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THE PATIENT ENGAGEMENT ISSUE

Transparent Communication



The important role of communication and technology in patient collections. >>> PAGE 6

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A CASE STUDY

Texting Statements

Statement vendor Data Media Associates integrated a pay-by-text and two-way messaging solution in March to great success.

By Whitney Power

Now more than ever, text messaging and SMS invoicing should be included in any omnichannel practice management and patient billing strategy. Consumer demand for touchless, digital services is at an all-time high since the pandemic, and trust in text-based payments and communication with healthcare companies is growing stronger.

Statement vendors like Data Media Associates (DMA) predicted the now-trending contactless payment shift even before the COVID-19 outbreak. They got ahead of the curve by integrating Everyware Pay by Text and two-way messaging solutions into their trusted medical billing product line in March.

DMA's client, Dexios Radiology Billing, were among the earliest adopters of the newly integrated Everyware SMS billing solution. Dexios' client, Pacific Coast Imaging, came on board quickly, although they were initially unsure of how many patients would actually use Pay by Text.

Dexios launched its Pay by Text pilot offering for Pacific Coast Imaging on Aug. 6, 2020, and watched the rate of payments from texted invoice links jump 18% by mid-September.

"We are so impressed with the response and payment rates that we can't wait to expand. We're especially surprised with the text-to-pay success because most of the company's patients are in the older demographic," says Tracy Baase, vice president at Dexios.

It should come as no surprise to medical billing companies that older adults are becoming increasingly willing to pay bills via text message. According to the AARP's 2020 Tech and the 50+ Survey,¹ the generation gap in smartphone adoption is narrowing, and 88% of older adults use smartphones primarily for, you guessed it, text messaging.

"The beauty of integrating with DMA and Everyware means Dexios' clients don't have to ask patients to download any payment app or patient portal app. We know people are already texting on their phones, so all they would have to do to pay a bill with us is open a link from a text message.



It should come as no surprise to medical billing companies that older adults are becoming increasingly willing to pay bills via text message.

There's basically no learning curve, so no barrier to adoption that way," says Cleve Shultz, president at DMA.

So far, all of DMA and Dexios' original SMS bill pay ROI predictions are proving true.

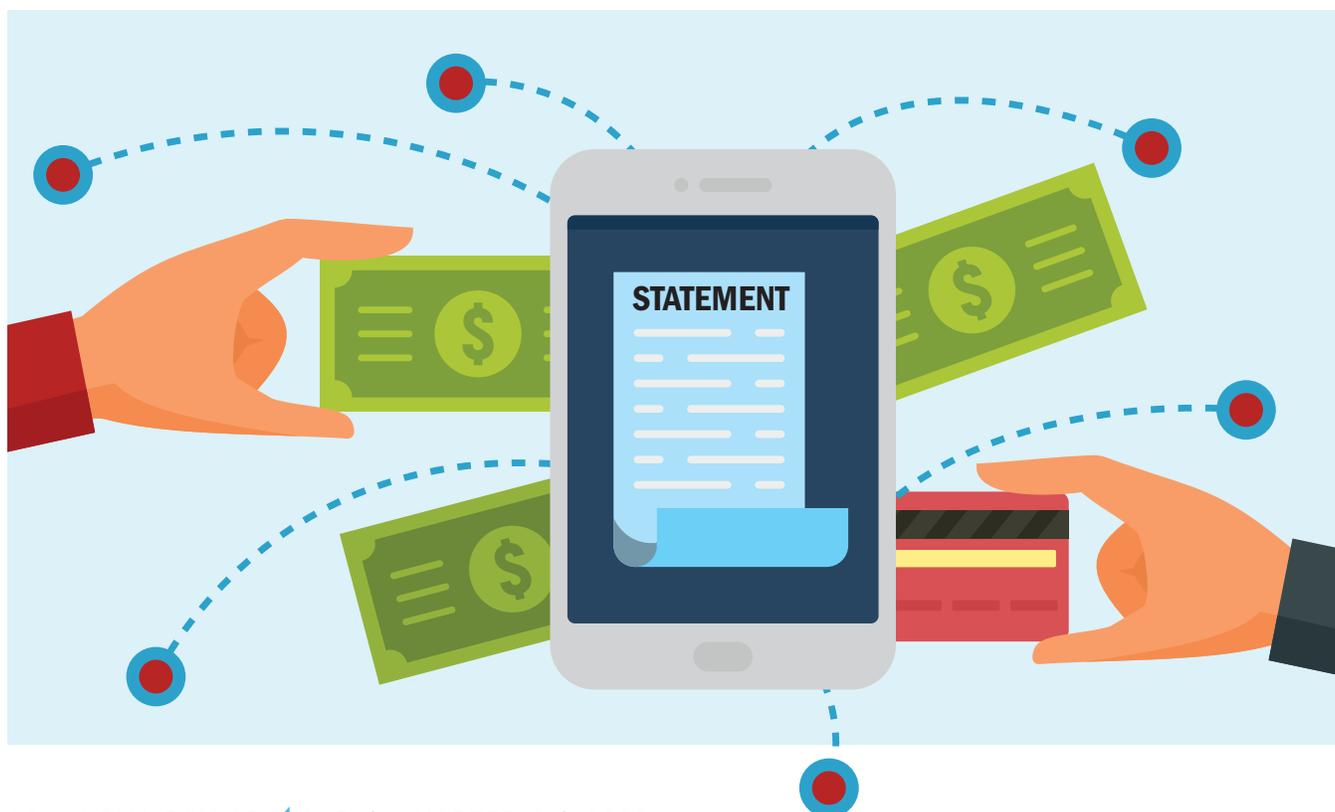
"The SMS project was supposed to be an efficient alternative to 'the good old way' of sending an envelope in the mail that patients would appreciate," says Dexios President Kyle Tucker. "It would save both Dexios and our clients' money, as it is quite a bit less expensive than a paper statement. Texting invoices before mailing them was intended to yield a percentage of payments that would save clients' time and expense associated with paper-based collections in the next round of outreach. Beyond that, it is also an environmentally friendly approach to statement delivery. It also would meet the need for a totally touchless payment solution that would help keep patients and healthcare teams productive from a safe distance amidst pandemic concerns."

Evidence of patients' appreciation for SMS invoicing can be seen in Pacific Coast Imaging's dashboard trends:

- A considerable number of transactions take place in the evenings between 5:30 and 8:00 p.m.
- Many payments are made within the hour of issuing SMS invoice batches, some in under 10 minutes.

Without enabling "friendly reminder, your payment is due" automated follow-up texts, patients still returned to their SMS apps and paid their bills days after receiving them. This shows patients intentionally held onto the messages rather than deleting them or blocking the sender.

A potential challenge in rolling out SMS billing could be in collecting patients' mobile numbers and permission to text them. Billing companies, management platforms, and the practices they serve probably already have mobile phone numbers on file since many people have done away with



landlines altogether. Before launching SMS services, you'll want to update contact records and communication preferences for patients.

To meet best practice standards around privacy and consent, it is recommended for health practices to include "Do you wish to receive communications by text?" in new patient registration packets among the typical medical record sharing and nondisclosure agreement language.

The Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA), enforced by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), dictates that permission be requested ahead of billing related text messages to patients. An easy way to phrase an opt-in text is: "You now have the convenient option to receive your invoices by text message along with appointment reminders. Please text reply 'No' if you prefer to continue receiving email or paper-statements only."

According to Everyware product analysts, patients are unlikely to opt out of such a convenient, risk-free option, especially if SMS communications also include text appointment reminders and the ability to text replies or ques-

tions to office staff. On average, Everyware sees only a 3% SMS opt-out rate among healthcare companies.

"Based on what we're seeing, we can't wait to expand the use of text messaging technology further and recommend our medical billing colleagues consider doing the same," Tucker says. ■



Whitney Power, MBA, is a marketing manager at Everyware. As innovation and technology commercialization manager for national nonprofit healthcare organization, and after years of implementing new systems to improve healthcare efficiency from inside administrative offices, Power joined Everyware to help tackle the greatest barriers in the industry from a new angle: integrating Pay by Text and two-way messaging for better patient billing and communication through technology consumers use most.

Resources

¹ <https://www.aarp.org/research/topics/technology/info-2019/2020-technology-trends-older-americans.htm>

Difficult Times For Small Billing Services

Do any of the following apply to **YOU**?

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