Northeast Ohio Eye Surgeons Increases Recalls with Automated Messaging
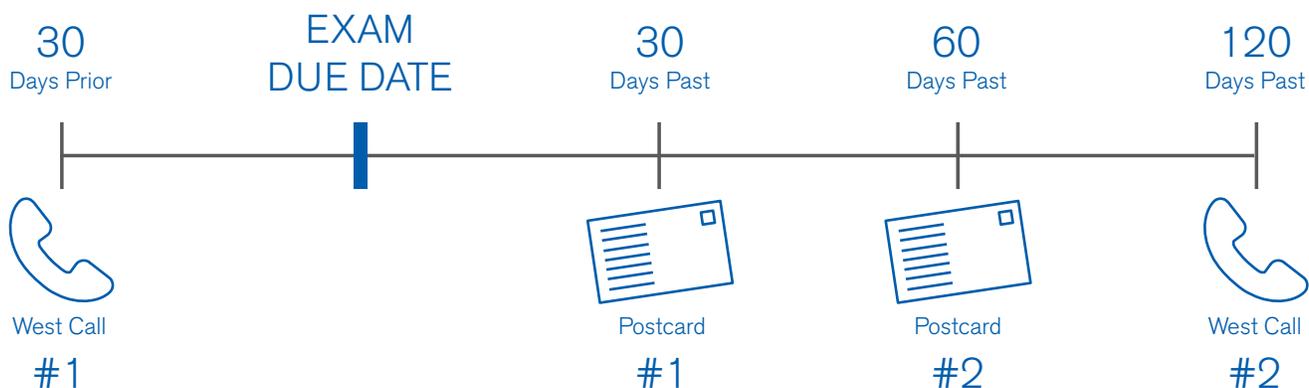
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While numerous studies have shown that automated appointment confirmation calls are more impactful than mailed reminders and more efficient than manual phone calls from staff members, innovative practices are finding other effective uses for the technology in their daily patient communication. Northeast Ohio Eye Surgeons in Kent, OH has found many applications for West's automated messaging technology beyond standard appointment confirmations, including past due balance calls, invitations to satisfaction surveys and the greatest success so far – recall reminders.

"We've gotten very creative with how we use West notifications," says Michelle Hawkins, Office Manager for Northeast Ohio Eye Surgeons. "Looking at our past results from sending postcards to patients, we felt like our recall efforts presented the greatest potential for automated messaging success."

Before adding West to its recall strategy, a postcard was the first communication a patient would receive about scheduling his or her follow-up visit. Hawkins notes that the average patient conversion (meaning that the patient called to schedule an appointment) from these initial postcard communications averaged 20%.

- 41% first call conversion rate from automated recall messages to patients

- 104% success rate improvement compared to postcard communications

30 Days Prior	EXAM DUE DATE	30 Days Past	60 Days Past	120 Days Past
West Call #1		Postcard #1	Postcard #2	West Call #2

The practice's current recall outreach contacts patients up to four times to encourage them to schedule an appointment. Patients are first reached with an automated phone message 30 days before they are due for an exam. If no appointment has been made, patients then receive reminder postcards at 30 and 60 days past their exam due date as necessary. If an appointment still has not been scheduled at 120 days past due, another automated phone message is delivered to the patient.

A 12-month analysis of the current automated recall strategy shows an average first call conversion rate of 40.8%, with monthly averages ranging as high as 72%. This 40.8% average represents a 104% conversion rate improvement over the older postcard-driven recall strategy.

Hawkins estimates that the practice's total cost of mailing a single postcard to patients (printing, postage, staff time, etc.) is $1.33. Depending upon the length of call, as many as six West automated messages can be delivered to patients for the same cost as a single mailer. Unlike postcards that incur expense whether or not they actually reach the patient, the practice is only charged for messages that either reach a live answer or an answering machine. Superior conversion rate, lower per message cost and no charge for undeliverables have made automated messages the practice's preferred method for initial recall notifications.

For patients who make it through the first three recall notifications without scheduling an appointment (Initial automated call, Postcard #1 and Postcard #2), the 120-day past due automated message is effective in prompting many of these patients to schedule their visit. The same 12-month data shows that 9.9% of patients who make it to this step are converted by the past due automated recall notification, furthering increasing revenue opportunities for the practice.

Automated Recalls - First Call Conversion Rate
December 2009 - November 2010

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