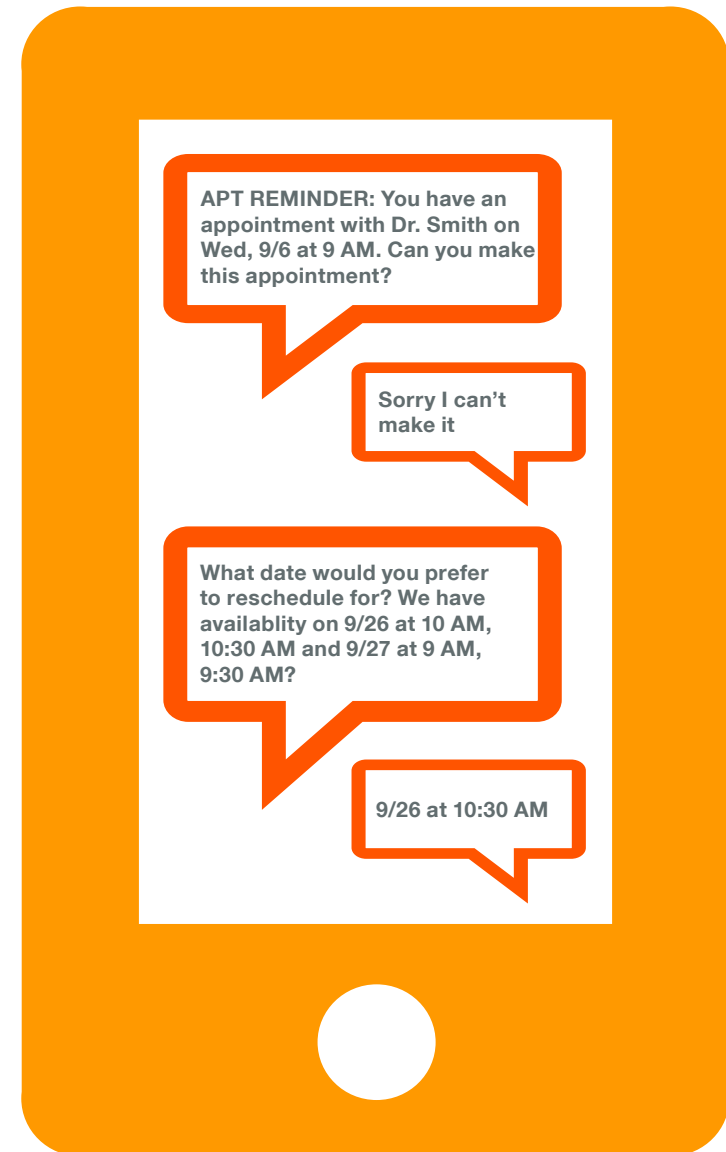


#6 Offer a wait-list option

In most outpatient settings today, 10% to 30% of clinical capacity goes unused or underused. Wait-listing functionality means you can quickly refill canceled bookings — so patients get treated earlier, and you don't miss out on revenue. One study found that wait-listing functionality improved provider schedule utilization by 17%.²

Patients are usually willing to accept on-the-spot offers of an earlier time slot. A survey by a National Health Service hospital trust in the U.K. found that more than 90% of outpatients would accept a last-minute appointment due to a cancellation if it was offered through a familiar channel. The hospital trust estimated they could fill at least 50% of canceled appointments with a wait-listing system.³

50% of canceled appointments could be filled through wait-listing



#7 Help patients prep for appointments — and stay informed after

If a patient arrives unprepared for an appointment that involves a procedure or screening, it often has to be rescheduled, creating hassle for you and distress for your patient. One major university medical center found that 7% of surgeries were canceled on the day of the procedure, and that 30% of those cancellations were due to inadequate prep by the patient.⁴

By using your appointment management solution to send preparatory instructions, you can stave off these last-minute cancellations. This is more than an economic issue — it's also

about quality of care. Apply the same technology for other patient communication functions, such as post-procedure and discharge instructions, and you won't just reduce cancellations — you'll also improve patient compliance and reduce readmission rates.

It supports your quality metrics, too: 65% of healthcare consumers say they'd like to receive timely reminders for things like annual flu shots, vaccinations and recommended screening tests.⁵



30%

of on-the-day surgery cancellations are due to **inadequate patient prep**



65%

of consumers say they'd like to receive **preventive health reminders**



#8 Keep patients advised of any delays

Slipping schedules are unavoidable in some circumstances — yet they’re a major pet peeve of patients. According to one study, keeping patients informed of wait times has the highest correlation to overall satisfaction with their providers.⁶

Time spent waiting in a physician’s office is time lost to patients. Communicating wait times before and during visits provides tangible proof to all patients that their time is valuable — a best practice in every industry.

Keep patients informed about wait times before and during visits using their channel of choice



Call



Text



Email

#9 Never stop getting better

Patient expectations never stand still and neither should your appointment management solution. Look at customer-obsessed organizations in other industries: They use reports and analytics to continuously monitor their customer communications and find new ways to improve.

A solution with poor reporting limits you and what you can achieve. But a system with rich reporting of key metrics, configurable reporting and drill-down capability delivers deep insight into the effectiveness of your efforts. It can uncover the reasons behind poor performance, identify opportunities for improvement and measure the impact of those efforts.



EHR integration

The key to great appointment management

Many of the best practices outlined in this guide are possible thanks to tight, real-time integration with electronic health record (EHR) systems.

These systems do more than store the history of diagnoses, procedures and patient care. They're also accessible to patients for tasks such as scheduling appointments, reviewing pre- and post-visit instructions and receiving notices about essential preventive care.

Traditional appointment-reminder systems simply extract reminder information and push it out to patients. A full interactive experience requires two-way communication with the EHR via an application programming interface (API).

That may sound like pure tech-speak, but it's worth knowing about. It means that not only can patients view their information, but they can also interact with it and update it. It makes online, text- and voice-based self-service rescheduling and wait-listing possible, as well as other applications that enable the patient to be a fully engaged participant in their own healthcare.

#10 Get help to maintain top-notch performance

Nothing's more frustrating than a technology vendor who doesn't pick up the phone when you need help. If you have a question about or an issue with your appointment management solution, you want to be confident that someone who's familiar with your organization will be there to pick up, listen to your needs and take immediate steps to help you out.

And support is only one element of what a good partner will do for you. Keeping up with patient expectations as technologies evolve is a separate challenge — and another one where your vendor should proactively help you. With providers held to the standards set by the most progressive organizations both inside and outside of healthcare, it makes sense to partner with someone who can bring you forward-looking ideas, innovative approaches and cross-industry best practices.

The right partner can help you continuously improve. Look for offerings like regular business reviews, strategy consulting, services for testing, tuning and optimizing the patient experience and interaction design to maximize the effectiveness of your appointment management strategy.

They should also help you benchmark against your peers to help you identify where you're doing well and where you can improve. As a result, you'll be well placed to achieve your goals: better utilization of clinical capacity, deeper patient engagement and better outcomes for your patients and your organization.



The wait is over — Automated appointment management done right

We're here to help. A well-implemented and well-supported appointment management solution doesn't just cut no-shows. It can also improve patient adherence, boost patient satisfaction and positively impact your financial performance. If your solution (or vendor) doesn't do the 10 things we've covered in this guide, it's time for a change. Not just for your own efficiency and bottom line — but for the health and satisfaction of your patients.

As the industry pioneer and undisputed leader in AI-driven omnichannel customer engagement solutions, Nuance can help you drive better staff utilization, improve outcomes and increase patient engagement. We do this not only through our best-in-class solutions, but by bringing forward-looking ideas, innovative approaches and cross-industry best practices to every engagement.

Why Nuance for Appointment Management

Unsurpassed capabilities

Multichannel, orchestrated outreach, conversational, two-way messaging, EHR integration, automated waitlist and running late functionality, pre- and post-appointment communications and support for more than 80 languages are just some of the cutting-edge capabilities designed to help you meet patients' and physicians' expectations while driving meaningful results.

Unbeatable support

A dedicated Nuance service and support team is always available to lend their expertise through every stage of the support lifecycle — from strategy consulting and requirements analysis, through application and interaction design, development and systems integration, to application deployment, testing, tuning and ongoing optimization.

Unmatched outcomes

Our healthcare customers achieve real business results and stronger ROI — from a 25% reduction in missed appointment rate (resulting in an estimated \$2.3 million in new annual revenue from rebooking freed-up appointments) to a 9% improvement in select Quality Measures and a 126% increase in patient engagement.

Unrivaled credentials

86% of all U.S. hospitals, more than 500,000 clinical professionals and 10,000 healthcare facilities use our solutions — from patient engagement to clinical documentation and beyond. Outside of the healthcare industry, we've powered customer care and engagement solutions for leading brands across major industries, including FedEx, Delta, Barclays, Santander, American Airlines, Amtrak, AT&T and Esurance.

Next steps



Talk to us about a better way to automate appointment management. Request a discovery call with a Nuance Appointment Management specialist at: CXexperts@nuance.com.



See how Nuance Appointment Management solutions deliver fewer no-shows, deeper patient engagement and stronger ROI.



Learn more about our automated appointment management solutions.

Footnotes:

¹ Whicher, T. (2014). How text messages can eradicate waiting times. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/healthcare-network/2014/apr/16/text-messages-eradicate-waiting-times>.

² Johns Hopkins Medicine. (2015). Right Patient with the Right Provider at the Best Place and Time.

³ Whicher, T. (2014). How text messages can eradicate waiting times. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/healthcare-network/2014/apr/16/text-messages-eradicate-waiting-times>.

⁴ Bent, S., et al. (2012). The Financial Burden of Cancelled Surgeries: Implications for Performance Improvement. Practice Management, Research in Perioperative Management.

⁵ Wakefield research.

⁶ Blizzard, R. (2005). Patient Satisfaction Starts in the Waiting Room. Gallup News. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/14935/patient-satisfaction-starts-waiting-room.aspx>

About Nuance Communications Inc.

Nuance Enterprise is reinventing the relationship between enterprises and consumers through customer engagement solutions powered by artificial intelligence. We aim to be the market leading provider of intelligent self- and assisted service solutions delivered to large enterprises around the world. These solutions are differentiated by speech, voice biometrics, virtual assistant, web chat and cognitive technologies; enabling cross-channel customer service for IVR, mobile and web, Inbound and Outbound; and magnified by the design and development skill of a global professional services team. We serve Fortune 2500 companies across the globe with a mix of direct and channel partner selling models.

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NUAN-CS-3423-01-EB Patient Engagement, May 10, 2018

