

BEST USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN HEALTHCARE MARKETING

How UCLA Health Integrated an Open Scheduling Feature into Our Chatbot to Drive New Patient Acquisition and Improve Patient Retention

The challenges of COVID-19 compelled all of us to adopt new digital technologies to communicate with people who need to reach us, especially those requiring medical care or information. UCLA Health embraced the shift by revamping our website and creating an intelligent chatbot to ensure our patients' online experience was more efficient and user-friendly than ever before.

On the heels of the pandemic, our team has continued to expand these digital tools. We've integrated an open scheduling feature into the chatbot to increase access to care and meet our patients' needs. These technologies allow patients to connect with the right provider and schedule an appointment — all in just a few simple clicks.

INSIGHT

Our research has shown us that by the time a patient comes to UCLAHealth.org, they're usually ready to take action — they either want to make an appointment or they're actively looking for a provider or clinic location. We also know that more and more people prefer to schedule an appointment online rather than over the phone. Patients of all ages are more tech savvy than ever before, and they expect sophisticated, easy-to-use digital tools. We're committed to helping them manage their health, and the health of loved ones, quickly and efficiently.

PROBLEM

MEANDERING SEARCH PROCESS

Prior to the pandemic, patients came to UCLAHealth.org to search for a doctor, but when they wanted to schedule an appointment, they hit a roadblock: They would find a physician they wanted to see, but then what? Clicking on that doctor's profile opened another window, and it wasn't always easy to navigate back to the previous page, find contact details or take action.

Filling out an online appointment request form had its own challenges. When a member of our scheduling team responded to the appointment request with a phone call, many patients didn't answer because they didn't recognize the number. There were too many opportunities for patients to get lost or diverted during the scheduling process. We struggled to keep patients engaged, and they struggled to get timely care and attention.

SOLUTION

CHATBOT-GUIDED SEARCH

The UCLA Health team enhanced our existing chatbot to include substantially more actions, including searching for a provider and scheduling an appointment online. The chatbot appears on every page of the UCLAHealth.org website, so patients never have to scroll through the site to track down a provider's phone number or a "Contact Us" button.

Using clear, conversational language and familiar terms, the chatbot guides patients through each step based on the information they enter. People can ask about a symptom, inquire about a specific provider, look for a location or schedule a visit. The chatbot understands the intent of the patient's question and responds accordingly. The names, locations and contact info for local providers appear immediately, right in the chat box.

PROBLEM

LIMITED SELF-SERVICE OPTIONS

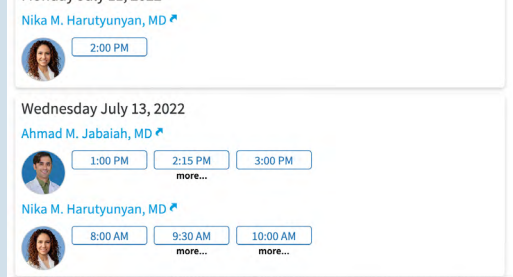
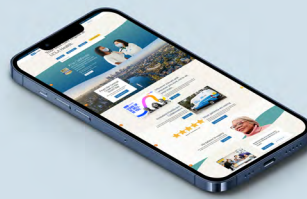
At one time, new patients had no way to make an appointment online. Every scheduled appointment required the assistance of a member of the UCLA Health call center team. This presented a barrier for patients, especially new patients and younger people accustomed to having a range of digital tools at their fingertips.

SOLUTION

STREAMLINED SCHEDULING

Our open scheduling chatbot allows new patients to search and schedule appointments, all in one platform. Patients can select an in-person or video visit without having to sort through multiple pages or backtrack. It's simple, seamless and efficient.

Currently, new patients can schedule an appointment online with hundreds of primary care doctors. We continue to expand online scheduling to include providers in orthopedics, ophthalmology and many other specialties.



BENEFITS

1 IMPROVED ACCESS TO CARE

We've grown our chatbot's capabilities to respond to the needs of people who would rather click than call to make an appointment. By offering simplified search tools and online scheduling options to more people, we're meeting them where they are. We understand that it's essential to communicate with patients in ways that work for them.

2 INCREASED NEW PATIENT ACQUISITION

As a "digital front door," the UCLA Health website is designed to be warm and welcoming to all patients, and the chatbot is a key component in cultivating this friendly environment. We've made it easy for new patients to come to UCLA Health. The chatbot funnels new patients down the right path so they can quickly find what they're looking for, enter their contact details and schedule a visit.

3 ENHANCED PATIENT RETENTION

When existing patients engage with the chatbot, it automatically prompts them to sign into their MyChart account. Since their information is already entered into the system, they save time and can jump right into asking questions, checking test results or scheduling an appointment. Less time online means happier patients.

4 BETTER CALL CENTER EFFICIENCY

Improved self-scheduling options result in less strain on our call center staff. Because more patients are able to make their own appointments online, volume in the call center has been reduced, allowing our staff to be more productive. The result? Our call center team receives fewer calls and is better able to focus on each individual. Our team is also able to return calls sooner, which means we're able to get patients into providers' offices more quickly.

5 PERSONALIZED EXPERIENCE, EVOLVING CAPABILITIES

The chatbot allows us to engage with patients in a conversational, informal way. Our goal is to make it as easy as possible for our patients to find the details they're looking for and connect with a provider in a few easy steps. We recognize access that provides a customized approach is especially important for individuals and their loved ones facing health challenges.

We know that AI is never static. That's why we continue to adjust and refine our services to meet our patients' needs. Our team is constantly reevaluating the chatbot's dialogue and improving its ability to understand more terms. We analyze the terms patients choose and incorporate search terms that they actually use. Our chatbot gets more intelligent all the time so it's better able to respond to our patients' needs.

BY THE NUMBERS

FROM JANUARY TO JUNE 2022:

There were **27,057** chatbot conversations

61% of chatbot users asked about finding a doctor or scheduling an appointment

Around **90%** of chatbot users who started a scheduling session were new patients

There were **2,418** provider profile clicks, which usually correlated to scheduling an appointment

10,770 users asked about finding a provider

5,668 users asked about scheduling an appointment

4,641 users asked how to contact us

As California's #1 health system, UCLA Health has always aimed to improve access to exceptional care. Artificial intelligence plays a critical role in our ability to connect with patients and keep them engaged throughout their online journey. The flexibility and dynamic nature of AI allow us to continue to adapt to the ever-changing needs of our community and remain agile in a world where digital tools are becoming more and more ubiquitous. These technologies enable us to partner with our patients as we work together to improve their well-being.

