

Blog Post

How to Improve Patient Retention at Your Healthcare Practice

November 8, 2021



5-25x

Cost of acquiring a new customer versus retaining an existing one

According to [Harvard Business Review](#), acquiring a new customer is 5-25X more expensive than retaining an existing one. Unfortunately, many practices spend a disproportionate amount on acquiring new leads and converting these leads, rather than harnessing the power of their existing patients. With the right patient retention tactics, loyal patients have the power to boost your practice's profitability. Keep reading to learn more about patient retention and five patient retention strategies to implement at your healthcare practice.

What is Patient Retention?

Patient retention is a marketing tactic that focuses on keeping existing patients satisfied so they continue to return to your practice. Between review sites, social media, and word-of-mouth referrals, patients are given many opportunities to select another practice. By implementing an effective patient retention strategy, you can establish strong, long-lasting relationships with your patients during and in-between visits.

Why is Patient Retention Important?

Long-term patients should not be overlooked in your marketing strategy. According to a [Bain & Company study](#), increasing customer retention rates by 5% increases profits by 25% to 95%. Since long-term patients already have a relationship with your practice, they are more likely to spend more during each visit, write a review, refer another patient to you, and ask about additional treatments you offer.

5 Patient Retention Strategies to Implement at Your Healthcare Practice

[Patient retention research](#) shows an average national patient growth rate of 45% and a patient churn rate of 48%. This means that healthcare providers are losing patients at a faster rate than they are keeping them. The following five patient retention strategies will help build a positive customer experience to keep your patients coming back.

1. Make Scheduling Appointments Convenient

Did you know that [81 percent of patients](#) would schedule a doctor's appointment online if they could? In today's digital era, patients expect convenience, which translates to the ability to make immediate bookings on a 24/7 basis. Since scheduling and cancelling appointments can be frustrating for patients, give your patients the ability to schedule, reschedule, cancel, and confirm appointments both online and via text message. If they can get an appointment on your calendar in only a few minutes, they will have a more favorable view of your practice.

2. Focus on Your Front Office

Patients have the potential to lose millions of dollars at the front desk due to poor processes in place or improperly trained front office staff. Since your front-office is the first and last stop your patients make during their visit, it is important to fine-tune your front-office experience. Treating patients with respect, displaying compassion, and greeting with a warm and welcoming smile doesn't cost a cent, but can go a long way in creating a comfortable environment. To create a good patient experience, be sure to avoid the following front-office mistakes:



Poor manners

While exceptional is critical to practice success, it is also important to improve your practice's relationship-building skills. According to SolutionReach, [70% of patients leave](#) because they feel they've been treated with indifference. If patients perceive your front desk staff as being rude, preoccupied, or apathetic, they are less likely to come back.



Poor presentation

It is important to give your staff explicit guidelines and expectations for front desk behavior. To start, the front-office should be clean and clutter-free, the staff should be dressed appropriately for work, and consumption of food and beverages at the front-desk should be discouraged.



Manual processes

Your front office staff should not have to spend most of their time booking and confirming appointments. With the help of a practice management software that enables online booking and automated booking confirmations, your staff can spend less time on tedious tasks and more time interacting with patients.



Long hold times

Do not put a patient on hold for longer than 10 minutes. This shows your patient that their time is not respected, and they may go elsewhere if this pattern continues.



Improper insurance charging or billing

In many healthcare practices, the front-office does not fully understand the difference between insurance plans. This can lead to overcharges or misinformation about insurance coverage, which can frustrate patients. To avoid errors in billing, all front-office employees should understand the different insurance plans that the office accepts and how they work.

3. Use Marketing Automation to Engage Patients

Marketing is more than a one-and-done activity. The key to effective patient communication is marketing automation, which enables personalized engagement with your patients based on predetermined behaviors. Staying connected to patients between visits improves retention, paving the way for long-term successful relationships. It also enables efficiency and scalability by allowing you to easily create templates, deploy communications, and track the activity of your recipients. There are many ways to engage your patients, including but not limited to: social media, email, direct mail, blog, phone, and text. Examples of effective automated marketing campaigns include:

New Patient Campaigns

Welcome your new patient to the practice with a friendly e-blast, encouraging the patient to schedule an appointment or check out your online resources. Then, follow up with automated emails containing resources for patients, including checklists, guides, and education on relevant healthcare topics.

Patient Recall Campaigns

Every time a patient leaves your office without scheduling a follow-up appointment, you risk losing that patient. Patient recall campaigns are structured around appointment dates, meaning they are delivered to those who have missed a recently scheduled appointment by a certain number of days. Patient recall campaigns can include a mix of postcards, emails, phone calls, and text messages

to encourage patients to schedule an appointment. For example, you may send out an automated postcard reminder, follow up with a friendly recall email, and then schedule an automated phone call to encourage your patient to schedule their appointment.

Patient Reactivation Campaigns

Reactivation campaigns are designed to be a follow-up to recall campaigns, targeting patients who have still not scheduled an appointment. The goal of these campaigns is to create a consistent flow of messages without overwhelming your patients. A five-step patient reactivation campaign may include a “We Miss You” email and “Special Offer” email, followed by a paper mailing, phone call, and text messages.

Patient Referral Campaigns

A patient referral program utilizes your existing patient base to market to new patients. To automate your referral process, send a referral solicitation email to patients who were satisfied with your care. Within the email, thank your patient for their feedback and ask if they would be willing to refer your practice to their friends and family. Then, included an automated option that allows the patient to send the referral via email.

Birthday and Holiday E-Cards

Show your patients you care with automated e-birthday cards and holiday e-cards, delivered right to their inbox. These can be updated each year.

It is important to note that all communication should abide HIPAA guidelines regarding use of patient health information for marketing purposes. Healthcare providers can safely use their patient list to send communications about their own products or services if using a secure, HIPAA compliant platform.

4. Build a Social Media Presence

While in-office training and re-training can go a long way in creating a warm, welcoming environment in-office, social media is also an excellent tool for improving patient-provider relationships in-between visits.

Social media gives your practice a more human feel and enables providers to inform and educate both current and prospective patients. It also allows you to leverage User-Generated Content (UGC) for your practice while improving two of your practice’s Three Cs: communication, connection, and comfort.

A good social media strategy should include the following five features:

- Educate customers with multimedia content
- Use social listening to discover and respond to patient needs
- Provide tips for staying healthy in-between visits
- Provide education on practice resources
- Host periodic contests or giveaways

5. Leverage Patient Surveys and Implement Patient Feedback

According to the [Weatherby Report](#), only 67 percent of patients ages 18 to 34 are satisfied with their physicians in comparison to 82 percent of patients over the age of 55. Patient surveys are critical to getting a pulse on patient satisfaction and identifying new ways to improve patient experience.

To identify the causes of poor attrition, set-up automated patient satisfaction surveys to be administered anytime during an electronic medical record (EMR) or an electronic health record (EHR), or via a post-appointment survey sent via email or text. A good patient survey should be brief, clear, and concise in its language and consistent in its scales and formatting. According to [QuestionPro](#), your survey should also consider the following:

- Quality of care
- Interpersonal skills of staff and provider



- Transparency and communication between provider and patient
- Financial aspects of care
- Access to doctors and medical professionals
- Accessibility of care

Healthcare practices should always monitor patient satisfaction to drive retention. If you see multiple comments about a particular problem, make the necessary changes to your practice. Then, connect with the patient or patients that raised the issue to let them know that their feedback resulted in a change at the practice. With the help of a post-appointment survey, you will be well on your way to measuring patient experience and boosting patient satisfaction.

How SCALE Marketing Can Help You Improve Your Patient Retention Strategy

Scale Marketing provides the specialized strategic, creative, and technical expertise and resources to help healthcare provider platforms improve their patient retention strategy. Our unbiased suite of marketing solutions was developed in response to the prevailing gap in strategic marketing services in the industry.

We follow a standardized analysis to qualify and measure all areas of your brand and patient lifecycle, from market awareness to patient acquisition, to retention and lifetime value. Regardless of whether you engage us for consulting or fully managed services, we offer the same level of dedication, transparency, and execution support to help your business succeed.



SCALE+
healthcare marketing

Let's Continue the Conversation

SCALE prides itself in developing customized solutions for its clients and helping healthcare organizations grow and thrive in a challenging marketplace. Now, we are ready to help you. We look forward to sharing examples of how we have helped our clients and invite you to schedule a 1-on-1 complimentary practice management consultation with us.

Contact Cedric Tuck-Sherman at ctucksherman@scale-healthcare.com, or +1 (310) 648-0096 to continue the conversation.