

Elman Retina Group Returns to West for Outstanding Customer Service

TELEVOX SOLUTIONS

With shrinking Medicare reimbursements and the challenges of running a medical practice in the current economy, practices are more cost-conscious than ever. Price is one of the most common factors that influence the selection of an automated notifications vendor for the prudent practice. However, not all automated notifications vendors are created equal.

Companies that offer these solutions 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. Practices 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.

Elman Retina Group (ERG) unfortunately discovered this the hard way. ERG began using West's automated solution in 2002. Elene Aiken, Practice Administrator with ERG, praises the customer service she received from West then and now.

"Every time I've ever called West customer service, anyone I spoke with was very knowledgeable," says Aiken. "They always called back in a timely manner and impressed me with their professionalism. It was really great customer service."

"I thought calls were just calls... until we left West."

Elene Aiken,
Practice Administrator

However, for financial reasons, ERG decided to change their automated appointment reminder service in late 2010 to a company affiliated with their electronic medical records (EMR) vendor. The company offered their automated notifications for a lower price than West. However, ERG quickly learned that you get what you pay for.



- Customer service cited as major influencer in vendor selection
- Automating appointment reminders saves ERG \$14,000 in labor expenses annually
- West's reliable delivery minimizes \$600 broken appointments



"There was no customer service," says Aiken. "Calls sometimes didn't go out on any given day. When calls did go out, sometimes there was no message once the person picked up. We gave the vendor chance after chance but they kept falling short. I thought calls were just calls...until we left West."

ERG came back to West in 2012. Now, they credit West automated notifications as a valuable part of their operations. Aiken reveals, "The staff was so happy when we switched back to West."

Before West and the other service, ERG was making manual appointment reminder calls each day. With 80 patients per day, Aiken acknowledges that it was too time consuming for the staff to make these calls. There were too many calls for one staff member to complete so they often split the list, using two hours each day of two staff members' time.

According to the American Association of Medical Assistants, the hourly salary of a Medical Assistant averages \$14.67 an hour. Using that figure, replacing manual calls with automated notifications is saving ERG over \$14,000 annually in labor expenses alone. And a process that took hours before, now takes seconds. Aiken says uploading their file so that calls go out the next day is as simple as "click, click, done!"

ERG's staff now has more availability to send out records, complete paperwork, attend to patient care, verify patient information and concentrate on end of day procedures that Aiken says before were inconsistently completed simply because there wasn't enough time.

ERG serves an older population of patients, ranging in age from 70 to 90. It is common for practices to be reluctant about adopting automated notifications for fear that elderly patients will not accept the new technology. However, Aiken says, "Our patients have come to expect the automated reminders. They quickly notify our staff when they don't receive one." Aiken notes that being able to change the audio volume of calls being sent to certain patients is a huge benefit and has helped with the adoption.

Choosing the Right Vendor Checklist:

- How much experience does the vendor have?
- Can the system be used for more than just appointment reminders?
- How detailed are the automated messages?
- Does the system allow patients the chance to respond?
- Does the message sound both professional and personal?
- Will the system integrate with practice management software?
- How quickly does the vendor respond to problems?

For ERG it's the most efficient way to reach out to their patients to prevent no-shows. A new patient visit is worth approximately \$600 to the practice, so any no-show is significant lost revenue.

The take-away from ERG's change in automated notification vendors is that automated calls aren't just automated calls. They can have a significant impact on your practice operations and revenue. Choosing the right vendor requires not only considering the cost but also the stability, reliability, capability and accountability of the company you are trusting with your valuable patient outreach.