

The Modern Physical Therapy Office: Communication for the Future

How the latest tech can reduce
inefficiencies, retain good employees,
and build patient relationships

We live in a time when communication is easier than ever before.

This ease of communication can either optimize our work or remain untapped potential. In the case of physical therapy offices, many physical therapists and office managers are so busy making their already-existing communication tools work for them, they don't stop to think about how they could further modernize their communication.

Every physical therapy office deals with the challenges of inefficiency, retention, and modernization. Much of the work done to address these issues revolves around improving the quality of the physical therapy itself, and rightfully so. However, other variables factor into the patient experience at a physical therapy office, especially communication.

Inefficient customer communication affects the well-being of your physical therapy practice, including patient loyalty. Here, we'll walk through those challenges and offer some solutions to combat these inefficiencies.

To better understand how modern physical therapy offices are engaging with their patients, we commissioned a survey of 750 business leaders and 750 consumers. The results showed that small businesses using outdated systems and tools — think paper forms and traditional voicemail — are increasingly overwhelmed with tedious tasks that automation and technology could help streamline, saving them time and money. Let's explore some of the most important findings from our survey.

Methodology

Weave, a leading all-in-one customer communications platform, commissioned an independent study of healthcare clinics, small businesses, and US consumers in September 2021 using an independent market research firm and a global sample provider.

Weave's study surveyed 750 business leaders (margin of error +/- 3.60%) and 750 US consumers (margin of error +/- 3.58%) to understand how business communication is evolving, and how technology is changing the way consumers interface and pay for services.

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01

Inefficient patient communication costs time, money, and employees

When physical therapists and their teams spend significant amounts of time trying to communicate with their patients, quality care can feel rushed. If physical office owners waste chunks of their budget on a cumbersome and disjointed communication network, they can't offer some of the small luxuries that make a difference in the patient experience. And as employees recognize these inconveniences, they grow tired of participating in the practice and quit.

Today's physical therapy practices recognize the benefit of communication technology. In fact, 98% of the clinics interviewed in our survey say their

front office technology plays a crucial role in delivering great patient experiences. The question for physical therapy offices, then, is whether or not they're taking advantage of technology to further optimize the patient experience.

Some practices put a premium on keeping their lines of communication up-to-date. However, 23% of clinics are still using office technology that's over 5 years old. The constant stream of technological innovations in virtually every market can be daunting, but it's worth considering how modern communication saves physical therapy offices' time, money, and employees.

Front office staff could save over 3 hours per day

According to our survey, the average front office staff member spends over four hours each day responding to patient requests. This workload is what we've come to expect of office managers and receptionists. We're used to seeing them jump from phone calls to in-office questions to billing and back again. But what if they could be free to work more productively?

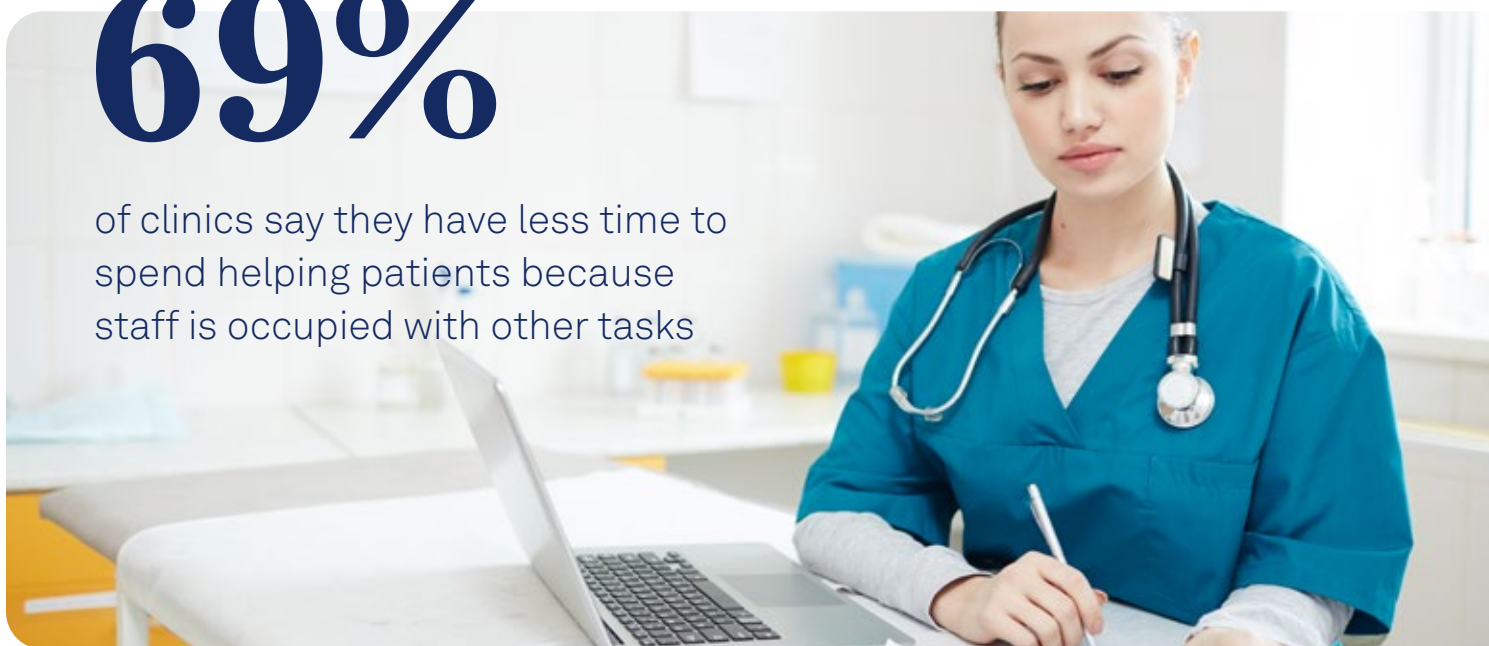
The results of our study found that front office staff could save over three hours per day if they had the option to automate more of their patient communication. Once automated processes are set up in your physical therapy office, front office staff are able to focus on deeper, more complex tasks or providing what patients really want — a quick, friendly and quality in-office experience.

[The COVID-19 pandemic has made it more difficult for practices to stay efficient](#). Compared to one year ago, 69% of clinics say they have less time to spend helping patients because staff is occupied with other tasks. If employees could do more with less through automation, this trend could potentially reverse itself.

Making your office's communication more efficient doesn't mean working around the clock. Automation is able to handle calls, texts, and emails when physical therapists and their staff aren't around. Nearly half of clinics in our survey weren't able to help patients after hours because they didn't have the right communication tools. Automated responses and [website tools](#) keep patients informed and loyal to their physical therapist while respecting the need for employees to rest and recuperate.

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33% of clinics spend over \$1,000 per month on communication technology

One objection to new technology physical therapists might have is cost. Managing the finances of any business is a delicate art, and adding a new toy could throw off the balance. At a certain juncture, though, trying to maintain the status quo is actually more expensive than updating.

For example, 33% of the clinics interviewed for our study spend over \$1,000 a month on the technology they use to interact with patients. This technology includes communication as variable as taking calls, setting up extensions and voicemail, text messaging, email marketing, scheduling appointments, appointment reminders, and digital forms.

There's a laundry list of technological shortcuts to efficiency, but they often wind up breaking the bank, as offices have to assemble a patchwork of different tools and softwares that can range in cost and often don't integrate with one another. That adds another level of inefficiency, since front office workers have to bounce between multiple services to handle patient communication.



\$1,000

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One Weave user, Jena Questen, had the following experience with her phone system:

“

When I bought this practice, we had to have AT&T for out-of-state, long-distance calls, and then we had to have Century Link for in-state, long-distance calls. Plus, I had to pay for a normal landline. It was really confusing and a lot of hassle because we basically had three different phone bills going on every month. It was nuts.”

By signing up for Weave, Dr. Questen found [a cost-effective phone service](#) that allows her clinic to make all its calls from a single platform. For her, it was worth switching to Weave for that benefit alone. Throw in the complete suite that includes texting, email marketing, scheduling, and digital forms (just to name a few solutions), and practices have virtually all of their communication unified in a single platform.



Recruit and retain office staff by updating your systems

Inefficient communication systems impact not only practice owners, but the people they employ. Spending inordinate amounts of time on responding to patient requests leads to a stressful environment that pushes front office staff away, and paying too much for communication technology means your ability to properly compensate employees is affected.

The practices in our survey can attest to the importance of office technology in recruiting and retaining office staff. 77% of them say having the latest front office technology makes it easier to recruit talented staff. Smart potential employees recognize physical therapy practices that are making an effort to support their office managers and receptionists with effective systems.

A sizable percentage of practices have lost employees due to limited communication technology. 39% of clinics report that a staff member quit partially because they were frustrated with the performance of office technology.

Everyone these days uses smart technology; why shouldn't they be able to put these tools to work at their job?

75% of the clinics say it's easier to retain office employees if they're using the latest office technology. Physical therapy practices relying on the same old communication tools are increasing the likelihood of their having a high turnover rate. Constantly searching for new staff members is an exhausting process and inflicts a significant cost on small businesses.

To avoid burning through time, money, and employees, physical therapy practices need a communication solution that allows physical therapists to focus on their jobs, owners to make prudent financial decisions, and staff members to feel calm and in control of their work environment. Finding a single platform to address these issues consequently improves the patient experience.

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Many patients aren't loyal to their physical therapist

Although time, finances, and staff members are crucial parts of running a successful physical therapy office, physical therapists widely consider the quality of their patient care to be the crux of their practice. Whether patients are coming to a clinic for a checkup, a physical therapy session, or an even more complicated procedure, they are the primary focus of the practice. Without patients, physical therapy wouldn't exist.

Many physical therapy patients tend to float between providers. Even if they haven't moved to a new geographic area, patients can become dissatisfied with their physical therapist and look elsewhere (like at Google reviews) for someone that better suits their needs. According to our survey, 76% of physical therapy patients aren't loyal to their physical therapist.

So, what prevents patients from being loyal to their physical therapist?

A photograph showing a physical therapist's hands assisting a patient's leg. The therapist is wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt and is holding the patient's leg, possibly demonstrating an exercise or providing support. The patient is lying down, and the background is a blurred clinical setting.

76%

of physical therapy patients aren't loyal to their physical therapist

Reasons physical therapy patients switch offices

In our survey, physical patients switch to new offices for a variety of reasons. The first is cost. Physical therapists are constantly dealing with the process of finding a balance between the expenses inherent to running their business and the amount they charge their patients. As discussed in the previous section, inefficiencies stemming from poor time management and expensive systems contribute to service prices that drive patients away.

A change in insurance provider also causes physical therapy patients to switch offices. Physical therapists' hands seem tied in this situation, but could optimizing the patient

experience give patients a reason to reconsider an insurance that forces them to leave their favorite physical therapist?

Unclean facilities are another reason patients choose a new physical therapist. The COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened the concern of patients surrounding hygiene. Physical therapy offices should maintain proper social distancing, be conscientious of mask-wearing protocols, and clean commonly used surfaces on a regular basis. Beyond these basic rules for upkeep, practices can add technological solutions that allow patients to feel safe and hygienic in their offices.



Clients care more about who than how long

Despite the prevalence of their switching offices, patients tend to have a distinct preference for which person helps them at a clinic. 55% of patients want to be seen by a specific practitioner when they're visiting a clinic. Patients would like to be loyal to their physical therapist; they just need more convincing reasons to show that loyalty.

Patients are even willing to deal with inefficiencies, including lengthy wait times, if they develop a preference for their physical therapist. Providing a higher quality of care is one surefire way to create a better relationship with your patients. On the business side of your practice, however, implementing modern office communication tools opens up new possibilities for eliminating inefficiencies, keeping a top-notch workforce, and developing an experience that turns first-time clients into lifelong patients.

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Modernization 101:

How to save time & keep up with your patients

Just as smartphones, tablets, and laptops help us communicate more effectively in our personal lives, modern physical therapy office technology is able to support physical therapists and their staff in their efforts to establish loyal patients. Along the way, these solutions also reduce

wasted time, offer financial savings, and bolster employee productivity.

Here are four solutions our survey found to be powerful ways to modernize your physical therapy office:



Declutter with digital forms

Everyone's familiar with the ritual of arriving at the physical therapist's office and sitting down with a clipboard to complete paperwork. With the advent of electronic documentation, though, the days of filling out paperwork with a pencil or pen are numbered. 58% of patients today consider filling out paper in-take forms "old fashioned."

As previously mentioned, unclean or disorganized physical therapy offices make patients want to switch practices. Nearly half of patients say that a clinic with stacks of papers and cabinets seems "disorganized." Much like electronic health records, electronic forms get rid of the tendency to clutter your office with stacks of paper that become eyesores for patients.

Having patients fill out paper forms can also create errors in health profiles. 74% of patients expect clinics to keep an accurate record of their health profile, but 42% of patients have noticed an error in their patient file because the practice misunderstood the handwriting from their paper in-take form. Electronic forms make it more likely that mistakes are caught and prevent complications with billing and auditing.

[Weave Digital Forms](#) is an easy-to-use and customizable way to distribute and collect electronic paperwork. Physical therapy offices can discover savings by using Digital Forms within Weave's unified platform, making it simple to include paperwork in pre-appointment texts. Digital Forms supports HIPAA compliance and ensures that patient data is protected.



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Automate your scheduling

An automated scheduling tool is one of the best methods for increasing your physical therapy office's efficiency. Today, 70% of clinics prefer to send a text for appointment reminders, and patients agree. Modern physical therapy patients like receiving appointment reminders by text because they're able to check appointment details without calling their physical therapists back.

While older patients still prefer communication by phone, 67% of young people would rather receive a text than a call or email. Patients in our survey also preferred getting a text while they're at work. Since the vast majority of appointment reminders are sent out during the workday, a strong text outreach scheduled through an automated system is ideal for the modern physical therapy office.

65% of clinics in our survey prefer to schedule appointments by phone, while the remaining 35% of them handle scheduling by text. The benefit of a single platform like Weave is that physical therapy practices can develop their own approach to scheduling, reminding, and following up with patients. Missed call texts are a link between phones and text messages that open up the possibility for text conversations.

[Weave Scheduling](#) allows physical therapy offices to automate and personalize their appointment reminders. It even analyzes patient responses to texts and notifies front desk staff of confirmed appointments. If patients cancel on short notice, Scheduling makes it easy to identify patients ready to come into the office and send them a text blast.

70%

of clinics prefer to send a text for appointment reminders, and patients agree



Collect online reviews

It's becoming common knowledge that most consumers refer to online reviews before making a purchase. Physical therapy patients are no different. 86% of the patients in our survey check the online reviews of a practice before requesting an appointment.

Although patients are eager to read reviews, they're not likely to write reviews without prompting. Only 15% of patients consistently leave online reviews for their providers, but 52% of them say they would if they got a reminder. Sending review requests following appointments and collecting them on key sites like Google and Facebook is a cornerstone of online marketing for modern physical therapy practices.

94% of practices believe online reviews are important for their success in today's market,

but only half of them actually send reminders to their patients about writing an online review. [Weave Reviews](#) lets physical therapy offices turn customers into evangelists with a simple text. After patients write reviews, office staff can monitor their practice's review status through a user-friendly interface.

“

We use Weave Reviews exclusively to get reviews, other than the occasional patient that writes a review manually on paper,” says marketing coordinator Dan Trachtenberg. “Compared to last year and the year before, it's made a big difference.” The office Dan works for in New York added 4x their new online reviews from the previous two years in 2021 with Weave Reviews.



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Offer text payments

Modern physical therapy offices rely on technological solutions to increase efficiency before, during, and after appointments. They also utilize contactless payment methods like digital wallets and text payments. Weave's Text to Pay feature gives physical therapy practices the ability to request payment by text following appointments.

61% of patients from our survey are more likely to pay their bill if they receive a text reminder with a payment link. This increased likelihood has to do with the speed and convenience of text payments. Once patients click on the link, they're brought to a payment page that makes it quick and easy to pay for their therapy.

74% of the practices interviewed in our survey that offer a text payment option say that this capability helps prevent overdue invoices. And patients agree. Adding a text payment option to your physical practice improves the patient experience and makes the financial side of your business more efficient.

[Weave Payments](#) isn't only reliant on contactless payments. Patients can stick to traditional payment methods like cash, checks, and credit cards. Payments lets Weave handle all your office's merchant services and payment processing within our single platform, allowing physical therapists to spend the bulk of their time caring for their patients instead of worrying about billing.

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Conclusion:

Modernize your physical therapy office with Weave

Today's physical therapy practices are hungry for technology that can make them more efficient, more competitive, and more caring. Effective communication enables physical therapy offices to use their time wisely, manage their business profitably, and support their teams properly. An optimized communication system helps patients feel secure and that their physical therapist is doing everything possible to meet their needs.

Unifying your patient communication with a single platform is possible with Weave. Using our VoIP phone system as its foundation, our platform enables physical therapy practices to digitize their forms, automate their scheduling, strengthen their online presence, and optimize their payments.

We invite you to discover how to modernize your physical therapy office's communication with Weave. Visit our website, check out our educational resources, and schedule a demo to find out why Weave is the single communication platform for the future.

Schedule a demo