A Guide to Reducing No-shows
Problems With No-shows

No-shows are a common problem for service providers and professionals – particularly in healthcare where patient appointments are a standard part of operations. For example, no-show rates up to 30 percent have been reported for psychotherapists. Community mental health centers face rates of 10 – 50 percent. In fact, many types of healthcare providers struggle with no-shows. A Medical Group Management Association study reported in 2015 that even well-run medical practices have an average no-show and last-minute cancelation rate of 12 percent. Some practices fare less well, experiencing a no-show rate as large as 50 percent.

But no-shows don’t only impact the healthcare industry. Service businesses, governments and nonprofits can be impacted as well. One study of jury duty participation in California reported no-show rates ranging from 20 – 46 percent, depending on the county. Regardless of the industry, no-shows cause a myriad of problems.

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<th>DECREASED REVENUE</th>
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<td>(for a business that is open 5 days per week)</td>
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<td>$78k</td>
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**Decreased revenue** – A high no-show rate impacts the bottom line. If your business is open five days a week with an average of three no-shows per day at a rate of approximately $100 per customer-visit, that equals lost revenue of over $78K per year.

**Lower accessibility and operational efficiency** – During the time allotted to someone that didn’t show up, other customers could have accessed your service and moved through the queue more quickly.

**Detrimental outcomes for the no-shows** – For jurors or offenders, a no-show can lead to a contempt of court citation or even an arrest warrant. For salon customers who are repeat offenders, it could result in the customer being “fired.” For patients, a no-show might result in a poor medical outcome.
While lost revenue impacts any type business, medical appointment no-shows create additional risks for healthcare providers and their patients.

**Lost opportunity:** The doctor loses an opportunity for a timely review of patient health and treatment progress.

**Liability risk:** A patient that missed an appointment and suffered an injury may have a viable cause for a lawsuit against the practice. To avoid such risk, the doctor must maintain evidence of giving clear directions and making reasonable efforts to ensure patient's compliance with care program, including keeping follow-up appointments.

**No-show penalty fees:** Patients may be charged fees for not showing up or for canceling appointments without sufficient notice.

**Health damage:** No-shows interrupt continuity of care and can lead to missed opportunities to solve an acute health problem.

**Reduced accessibility:** Other patients are impacted when their appointments are pushed further out behind a no-show patient. They could have accessed care sooner if the no-show had rescheduled and opened that slot.
Businesses across the U.S. employ a variety of techniques to reduce no-shows and to minimize their impact. Here are some approaches to consider that have worked for others.

**Call your customers to reschedule their missed appointments.** When no-shows are decreasing your revenue, you can’t afford to wait for customers to call you back.

**Develop a call list of customers** who are able to come in for short-notice appointments. After you’ve developed the list you’ll have a backup plan. When a late cancelation occurs, these customers may be able to fill the empty slot.

**Allow customers to prepay** for their next appointment. This gives them incentive to return for their next appointment.

**Reward customers who show up on time** with discounts on their bill. This not only reduces no-shows, but also helps keep your schedule on track.

**Limit appointments per customer to one per week.** Taking off work to make an appointment just once in a week can be difficult for many people, so trying to make it to multiple appointments in one week can be even more trying.

**Change the office mindset from one of “appointment reminders” to one of “appointment confirmations.”** Appointment confirmations affirm that customers have a responsibility to show up for their appointments, whereas appointment reminders are merely a suggestion. Staff should use “appointment confirmation” language when speaking or corresponding with customers.
Have an after-hours option for customers to leave a message to reschedule. Having an after-hours option for customers to reschedule allows you to know first thing in the morning that slots are available to schedule others.

**Send automated appointment reminders.** A combination of automated appointment reminders sent by phone, text and email can reduce no-show rates significantly – sometimes as much as 50 percent or more. With a cost that is literally pennies per message, this is an extremely cost effective method for reducing no-shows.

In 2005 Denver County conducted a pilot program to determine if using automated reminders would reduce the incidence of offenders failing to appear for arraignment. It worked well. Failures to appear decreased by 50 percent.

When Kaiser Permanente implemented automated text messages as part of a pilot program, they realized a 95.65 percent success rate for the chosen clinic, resulting in 1873 fewer no-shows. **At a rate of $150 per appointment, the clinic saved over $275,000.**

If your business chooses to send automated appointment reminders, make sure to follow best practices that include sending reminders over multiple channels (phone, text and email) and honoring customer preferences. For example; some customers will prefer phone and text, others may prefer email and text, and others may prefer to receive all three, or even just one. You will also need to follow FCC regulations such as including opt-out instructions in text messages, and never sending automated messages without customer consent.

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Want to Explore Automated Appointment Reminders for Your Organization?

Our team is available to answer any questions you may have about sending automated appointment reminders. Request a free consult, or call us at 800.951.8733 to learn more.

At PhoneTree, we use our top-of-the-line messaging solutions to inspire customers to act on their best intentions. We’re in the business of helping people. With our support, you can help move your customers to do the things they always intended to do. Spur customers to action with automated calls, texts and emails. With over 25 years in business, nobody understands better than us the power of well-crafted automated communication.

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