

Improving Patient Service for Increased Productivity and Profit

Clinic Guide to Enquiry Handling

- ✓ Efficient enquiry handling
- ✓ Increased patient satisfaction
- ✓ Higher booking rates
- ✓ Reduced no-shows
- ✓ Busier clinics



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Where patients find the right clinic

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Introduction

Every month, over a million WhatClinic.com users search for treatments in locations all over the world. Many then choose a clinic and go on to make their enquiry. How many enquiries to a particular clinic go on to become a customer? That depends on how committed the clinic is to handling that enquiry.

Because we track and analyse every single enquiry made from our users, a pattern becomes clear. Certain clinics consistently convert more of their enquiries into happy customers. We would like to reveal the processes and behaviours that are key to converting more enquiries.

Just what makes one clinic convert 40% of all enquiries into paying customers, and another clinic only 20%? Most of the recommendations within the Guide are practical, common sense processes – many of them incredibly easy to implement, with little or no cost involved.

A few small changes can make a big difference to how busy and successful your clinic is.

This Guide covers the common practices of top converting clinics. Clinics in any sector can make a significant impact on the number of enquiries they convert, by implementing some or all of the recommendations to follow.

There may be nothing new in this guide, and if so, we salute your commitment to the patient. Perhaps you might take this opportunity to review and check your systems to see if they are still in place, and up to date. Testing your own systems from time to time – using ‘mystery shopping’, and surveying your own customers are all additional ways to reveal lots of opportunities to improve.

At the end of each section we have a list of ‘take-aways’ Key points to remember, that you can take away, and put in to practice.

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Enquiry fundamentals

Being the first to respond to a patient gives you a massive head-start against your competitors. Being prompt matters.

Speed of response

Patient online behaviour indicates that people are likely to make several enquiries for the same treatment, to different clinics. This is even more likely when the treatment is one of high value. Customers want to get several quotations and consider all the available options before making a decision. Analysis shows that the clinic who responds first tends to get the patient. The average clinic can take up to two days to respond to an email enquiry. Patients find this type of response frustrating. They will continue to search and enquire until they find a clinic that responds promptly, and this will influence their decision.

Commitment and Dedication

So you got a phone enquiry, and you rang them back but you didn't get through. Did you just move on to the next one? Commitment is most certainly a key trait of top performing clinics. Here we see clinic staff calling the patient back at least two more times, or using the patient's alternate contact details to ensure all avenues have been exhausted. The message is – don't give up too quickly!

Attention to detail

Consistency can be hard for any clinic, from busy private hospitals to single practitioners. Attention to detail can make all the difference in long term increases in conversion rates. Are all enquiries logged and followed up every day? How often are phone and email messages checked? Do staff make a note on which ones have been called? Who is tasked with chasing down enquiries that may have fallen through? Whether you have one simple diary, or a bespoke customer management system – it's down to you to use it to its fullest, and ensure the correct processes are adhered to all the time.

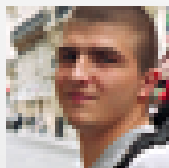
Takeaways

1. Respond to email enquiries quickly – same goes for phone messages.
2. Don't give up after one try – call them several times, and try a different contact method.
3. Don't let patients slip through the cracks. Use the tools you have effectively.

Hi Dr Murry,

may I speak to someone today about Dental Implants and making an appointment.

Can you **reply to this email**
or phone me at **+353 1 555 4589**



Regards,
Michael Granger
Dublin

Things to consider

Phone Enquiries

Holidays, weekends and out of office hours are common times for enquiries to be missed, or diverted to message minder. There are also times during the day when the phone rings out, or is engaged. An obvious question: Can your systems cover these eventualities? Are they robust, and are they checked routinely and tested often?

Email Enquiries

More and more enquiries are being made by email. Are these answered appropriately? Are you doing everything you can to respond promptly and effectively? From observing the hundreds of thousands of email enquiries that flow through our systems, we have learned what techniques guarantee a better experience for the patient. Are your systems up to scratch, and when was the last time you tested them?

Patient Conversion Rates

Do you know your patient conversion rates? By conversion rates, we mean the percentage of potential enquiries that turn into real patients. With some simple, affordable changes, conversion rates can be greatly improved. Tracking them is a smart way to evaluate your business efficiency.



10 enquiries



2 real patients

$$\frac{\text{Number of patients}}{\text{Number of enquires}} \times 100 = 20\% \text{ conversion rate}$$

Understand the person

A very simple and important way to improve your patient conversion rates is to understand the person making the enquiry. You might prefer to speak directly to the person, but they might prefer email! Your prospective patients might work during the day, when you have the most staff available to take calls. They might want to ask a lot of questions or they might just want to research price before they make an appointment. By understanding the person and meeting their expectations, you are more likely to convert their enquiry into a booking.

Prospective patients expect a timely response.

As a patient, how long would you wait before expecting a call or email in response to your enquiry? How would you like to be treated and what kind of attitude would you like to be met with? Would you expect a response on the same day? We think so. Don't let enquiries go cold.

Prospective patients make multiple enquiries.

Having facilitated over half a million patient enquiries in the past year alone, we can confirm that most patients will go on to make a second or third enquiry with another clinic, often as part of the decision making process. This is especially true if they don't get a quick response at their first attempt. We also see that the clinic that responds most quickly is the one the patient is most likely to select for treatment. Get ahead by responding quickly.

Prospective patients make enquiries at times that suit them.

While no one expects you to keep your clinic open 24 hours a day or seven days a week, clinics must be prepared for enquiries that are made at any time of the day or night.

Online behaviour is changing. Online is part of every-day life, from social media to shopping online. We see more and more enquiries being made outside of office hours. Ensure you are catching these enquiries, which are just as valuable as a prospective patient who walks through the door.

Prospective patients expect you to help them.

You may have called a prospective patient back and left a message. However, people are busy and often may not have time to check messages or return calls. To make it as easy as possible for the person to make a booking, top converting clinics put in several calls. If phone calls prove unsuccessful, an email or text might suit that person better. Each clinic needs to decide how far they will go to follow up on the initial enquiry – without, of course, pestering the person who made the enquiry!

How you respond to these enquiries could make all the difference to your bottom line.

Takeaways

1. A prompt response is essential.
2. The first clinic to follow up often wins the patient.
3. Be prepared for enquiries to be placed at any time.



Understanding email enquiries

People's expectations have risen in line with advances in technology. Email enquiries are growing, and not only are more people choosing to use email, they expect the same level of service as if they walked through the door. The worst level of service is an unanswered email. Clinics can implement a number of simple techniques to ensure an enquiry is acknowledged.

According to our records, many clinics wait longer than two days before responding to email enquiries from patients. Email is quick and simple. Put yourself in the patient's shoes. How long would you wait as a prospective patient for a reply to a simple question?

It is not surprising that patients contact more than one clinic, given how poor the average response rate is. If you haven't replied to an enquiry within 24 hours it is highly likely that someone else has - and remember, the patient is most likely to go with the clinic that responds to their enquiry first.

Simple Guidelines for Email Enquiries:

- Check your email enquiries at least once a day, if not more
- Set an automatic email response, so that people are reassured their enquiry got somewhere.
- Add some useful information to the response, such as your opening hours, but don't make it too long.
- Don't add attachments, even if you think the person might like the content, as this could be marked as spam.
- Don't use the email as an opportunity to plug or promote special offers. Keep it simple: Tell. Don't sell. If you want to add extra information, make sure it is relevant to the person. In our sample text we have included a link to testimonials and to a facebook page. This information is short, simple and at the very end of the mail.
- Most important: Confirm in the email how long it will take you to personally follow up with the enquiry, then make sure you follow up in a timely fashion.

Takeaways

1. Respond to emails faster to improve conversion rates.
2. Check and respond to emails every day.
3. Set up a simple auto-respond, and follow up.

Sample auto-response email

Thank you for contacting us.

This email is checked regularly during our business hours. We're open from Tuesdays to Saturdays, from 9am until 6pm, and from 10am until 8pm on Saturdays. We close Sundays and Mondays.

We'll reply to your mail as soon as possible, usually within a few hours. Either Michael or Jan will respond to your email.

Kind regards,
The Clinic Team

For patient testimonials check out our website: <http://www.ourclinicwebsite.com> and for news and competitions, check out our facebook page www.facebook.com/ourfacebookpage.

Takeaways

1. Acknowledge all enquiries - at the very least with an auto-response.
2. Respond as quickly as you can.
3. Check your email inbox frequently.

Note the email mentions staff members by name – so that people know who will be calling them – this helps make the auto response a bit more personal.

Understanding phone enquiries

Several changes in phone usage have had a real impact on clinic enquiries. The time between thinking about a treatment, researching it and making a call has decreased. More enquiries are being made outside of office hours than ever before. These calls are just as valuable as the ones made while you are in the office. Call management systems are more affordable than ever, with virtual lines and call waiting easy add-ons to most business packages. There are lots of ways to make the most out of the tools you have, to ensure prompt and effective handing of phone enquiries.

Make the Most of Your Phone System.

1. Make sure you have more than one phone line, so that no customer ever gets an engaged tone.
2. Set up your voicemail. If you want to really reassure the person making the enquiry, the best voice mail is changed every day. This will develop a strong sense of trust from the potential patient as it displays a level of organisation and attention to detail. However, the opposite is true - if the message is scripted for daily message, but you forget to change it, the customer will know instantly that you are not organised, so it requires commitment and planning. It will make a big difference to the person who is making the enquiry so it's worth considering.
3. Most basic phone systems have many features that are easy to master if someone is prepared to take responsibility. You can often create different scripts and swap them at the right time.



Sample phone scripts

Sample voice mail script for unanswered calls.

Here's a sample voice mail script, to be used when the office is open but no one is currently able to answer the phone.

Hi there. You've reached the [Insert Name of Clinic Here]. Sorry we weren't able to take your call, we're either looking after someone, or on another call. We check our messages frequently - Please leave your name and number after the beep and someone will call you back shortly. Thank you.

Sample phone script for evenings and weekends.

Thank you for calling the [Insert Name of Clinic Here] Sorry we can't take your call, but our clinic is now closed. We open Monday to Saturday, from 9am to 6pm, and we check our messages frequently during the working day. Leave your name and number and we'll call you back. Thank you.

Sample voice mail script for holiday periods.

Thank you for calling [insert business name here].. The office will be closed until [insert date here], when we will open at [insert time here]. Leave a message after the beep and we will return your call when the office opens. If your call is urgent, please dial [insert here] for assistance. Thank you and have a great holiday!

Check phone messages at least once a day, and reply to them as quickly as possible. If you don't make contact with the patient, leave a message, letting them know you called, and telling them when you plan to call again. Many clinics can forget about a potential patient at this point. These enquiries should be added to an action list, and contact should be attempted again later the same day.

Takeaways

1. Reply to missed phone enquiries promptly. Ideally on the same day, or if the call came in in the evening, try to call back the very next working day, ideally in the morning!
2. Set up your voice mail so the patient feels acknowledged and reassured, even though they haven't spoken to anyone.
3. Update your voice mail regularly with temporarily unavailable, out of hours, weekend and holiday messages as appropriate.

Summary

Patient conversion rates can be dramatically improved on by reviewing and optimising enquiry handling techniques. The tools to improve these are already in place, such as phone systems and email service, though many clinics are not making the most of them. By meeting and exceeding a person's expectations, a clinic is most likely to convert that person to a patient.

If you haven't replied to an enquiry within 24 hours someone else will. The quickest replies gain most patients. Out of hours phone enquiries are just as valuable as those made within office hours - do not ignore them.

Appoint one person to set up and manage voicemail messages, ensuring voicemails are answered. If you don't have more than one phone line, invest in some affordable call handling systems to ensure you have the capability to efficiently gather enquiries outside of office hours.

Email enquiries are just as valuable as phone enquiries, yet clinics wait two days or more to respond. Make every effort to contact a patient who has emailed you. Use auto-response emails, implement a process for tracking and responding, and ensure someone is responsible for tracking and following up.

For more advice, tips and practical knowledge on enquiry handling, patient trends and more, sign up for our blog updates on blog.whatclinic.com.



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