THE DO'S AND DON'TS
OF TEXT MESSAGE MARKETING

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Like Pavlov's dogs, most of us today are hard-wired to react when we hear a text message ping our smart phones. The sound is an alert that someone has reached out to you personally and that flash of excitement is hard to ignore. In fact, most people respond to texts within 90 seconds.[1]

Texts aren't just for communicating with friends and family. Text message marketing, also called SMS (Short Message Service) marketing, can help your practice engage with your community in a quick, easy, and highly targeted manner. This medium has proven even more effective than email marketing in regard to visibility and engagement:

- Average open rate for SMS messages is 98%.[2]
- Average open rate for email marketing messages is 20%.[3]
- Average response rate for SMS messages is 45%.[4]
- Average click-through rate for email marketing messages is 10.29%.[5]

Before you start sending texts, review this list of do's and don'ts to promote successful, appropriate communications.

WHAT TO DO

To increase your success in reaching patients, follow these steps.

Get consent. Just like you ask for permission to send emails to patients, you need patient consent to send texts as well. One way to do this is by adding a text consent button on all of your webforms (e.g., contact forms, patient information, event registrations, etc.). Your front desk staff can also be trained to ask patients for text consent as they check in for appointments: "May we email or text you with appointment reminders and practice updates?"

Give them an out. Sometimes patients may inadvertently sign up to receive texts or decide later on that they do not wish to keep receiving them. Make sure you give recipients an easy way to opt out of texts, directly within your message. Something as simple as "Reply STOP to opt out" can be effective.

Identify yourself. Keep in mind that the recipients probably don't have your practice in their list of contacts, so make sure you identify your practice name in the message.

Get personal. By using personal language like, "Hi, it's Dr. Smith from ABC Eyecare," the message may spark more engagement.

Provide value. Send relevant messages to targeted recipients. Your patients should look forward to receiving your communications because there will be something of value for them.

Make it compliant. Be cautious about the messaging in regard to your patients' HIPAA rights. Texts should be HIPAA-compliant, just like other communications. Remember that a personal cell phone is not HIPAA-secure.

Include a call-to-action. Include a link to a unique landing page that complements the message you are sending. For example, if you are offering $1,000 off LASIK in your message, link to a unique page that explains the offer and allows people to schedule an appointment easily.

WHAT TO AVOID
Four key things:

Wordy messages. Texts have a 160-character limit. If your message is too long, it will get broken up into two messages. Try to get your message across as concisely as possible.

Over-abbreviating. Avoid using too many abbreviations just to shorten your message. If it's too difficult to understand, your patients won't engage—and they may drop off your list.

Over-communicating. Avoid sending more than two to four promotional texts a month to your patients. The exception is appointment reminders: These may need to be sent more frequently.

Late-night delivery. No one wants to hear the text ping at 2 a.m. Be sure to schedule your text delivery at an appropriate hour. Take time zones into consideration—this is especially important if your external marketing firm is in a different part of the country.

HOW TO SEND MESSAGES
Some versions of practice management software have text messaging capabilities built into the system. If yours does not, look for a HIPAA-compliant SMS marketing system such as Text Request. The texting company should have a HIPAA-secure back end and sign a Business Associate Agreement (BAA) to satisfy HIPAA regulations, creating a bond of liability between your practice and the texting company.

PUSH VS. PULL
Your practice can incorporate both push and pull text marketing tactics. For example, you can push notifications to existing patients about appointment reminders, discounts/flash sales, or events such as webinars.

You can also allow patients to initiate text communications with your practice by giving them the opportunity to text for more information about a service or event (pull marketing). Allowing this text communication option may be more attractive and considered low-risk for potential patients who aren't quite ready to speak with someone at your practice directly.

GIVE PATIENTS THE OPTION
If you're thinking that texting is too aggressive, consider this: 64% of consumers think businesses should contact them via text messages more often.[6] Not all patients will want to receive texts from you, but it's an option that may be attractive. In this age when people want information quickly and concisely, texting may be the right medium to help your practice grow. *AE*

NOTES
[1] Jun-Li, Y. (April 1, 2021). Your CTIA & TCPA compliance guide and 10-step SMS compliance checklist. Cartloop. Retrieved from https://www.cartloop.io/post/ctia-tcpa-sms-compliance-guide-10-step-checklist

[2] Ibid.

[3] Hott, A. (March 25, 2021). SMS marketing: The good, the bad, and the don't you dare. Optinmonster. Retrieved from https://optinmonster.com/sms-marketing/

[4] Ibid.

[5] Chaffey, D. (March 18, 2021). How do you compare? 2021 average email open rates, clickthrough rates, and marketing statistics compilation. Smart Insights. Retrieved from https://www.smartinsights.com/email-marketing/email-communications-strategy/statistics-sources-for-email-marketing/.

[6] TxtCart. (Dec. 1, 2020). Text marketing statistics you should know in 2021. Retrieved from https://txtcartapp.com/text-marketing-statistics/?utm_source=zest.is&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=zest-organic.

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> " Texts are hard to ignore; they have a 98% open rate.

IN A BLINK

- Get patient consent before sending texts.

- Texts should be HIPAA-compliant.

- Incorporate both push and pull text marketing tactics.