Dental Buyers Guide 101

What to Ask When Shopping for Automated Patient Communication Systems

Whether you've never used automated patient communications or are looking for an upgrade from your current provider, here are key questions to ask to ensure you choose the right solution for your practice.

1. **Will your recare system work with my practice management software?**

   Ask this question first, as it's vital that any recare system be compatible with your existing practice management software. And while you're at it, confirm all the technical requirements to ensure that the product will run on your office network.

2. **How does your system meet the specific needs of dental offices?**

   Some automated recare systems are developed for all health-care practices. The approach is generic to accommodate various branches of medicine. But dental marketing—which recare is—is a much different discipline than marketing to cardio patients and expectant mothers. Dental patients have their own needs and concerns, as do dentists. For the best results, go with a system specifically designed for dental practices by a company that knows the industry.

3. **How can I measure the volume of new business generated by your system?**

Some automated recare systems obscure their results—or lack thereof—by tracking all new appointments made, regardless of whether the system prompted them or not. Ask the provider if the product tracks the number of new appointments it generates, along with the response rate to the various communications it sends out.

4. **What if your system does not perform as promised?**

Whether you are dealing with a lab or an equipment vendor, you want accountability if a supplier fails to deliver what was promised. Is your satisfaction guaranteed? How will the provider respond if results are lackluster or the system has technical flaws? If you are dissatisfied with the answers you get, keep shopping.

5. **I am missing email addresses for some patients and mobile numbers for others. How will your system reach all of my patients?**

Some systems offer limited methods of communication, such as texts or emails only. If you are missing email addresses or mobile numbers for patients, the recare system won't reach them. Be sure to choose a system that employs all means of communication, including phone calls, text messages, emails, and postcards.

6. Can I customize patients' records to accommodate their preferences for type, frequency, and timing of communications?

Every dental practice and every patient is different. You have your own needs and preferences, as do your patients. Millennials may prefer texts, whereas seniors may prefer phone calls. Some patients want just one reminder, while others need several. Look for a recare system that is flexible enough to meet your patients' needs as well as your practice's.

7. Is your system user-friendly?

Ease of use is one of those overused technology terms we've been hearing for decades. To find out if a system is truly easy to use, request a demo and try some specific routine tasks. For instance, ask how your staff would send a recare email featuring smile makeovers to all female patients 40 years and older who have not visited the practice for more than two years

8. **My staff has neither the time nor the skill set to design effective recare messages and campaigns. How does your system address this issue?**

    There is more to automated recare than meets the eye. Eliciting a positive response from dental patients requires marketing know-how. Your office manager or front desk person would need to know what to say to whom, when and how often to say it, and through what communication channels. Understanding demographics is also required. Rather than put your staff through mental gymnastics just to send out a reminder, look for a system with prebuilt marketing campaigns based on proven best practices for dentists.

9. **What are your support and training policies?**

    This is the time to read the fine print. Find out what the provider's training and support policies are. How are your staff to be trained? What are the support hours? How often is the system updated with feature enhancements? Are there additional costs?

10. What are your pricing plans, and which services are included?

Here you can do some comparison shopping on price. Be on the lookout for hidden fees and add-on services. It's also important to ensure that the services included are a good fit for your practice. In the long run, paying for something your team doesn't need or won't use is never a bargain, regardless of the cost.

11. Will I be locked into a contract?

Like many technology companies, recare vendors are fond of contracts because they protect their own revenues while doing absolutely nothing for their customers. Try to find a contract-free provider so you don't get stuck with an unsatisfactory service. If there is a contract, read the fine print and ask the provider's sales rep or legal department to explain in writing any unclear points.

12. Can I talk to some of your dental office users?

Don't be shy about asking for references. Contact a few of the provider's current users and find out how the product is working for them. Ask pointed questions: find out what they like and dislike about the system, what they wish they could improve, and, above all else, if it has increased their active patient base.

Effective patient communications are key. When done correctly, recalls and reminders can help you reduce no-shows, improve profitability, and keep appointment books full. Use these questions to guide your decision process, and take the time to select an automated patient communications provider that you can trust.

ProSites and PracticeMojo are trusted by over 8,500 dental practices for comprehensive website design, marketing, and patient communication solutions. Dentists who use PracticeMojo see an average of $50 back for every dollar they spend, and add an average of 2.5 appointments to the practice per day.

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