

# SESAME PAPERS 1.0

## Online Trends and Insights for the Dental Professional

### Technology Meets Tradition

What patients are saying about using Internet technology.

The relationship between dentist and patient is a unique and privileged one. It requires a high degree of trust and active communication from both sides to actualize treatment and manage care. In today's fast-paced world, this assurance and dialogue between dentist and patient is even more difficult to establish. The dentist must make it easy for patients to fit dental care into their schedule, financial situation, and lifestyle.

Patients want the simplicity and convenience of the Internet because it makes their busy lives easier. To be successful, dentists must develop and strengthen relationships with patients using the power of the Web. It is the single most important platform doctors can leverage to influence their practice's productivity and profitability.

Positively impacting the patient's experience no longer begins in the dentist's chair. It starts much sooner, in the patient's chair at home or at work in front of a computer. Maximizing the online connection to their patients allows dentists to nurture those relationships to grow and thrive.

**This whitepaper will examine how patients view and use Internet technology to take greater control of their dental care and why it results in stronger dentist-patient relationships.**

Findings and content are based on over 23,000 dental patient surveys submitted January – October, 2008 across the United States and Canada. These are patients of general dentists who use the Sesame service to access their appointments, account information and x-ray images by logging in through a patient portal on the dentist's web site. They also receive automated communications from their dentist through Sesame.

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### Key Findings:

1. Technology impacts patient perceptions
2. Putting patients first means being online
3. Time is a luxury and convenience a necessity
4. Email trumps phone calls
5. Financial visibility and online payment embraced by patients



## Technology Impacts Patient Perceptions

When patients see doctors applying innovative online technology, they associate that usage as a metaphor for being current on clinical procedures as well. Patients believe a practice with a smart, interactive web site and online access is more likely to use the latest treatment methods and materials. This belief was strongly supported by survey participants:

*"My dentist is always on the cutting edge, and this is more proof of what an awesome practice Levy Dental is ... I love them!"*

– Randi M., Hartford, CT

*"Staying up with technology - puts him ahead ... this could only mean that he is also up-to-date on the latest and great dental care for his patients."*

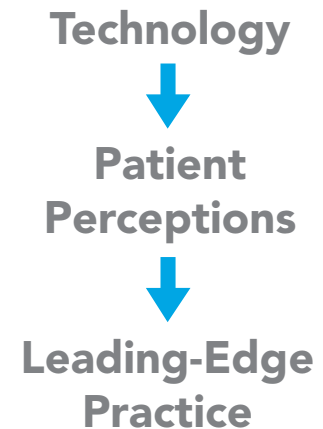
– Peggy M., Rochester, NY

*"I specifically chose this dentist for their online tools and use of email for scheduling and other correspondence. I found no other dentist in the area with a decent online presence." – Julianne Z., Hartford, CT*

*"I'm a new patient and first time user of Sesame. This service underscores the importance of customer service and should be provided by all medical and dental providers to improve doctor-patient interaction."*

– Joel L., Washington, DC

These comments suggest patients are judging the caliber of your practice and your professional qualifications based on how they experience you online. An effective web presence and dynamic online communication channel also boosts the perceived value that patients see in your practice. It helps retain current patients and acquire new ones. Currently, it provides the competitive edge that distinguishes you from other doctors. Soon, it will be fully expected – similar to your x-ray machine and other diagnostic equipment - and patients will make decisions based on your online capabilities.



*"Offering this online service shows my dentist is up-to-date on technology, and if they can do this, then it makes me feel more comfortable that they are also keeping up-to-date on dental equipment and procedures."*

– Lisa W., Aurora, IL

*"Knowing that Dr. Miller is keeping up with the latest and greatest web technologies makes a statement that he is a dentist that keeps up with the latest and greatest dental procedures."*

– Daryl M., Dallas, TX

## Putting Patients First Means Being Online

Although all patients are unique, they all share the same desire – to be treated with respect and acknowledged as individuals. An online channel catered to the patient's needs emphasizes the dentist's commitment to patient care and reassures the patient that they come first. This view was consistently echoed from survey participants:

*"I love your dentist office ... and it keeps getting better with every visit. I love this new web site you have put together with all our information."  
– Julia S., Chicago, IL*

*"I am a retired first sergeant and I enjoy professionalism like your operation set-up. This is what I call networking with your patients, and this is the only office I know that uses this system."  
– Arturo A., San Antonio, TX*

*"[His online service] shows that [Dr.] Pallotto cares about having a personal relationship with his patients and providing the most convenient services possible for us."  
– Mary Kate D., Chicago, IL*

*"Wow, I have never been able to have so much interaction with my medical [information]. It makes me feel more at ease."  
– Candy F., Dallas, TX*

These findings are highly consistent with patient views on general health care, not just dental care. In its recent survey of health care consumers, Deloitte found that "expanded use of use of Internet-based tools and technologies is strongly desired... and nearly 3 out of 4 consumers want physicians to provide online services to schedule appointments, exchange email, get test results and access medical records."<sup>1</sup>

With this sense of trust, the doctor-patient relationship benefits from increased longevity and optimum patient care.



*"His willingness to use the Sesame service shows his desire to be customer-focused and forward-thinking. I appreciate both qualities in a health care provider."*

*– Lisa C., Indianapolis, IN*

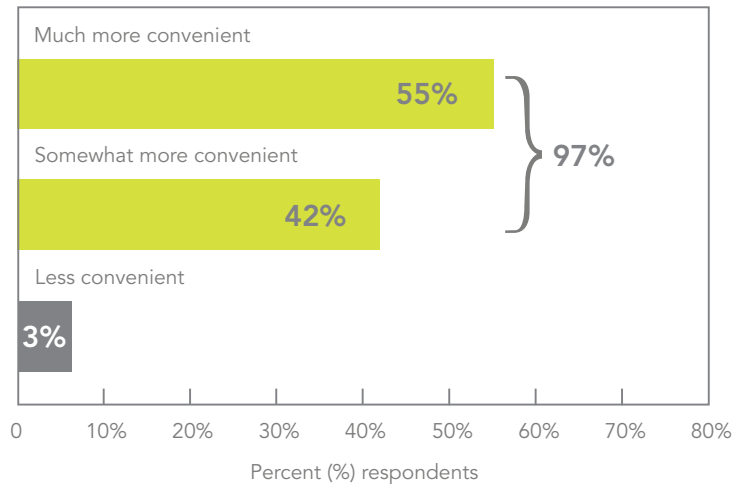
*"Wow! You're so progressive!! It really demonstrates the dedication your office has to the patient's needs and most importantly, your recognition of how important our time is and making accessibility convenient. Thanks!!"*

*– Jeanne A., Grand Rapids, MI*

<sup>1</sup> Deloitte Center for Health Solutions. 2008 Survey of Health Care Consumers, page 10

## Time is a Luxury and Convenience is a Necessity

Survey Question: How much more convenient is it for you to visit your dentist online with your questions, as compared to calling the office?



Patients overwhelmingly find online interaction more convenient than phone communication. Ninety-seven percent of survey respondents prefer online access to answer questions and provide information, with over half rating it "much more convenient."

This is a startling high preference, as it reflects near unanimity on the superiority of the online channel for convenience, time-savings, and personal productivity. In just the past few years, the pattern and mode of communication has completely migrated online, reversing decades of telephone-centered habits. Once patients get a taste of their doctor's web-enabled practice, they likely will never return to the previous status quo.

*"I find it much easier for me to get things done online versus calling for or having to mail out specific information. Sesame fits with me constantly having to be on the computer. I tend to get more things done online than any other way." – Angie L., Dallas, TX*

While the extent of the preference may be surprising, this trend is consistent with how modern technology has eliminated the pauses in life, with many of us juggling work, family, friends and community in an always-on connected world. Time is a precious commodity, and patients manage their hectic schedules by going online. This is where they do most of their living and working, including but not limited to communication, shopping, banking, reading and entertainment. Patients must have access to their doctors in the same way.

*"It's nice to be able to have 24/7 access to my dental account through the dentist's [web site] ... It is such a convenience; a real time-saving service."*

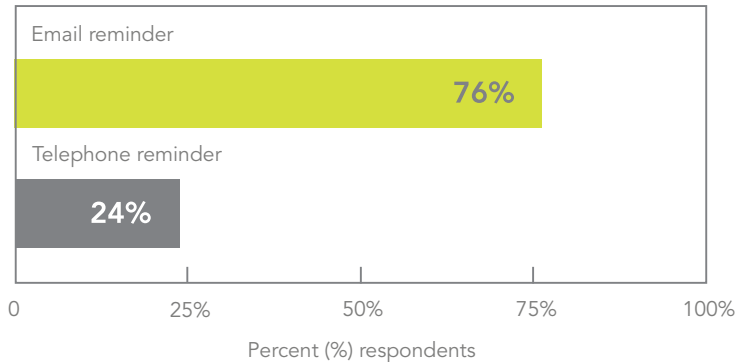
– Glynnis D., Gainesville, VA

*"I hate calling an office when I can just look up something online. This is especially important to me because I can do it while I'm doing something else."*

– Linda C., Washington, DC

## Email Trumps Phone Calls

Survey Question: Which type of reminder do you prefer?



Email reminders were preferred over phone reminders by more than 3 to 1. There is very clear, overwhelming preference for electronic communication compared with the traditional phone medium. Phone calls are often missed, and even voice mail does not provide the convenience and clarity of clearly written reminders delivered to a patient's inbox. Patients can seamlessly update calendars and print appointment detail, among other activities, on their own schedule.

*"I live in another city that requires me to make a long distance call each time I need to make an appointment, ask a question, etc. The convenience of using email as a communication saves me time and money when I need help." – Carolyn M., Phoenix, AZ*

*"I am on the Internet more than I am on a phone. Time goes by fast and there are days that I don't have time to just pick up a phone. This is much easier for me to keep up on my treatments." – Christine M., Dallas, TX*

As all successful dentists know, keeping in regular touch with patients is the cornerstone of a healthy and profitable practice. No-shows cost time and money, and can be one of the largest contributors to a practice not reaching its financial potential. Equally important, automated email reminders enhance office productivity. Staff can better focus on patient care because they don't have to spend time making calls, leaving messages, and following up. Consistent communication also builds office loyalty, educates patients about your practice, encourages referrals and is essential for the patient's overall dental health.

*"I really liked the text message option, and being able to confirm appointment times without calling in to the dentist's office."*

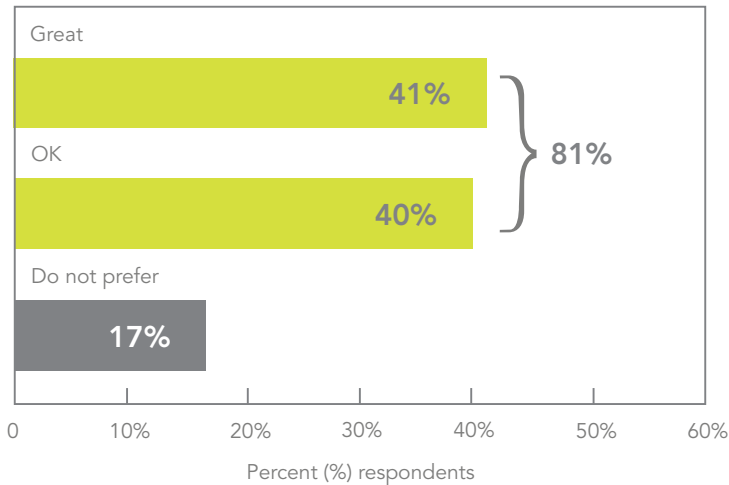
– Alan S., Seattle, WA

*"This service shows his savvy ability to be able to communicate on a broader level with a more tech-oriented generation of patients."*

– Tanya S., Albany, NY

## Financial Visibility and Online Payment Embraced by Patients

Survey Question: How do you feel about making payments online?



Over 80% of patients surveyed expressed comfort with making dental payments online, and over 40% enthusiastically endorsed it. This overwhelming level of acceptance will challenge many dentists' perceptions of patient readiness and willingness to pay online. Though dramatic, these results are understandable considering that patients are taking everyday tasks online, and paying bills is no exception. Giving patients the option of paying online shows that you respect their time and lifestyle.

*"I had an additional payment to make ... and I was able to easily log on and make the payment the day I received the notice. This is a more convenient way to process the payment." – Kathryn W., Phoenix, AZ*

*"I needed two receipts from previous appointments and was able to find and print them without having to call my dentist." – Denice D., Washington, DC*

*"It's so easy to view all my transactions online and see how much I have left to use for my dental benefits!" – Jacqueline L., Toronto, ON, Canada*

Many patients are taking the next step and making payments online directly to their dentist, speeding up collections, enhancing cash flow, and reducing administrative time for staff. This is another strong example that reinforces the central premise of providing patients with control and information on their terms – when and where they want it – online.

*"I love the fact that I could pay a bill online."*

– Kim P., Chicago, IL

*"The layout of the finance page is very nice. I can clearly see what my charges are and how much the insurance has paid. The year-to-date benefit usage is an excellent idea."*

– Brigitte J., Phoenix, AZ

*"I like being able to check my financial information when I need it - even at midnight!"*

– Linda B., Kansas City, KS

## Conclusion

The convergence of communications and Internet technology translates into an immense opportunity to improve the dentist/patient relationship. Providing patients with direct online access to the practice reduces the one-sidedness in the relationship, giving patients more control and empowering them to feel involved. Interestingly, the dentist's use of online technology also instills more confidence and trust about the doctor's clinical skill and desire to stay current.

Being online is an investment that keeps the dentist in touch with patients. Most important, it enables the type of interaction that keeps revenue streams open and the practice present in the mind of the patient. Appointment confirmations, payment alerts, expiring benefits reminders and newsletters delivered online remind them that the dentist respects their time, is committed to their long-term dental health, and values their relationship.

*"[Being online] shows a high-level of concern and appreciation for patients. I sometimes feel with other health care professionals that they are doing me a favor by providing care... they don't realize I can go somewhere else and will." – Helen C., Washington, DC*

Patients are health and dental care consumers, and they will continue to broaden and deepen their web-based experiences. Investing in your online presence for practice profitability and growth today plants the seeds for cultivating the full potential of your practice for years to come.

## How to ensure your practice will grow and thrive online:

1. Commit to a cohesive online strategy that puts patients first
2. Unify all web and practice data components to achieve online consistency and harmony
3. Leverage online resources to build practice value

## About Sesame Communications

Sesame Communications is the premiere provider of online products and services for the dental industry. We have revolutionized the way doctors manage their practice by decreasing missed appointments, improving staff productivity, enhancing practice marketing and simplifying patient referrals. We help take your practice to a higher level by providing:

- A consultative approach to develop a comprehensive online strategy;
- An online system that enables patients to receive appointment reminders, pay balances and check their images;
- Online navigation tools to find patients where they spend their time;
- Customized web sites that point patients in your direction, are search-engine friendly, and connected to all the appropriate social networking sites.

**Call now for a demo with a Sesame Solution Consultant, 866-592-7572 or email: [solutions@sesamecommunications.com](mailto:solutions@sesamecommunications.com).  
For more information please visit [www.sesamecommunications.com](http://www.sesamecommunications.com).**

## Appendix

Additional quotes from survey participants, organized by category:

1. Technology Impacts Patient Perceptions
2. Putting Patients First Means Being Online
3. Time is a Luxury and Convenience a Necessity
4. Email Trumps Phone Calls
5. Financial Visibility and Online Payment Embraced by Patients

## Appendix: Technology Impacts Patient Perceptions

*"Staying up with technology - puts him ahead on his billing and organization. This could only mean that he is also up to date on the latest and great dental care for his patients." – Peggy M., Rochester, NY*

*"This service is becoming the future, you have started it with ease. Even for people who aren't good with computers, this seems like an easy site to use. It is a convenient service that is keeping up with today's technology and people's busy lifestyles." – Gracie H., Spokane, WA*

*"This makes Dr. Adams the one that I'll stick with and recommend to all my friends. I really like how he's current with technology and makes everything streamlined for his patient and his office." – Heart H., Washington, DC*

*"This makes the office seem very high tech and smoothly run. I love this system." – Elizabeth H., St. Louis, MO*

*"It shows his savvy ability to be able to communicate on a broader level with a more tech-oriented client generation." – Tanya S. Albany, NY*

*"Handy for appointment schedule and, all-in-all, a more cutting-edge approach to communication." – Molly H., Dallas, TX*

*"My dentist is always on the cutting edge, and this is more proof of what an awesome practice Levy Dental is. I LOVE THEM!!!" – Randi M., Hartford, CT*

*"This is unheard of for other dentists. The availability to see my x-rays is very cool." – Kimberly J., Portland, OR*

*"I have never before seen such a well-run and organized dental office. The new technology and "extra" services offered are not typical for most dentists. I'm proud to use this business." – Cynthia G., Newark, NJ*

*"I must say for the record that Dr. Nab is about the best dentist I ever had, as he is far more technologically savvy than the norm. This service, however, beats just about anything I have seen in comparison with other healthcare professionals." – Erin G., Houston, TX*

*"This shows that Dr. Favalli is technology-oriented and interested in streamlining patient communication as well as making information available to his patients 24/7." – Grace R., Tampa, FL*

*"I am not aware of any other healthcare professional that I currently work with that has this information online. I especially like the billing information available online." – Vicki M., Chicago, IL*

*"Dr. Sexton and his staff display an eagerness to stay cutting-edge in the technology of dentistry as well as technology in general." – Megan G., Grand Rapids, MI*

*"I was just commenting on how I already like this dentist and haven't even met him yet. It's these little things that give me confidence that he's progressive and probably on top of new developments in his field as well." – Anna S., Seattle, WA*

*"This was not offered at my previous dentist. Much nicer. Definitely like being a member of such a 'modern' dental facility." – Melissa L., Chicago, IL*

*"It seems more modern and up-to-date for the patient, especially ones on the go all the time like me. Your office appears to be doing all they can to assist the client each and every way possible which enhances my continued devotion." – Jeanne B., Toronto, ON, Canada*

*"My husband is jealous about the access that I have through this site because his dentist does not offer it." – Aaryn F., Berlin, NH*

*"I do not know what other professionals offer. I have been a patient for 10 years. What keeps me coming back is that the practice keeps up with the latest technology." – Michael S., Rochester, NY*

*"It's great to be able to view the financial info to track what insurance has covered and what has not been covered... and to have a reminder of when appointments are. Great for the slightly forgetful!" – Heather T., Seattle, WA*

## Appendix: Putting Patients First Means Being Online

*"I love online access. It is very nice to have even my dentist office up-to-date on technology."* – Laura C., Chicago, IL

*"Excellent service, caring and empathy to a patient who is not a dentist's best friend."* – Chuck S., Orlando, FL

*"I always forget my appointment dates. I can now look on the web site without having to call the dentist office many times."*  
– Rachel P., Kansas City, KS

*"Wow I have never been able to have so much interaction with my medical stuff. It makes me feel more at ease."*  
– Candy F., Dallas, TX

*"I love your dentist office. Over many years we have looked for a good family dentist and I'm finally happy to say we have found the best. And it keeps getting better with every visit. I love this new web site you have put together with all our information."*  
– Julia S., Chicago, IL

*"I like being able to view my Invisalign treatment plan. It really helps to understand how my teeth are going to be realigned to correct my problem. I also like having access to my financial information so I can check the charges and payments."*  
– Katherine E., Sacramento, CA

*"It is just a quicker way to check your appointments. And I love how it has the option to pay online."* – Niveen F., Seattle, WA

*"I am a night owl and I love that I can check on appointments online at midnight!! This is great! Thanks."* – Erik S., Portland, OR

*"It is just another example of the excellent customer service that I always receive from the Dawson Road Dental crew. Thank you."*  
– Victoria B., Toronto, ON, Canada

*"This service makes his services more accessible."* – Stephanie K., Grand Rapids, MI

*"I like being able to verify appointments, see my records, etc. online, and I do not have that ability with any other doctor's office."*  
– Trudy D., Houston, TX

*"This is the first time that I have been able to log on to a site of a health professional and get my personal information, my appointment schedule, information about benefits and such. I like it. She cares about us."* – Charlotte S., Dallas, TX

*"There is a night and day difference. This service underscores the importance of customer service through patient feedback. This service should be provided by all medical and dental providers to improve patient-service provider interaction."*  
– Joel L., Washington, DC

*"Shows a proactive approach to enabling the patient to have easier access to information."* – David J., Atlanta, GA

*"Wow! It's great and suggests an openness and willingness to communicate with me. I really like it."* – Cynthia A., Sacramento, CA

*"It shows that Pallotto cares about having a personal relationship with his patients and providing the most convenient services possible for us."* – Mary Kate D., Chicago, IL

*"1. Easy to get info any time [and] 2. Received a birthday greeting and I had to smile!"* – Helen F., Kansas City, KS

*"A lot of doctors do not have a web site where you can access all the information that this now offers. With this web site I can get information right away rather than waiting for it to get mailed to me."* – Robert K., Everett, WA

*"It provides me with instant access to balance information as well as appointment information which far surpasses any other dentist I have seen in the past."* – Teresa C., Atlanta, GA

*"I already liked the dental service before the Sesame System, but now, this makes it that much better. Recommendations are on hand now."* – Michael P., Patient, College Park, MD

## Appendix: Time is a Luxury and Convenience a Necessity

*"I like that I can schedule and check my appointments online without having to call."* – Michael J., Spokane, WA

*"It provides me with access on my schedule, which may be all hours of the day or night. I really appreciate being able to look up info when it crosses my mind, as opposed to waiting to call when the office is open."* – Cyndy C., Atlanta, GA

*"It is a really convenient way to keep up with appointments. I now know I can rely on Dental Sesame instead of putting that little business card on the fridge. Also, it will be nice to know at a glance where I stand with insurance/payments."*  
– Dawn F., Kansas City, MO

*"It is nice to see my account information any time I wish without calling the dentist when they are open."* – Lori A., Jacksonville, FL

*"I was just telling the kids that their appointments must be coming up soon, so I was able to check, rather than wait for the mailing to come!"* – Hannah G., Birmingham, MS

*"I can never seem to find time to make all the important phone calls and the web site is accessible after hours when it is convenient for me."* – Jared C., Shreveport, LA

*"I can check on information about my account at a time that is convenient for me. Thanks for offering this service!"*  
– Garrett C., Birmingham, MS

*"Able to check appointment date and time at 9:15pm, when it was convenient for me."* – Kelly D., Houston, TX

*"Great web site! I can find answers to my questions regarding appointments and financial matters without having to disrupt your office. This can be done at times when your office is closed - very helpful for me! Thanks."* – Kirk P., Columbia, SC

*"The information I need is always at my finger tips even if your office is closed. Checking for appointment dates makes it easy to confirm and also serves as a reminder. Thanks for a job well done."* – Arturo A., San Antonio, TX

*"It allows me to take care of my dental business when I have the time to do so."* – George D., Houston, TX

*"I really like that it shows my next appointment and the details of my bill - and I can view it all at my convenience!"*  
– Kristie N., Indianapolis, IN

*"Able to verify appointments and account balances quickly during non-business hours."* – Margie B., Indianapolis, IN

*"I'm so busy at work, I just can't find time to call the office, I'm soooooooo glad, I can go online and do my appointments and confirm them. Thank you so much!"* – Mae E., Little Rock, AR

*"I often think of things to ask in the evening or on the weekend when not absorbed at work - but the office is closed then. The online service is always available. I've often played telephone tag during office hours because we are both busy."*  
– Linda I., Toronto, ON, Canada

*"I like the option to do it when ever I have time at home. I am a mother of 3 children and have a full time job, this gives me tons of flexibility."* – Veronica G., Dallas, TX

*"It's nice to be able to have 24/7 access to my dental account through the dentist's office in addition to the insurance company. It is such a convenience; a real time-saving service."* – Glynnis D., Gainesville, VA

*"Our dentist is already awesome, but this service adds more convenience to the great service we already receive."*  
– Toi M., San Antonio, TX

*"It allows me to find information that I would normally have to call the office for, which saves both myself and the healthcare professional time."* – Brennen C., Phoenix, AZ

*"Makes life easier to contact office. This can be done 24/7 online. I like the convenience, when I don't have to take time out of my work day to make a telephone call."* – Bonnie R., Seattle, WA

## Appendix: Email Trumps Phone Calls

*"I got a reminder call about my appointment for this Friday. I went on my computer and WOW - I got an email from the office too. I love the convenience of the web site!! It's very very easy to navigate. I really like that I can view my account online!!"*

– Jane Z., Newark, NJ

*"I love the ability to check and confirm appointments as well as have messages sent to my cell to remind me. This is very helpful when appointments are scheduled months in advance. Great Idea!"* – Abriena M., Dallas, TX

*"Excellent, fast, didn't have to wait on "hold" on the telephone for service."* – Linda D., Washington, DC

*"I can confirm my appointment without having to return the call the dentist office called. It is so much more convenient for deaf patients to use a web site rather than relay calls. I also can keep track of my financial info which is a plus."*

– Kimberly M., Chicago, IL

*"I am on the Internet more than I am on a phone. Time goes by fast and there are days that I don't have time to just pick up a phone. This is much easier for me to keep up on my treatments."* – Christine M., Dallas, TX

*"I like this dental office better than any other dentist that I have ever gone to because this office contacts me by email as well as phone call and no other dentist has ever done that before."* – Roberta A., Chicago, IL

*"At age 53, I find this a convenient service, and I expect that those who are younger than me are even more attuned to using email with the ability to access information at their convenience rather than being tied to office hour phone time."*

– Rebecca K., Spokane, WA

*"It's nice to not have to look up phone numbers, hopefully not get an answering machine, and wait for a response when needing to find basic information such as appointment times."* – Lori O., Spokane, WA

*"We are able to receive reminder messages via text and email. That service is vital in this new age of technology."*

– Dawn S., Long Beach, CA

*"Not only is it a great web site, but it is being shared with patients proactively. I really appreciate being given a password in the introductory email instead of having to jump through hoops to register online."* – Mara W., Chicago, IL

*"I enjoy the convenience of the email appointment reminders/confirmation."* – Rowan P., Portland, OR

## Appendix: Financial Visibility and Online Payment Embraced by Patients

*"I had an additional payment to make for a recent dental procedure, and I was able to easily log on and make the payment the day I received the notice. This is a more convenient way to process the payment."* – Kathryn W., Phoenix, AZ

*"I checked on the appointments that I have had within the past 2 weeks and even yesterday's billing information was there. I also like the fact that I can check the information you have on file for us - phone #s, etc."* – Patti C., Chicago, IL

*"It's great to be able to view the financial info to track what insurance has covered and what has not been covered... and to have a reminder of appointments. Great for the slightly forgetful!"* – Heather T., Seattle, WA

*"Lets you review your account and insurance on demand anytime, which is very helpful. Also, it gives you an opportunity to make sure the insurance is filed correctly and they have made payment."* – Jackson C., Birmingham, MS

*"It's so easy to view all my transactions online and see how much I have left to use for my dental benefits!"*  
– Jacqueline L., Toronto, ON, Canada

*"I was able to see all family appointments, and easily print my year's activity for flex reimbursement."*  
– Pattee B., Grand Rapids, MI

*"It's very useful to be able to print information as needed for my flex plan."* – Joyce G., Chicago, IL

*"I needed two receipts from previous appointments and was able to find and print them without having to call my dentist."*  
– Denise D., Washington, DC

*"I lost my appointment card and was able to find appointment very easily. I also checked insurance coverage limits that I hadn't remembered off hand."* – Dann W., Portland, OR

*"One example is that I had no idea of what my account balance was, but the service confirmed that for me, as well as my next appointment. I think it's a convenient service for people on the go, like myself."* – Debra C., Chicago, IL

*"I needed a copy of the receipt for flex benefits verification. This really made it fast at 10 PM."* – Virginia R., Kansas City, MO

*"I love the fact that I could pay a bill online."* – Kim P., Chicago, IL