

Patients Are Calling...Are you Answering?

Using Data-Driven Practices to Increase Intake



Gelb Consulting, An Endeavor Management Company

2700 Post Oak Blvd
Suite 1400
Houston, Texas 77056

P + 800.846.4051
F + 281.759.3607
www.endeavormgmt.com/healthcare

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Overview

Your front door is not your facility's front door – it's actually your contact center, whether a call center or an interactive web page. This is the first time a potential customer has demonstrated interest in your health care facility by sharing meaningful information about their needs. Those initial interactions through your website and phone are the first demonstration of your level of concern for your customer. However, it's where so many healthcare organizations fail to keep their callers' interest due to a lack of appreciation for their functional and emotional needs.

One Example

One large, very well respected health care system was receiving plenty of calls at their call centers. 9,000 calls and emails each month. 4,000 physician referrals. Yet only 58% of those contacts resulted in new patient appointments or admissions. That's when MD Anderson Cancer Center was wise enough to ask the right question –WHY are patients choosing to go elsewhere for their health care? What are our patients NOT telling us when they call? As Bill Gates is noted for saying, "Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning." (Business @ The Speed of Thought, 1999).

They joined with Gelb Consulting to identify reasons why so many patients did not follow-through to make appointments. Through customer and staff interviews, along with Gelb's "Experience Mapping" process and experience with cultural assessment, they discovered the following:

- Only 10% of patients were just "shopping around"
- 42% of patients referred – both self and physician – did not receive a medical record number, and thus were hard to track
- 18% of patients referrals who set up appointments cancelled due to medical/financial reasons, wait time too long, shopping around –these patient calls were recorded for in the system
- There was no reporting mechanism for calls from non-registered patients

Data from interviews revealed that patients expected someone to call them back. When no one did, they changed mind, then made an appointment elsewhere.

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Getting Lost in the System

Much like your institution, many others have decentralized scheduling systems and a very complex processes and idiosyncratic requirements. Many organizations have specific scheduling criteria, protocols and procedures. Decentralized systems are often hard for patients to navigate and centralizing of scheduling is not necessarily the solution. Regardless, communication between care centers can result in referrals getting dropped through the cracks. Some key examples:

- Limited knowledge: Initial contacts should have a working knowledge of what your organization can provide and what makes you unique. In addition, when required, it's important to make sure the caller is being transferred to the right person (function) in a way that continues to make the caller feel welcomed (emotion)
- Lack of follow-up: Many patients are not contacted after referral was initiated. What are your percentages? What is the loss in potential care revenue?
- Percentage of calls unaccounted for – not ever entered into the system. Did the callers get frustrated? Did the staff assume someone else from another call center would enter the data?

Critical Role of the Call Center

Your contact center is your customer's first experience with an organization. This is where the "moment of truth" happens – the time when your customer forms an opinion of what your organization is like, and whether the customer will receive the help (s)he needs. Therefore, the contact center represents the culture of your organization to the customer.

A question one might ask is: Does our contact center represent the culture we hope to embrace? Does the caller *feel* the culture we desire to have? How do they perceive our medical center? Do we appear disorganized, not caring enough to call back? Do the employees' actions reflect a professional and caring culture? In fact, through patient interviews conducted we have conducted across numerous healthcare systems, even those that described as very caring by patients actually admitted, can fall short *prior* to patient admittance. When this occurs, the contact center does not reflect the professional and caring culture of a medical center. Important information gathered via patient interviews and surveys will identify where and when you lose potential customers.

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Here is one example of what happens when even 10% of patients lost through “leakage” results in large missed opportunities.

Realities of Leakage

>10% of patients were not contacted after referral was initiated



5,250 patients lost in FY2010



Bottom Line:
\$341,250,000
in missed opportunities

Taking Action

1. Standardize the conversation to minimize leakage
2. Ensure the call center staff is empowered to take necessary actions
3. Outline specific behaviors for phone/online conversations (yes, online conversations make a difference, too)
4. Document key information from each contact to ensure proper transition of information across team members
5. Monitor the experience and escalate issues for service recovery
6. Consider skills development for call center staff to include a higher level of organizational and medical knowledge
7. Encourage empathy building at every turn

Potential Results

Adaptation of call center best practices and utilization of real-time feedback systems, can show quantifiable results. These can be measured not only by satisfaction with the call, but increased patient appointments (conversions) and admissions.

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In health care, calls received often occur when patients and families are in a stressful situation. The call center specialist, therefore, needs particular interpersonal skills to help the caller manage the stress as well as a lot of information. In addition, data analysis is regularly performed to benchmark performance across care centers, identify common themes, and track conversions after intervention with dissatisfied callers.

The implication of these interventions and sophisticated tools could yield an ROI of over 1000%!

In the MD Anderson case, the dashboard data management system, staff training and process improvement interventions resulted in an ROI of 1118%!

Return on Investment

1,000 Interventions	43% Convert after we intervene	\$65,000 Revenue/patient
430 Saves	\$27,950,000 Captured revenue	\$25,000 Cost of system
1118% ROI		

Implications:

Is this experience generalizable to other the health care organizations? According to empirical research, patients who are called back are much more likely to have a favorable impression of their clinical visit (Guss, Gray, & Castillo, 2014). Delays in call answering or callback for triage were significantly associated with lower satisfaction (Kelly, Egbunike, Kinnersley, Hood, Owen-Jones, Button, & Edwards, 2010). In addition, research tells us that employees who feel enabled better reflect a caring culture (Sarti, D. (2014).

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Yet, the medical industry is behind the curve when it comes to engaging with unhappy customers. The national average for responding to dissatisfied customers within one day is 66

percent; the medical industry's response rate is 50 percent (Klie, 2012). The implications are clear. Call centers and other first contacts are critically important to the overall experience of your patients, and to your opportunities for growth in the health care market place.

So Patients Are Calling, Are you Listening?

What are *your* patients thinking? Where is your leakage occurring? How can you decrease the percentage of patients who go elsewhere? Endeavor's Experience Mapping process can identify the specific factors that will lead to your improved outcomes, and online data dashboards that will manage your data for sustained improvements.

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About Endeavor Management

Endeavor Management, is an international management consulting firm that collaboratively works with their clients to achieve greater value from their transformational business initiatives. Endeavor serves as a catalyst by providing pragmatic methodologies and industry expertise in Transformational Strategies, Operational Excellence, Organizational Effectiveness, and Transformational Leadership.

Our clients include those responsible for:

- Business Strategy
- Marketing and Brand Strategy
- Operations
- Technology Deployment
- Strategic Human Capital
- Corporate Finance

The firm's 50 year heritage has produced a substantial portfolio of proven methodologies, deep operational insight and broad industry experience. This experience enables our team to quickly understand the dynamics of client companies and markets. Endeavor's clients span the globe and are typically leaders in their industry.

Gelb Consulting Group, a wholly owned subsidiary, monitors organizational performance and designs winning marketing strategies. Gelb helps organizations focus their marketing initiatives by fully understanding customer needs through proven strategic frameworks to guide marketing strategies, build trusted brands, deliver exceptional experiences and launch new products. Gelb can help you to develop and implement the right strategies. Using advanced research techniques, Gelb can help you to understand the complexities of your market, to develop your strategic decision frameworks and to determine the best deployment of your resources and technology to monitor your successes.

For over 40 years, Gelb has worked with marketing leaders on:

- Strategic Marketing
- Brand Building
- Customer Experience Management
- Go to Market
- Product Innovation
- Trademark/Trade Dress Protection

Our websites:

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