Not all automated confirmation solutions are created equal. Vendors differ greatly in pricing, functionality, notification channels (phone, text, etc.), the stability of their company, communication strategy expertise and the measures they take to ensure reliability, data security and adherence to regulations on automated communications. Organizations that select a vendor based on only one or two of these areas often regret not choosing a system that delivers at a high level across all of these important criteria and even put themselves at risk of violating FCC, FTC, state or HIPAA regulations. Use this guide to learn about important considerations when selecting the right vendor for you.

1. Successful formula of price AND response

Why this matters: You’ll make more money.

Budget prices are a bust. Predictably, price is one of the most common points that influence the selection of an appointment confirmation vendor for the cost-conscious organization. However, it is actually more important to consider the cost per confirmed appointment. After all, it is confirmed appointments that bring in revenue.

The primary element in determining a notification solution’s confirmed appointment cost is its ability to connect with patients and elicit a response. Price per notification among vendors is typically between $0.10-0.25 per notification and the confirmation rates they achieve range anywhere from 15-20%, with top performers reaching 40% response. Let’s look at the cost per confirmed appointment for two example vendors with differing per notification prices and patient response rates.

Vendor A is on the low end of the spectrum for price ($0.13) yet only achieves a response rate of 16%. Vendor B charges more for each notification ($0.20) but delivers a high response rate of 37%.

This illustration confirms that practices actually pay less per confirmed appointment when using a more effective solution with a higher per notification price. Notice the difference message effectiveness makes in the revenue you will retain from confirmed appointments. You actually pay more when you pay less!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Price per notification</th>
<th>Vendor A</th>
<th>Vendor B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price for 1000 notifications</td>
<td>$130</td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated # of confirmations</td>
<td>160 (16%)</td>
<td>370 (37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price per confirmation (price/confirmations)</td>
<td>81 cents</td>
<td>54 cents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retained appointment revenue (Confirmations * $100/appt.)</td>
<td>$1,600</td>
<td>$3,700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Effective message delivery

Why this matters: You’ll have happier patients.

The ability to communicate with patients through multiple communication channels is absolutely essential. Patients expect it from their providers! In addition to offering phone, email and text message notifications, you’ll want to know more about these four details:

**Voice call quality**

Patients are less likely to listen to a message that sounds pieced together. Ask the vendor to send you real sample calls to make sure the calls are clear and use natural voices.

**Text messaging short codes**

Be sure that the vendor is using a certified short code. Why? Short code messages have a higher deliverability rate than other methods such as SMTP. SMTP is available for the cost-conscious but is not as effective as messages using a short code.
Personalization
Leading vendors can help you configure messages for each specific patient. Not just first and last names either. Completely customize each message to include language preference, volume controls, appointment location and any other special instructions you’d like to include depending on the reason for their visit.

Answering machine/voicemail detection
The best messaging solutions can detect the difference between a live-answered voice call and one that reaches an answering machine or voicemail. If the call isn’t answered live, an answering machine version of the message can still give patients a convenient way to confirm the appointment. Look for vendors who have tested their messages and achieved at least 90% accuracy!

3. Security and compliance expertise

Why this matters: You won’t put your organization at risk.

We can’t overemphasize the importance of protecting PHI, following recommended practices under HIPAA guidelines and abiding by federal and state regulations! At a minimum, vendors should be taking these measures to ensure the safety of your organization and your patients:

Adherence to FTC/FCC/HIPAA/state regulations
Is the vendor aware of the most recent regulations related to automated messaging? Does the vendor have a legal expert dedicated to these areas? Do they have a compliance officer? Make sure you choose a vendor that has expertise on important communication-related regulations. It will mean less risk for your organization… and fewer headaches for you.

Security officer
Does the vendor have a high-level security officer or team dedicated to information security? While adherence to messaging regulations is essential, it’s every bit as important to make sure that patient data is protected through appropriate administrative, logical, physical and access controls. Choose a vendor that you can trust to protect your sensitive data!

Regular, third-party audits
Internal confirmation isn’t enough. It’s important that a third party verifies that the vendor is following written policies and procedures. Regular SSAE 16 audits, ISO reviews and other monitoring activities ensure that you can use the vendor’s solutions and services with full confidence. Look for a vendor that has these auditing protocols in place, because it means that you won’t have to invest considerable time and money should your organization require regularly scheduled audits from the vendor.
4. A financially stable vendor

Why this matters: You won’t have to do this again in six months.

Don’t underestimate the importance of working with an industry leader. Everyone has a lot on their plates these days, and the last thing you have time to do is implement another solution 6-12 months down the road. Once you have collected consent from patients for various message types, opt-ins or opt-outs for text messaging and so forth, you will not want to start over and make patients provide their preferences again. Imagine how frustrating that would be from the patient’s point of view. You’re taking a big chance by trusting a small or relatively new vendor that may not have longevity.

Another advantage of a financially stable vendor? Their money. Specifically, the money they’ll invest in technology to make sure you’re always given the best possible tools to communicate with patients. Remember - it’s in the vendor’s best interest to create a messaging solution that you’ll want to trust forever. The longer you’re a client, the more money the vendor makes. The more money that vendor invests in technology, the more you’ll benefit from the solution. Choosing a financially stable vendor that consistently invests in technology is mutually beneficial for both the vendor and your organization. Look to build a long-term vendor relationship!

5. Flexibility to cover any message content

Why this matters: It’s like having extra staff members.

An ideal vendor can cover it all – 360 degrees of patient communication. Appointment confirmations are the most common application of automated messaging technology, but ANY communication you can automate means the staff doesn’t have to handle it.

Post-visit communications
Need to let patients know test results are ready for pickup? Did they miss the appointment and need to reschedule? Choose a vendor that allows you to quickly communicate with patients after the visit.

Recalls/recare opportunities
For many patients, a single visit doesn’t cut it. And each additional visit means more revenue for the practice. Make more money by encouraging patients to schedule their follow-up visits.

Collections
Need to remind patients to pay their outstanding balance? Leading messaging vendors can deliver notifications that offer options for easy payment.

Wellness/ongoing care
Flu shots, breast cancer awareness and more! There’s a year-round calendar of health awareness initiatives you can use to show concern for your patients’ health while booking additional appointments. The ideal messaging vendor can even offer ideas to make a greater impact among your patients!