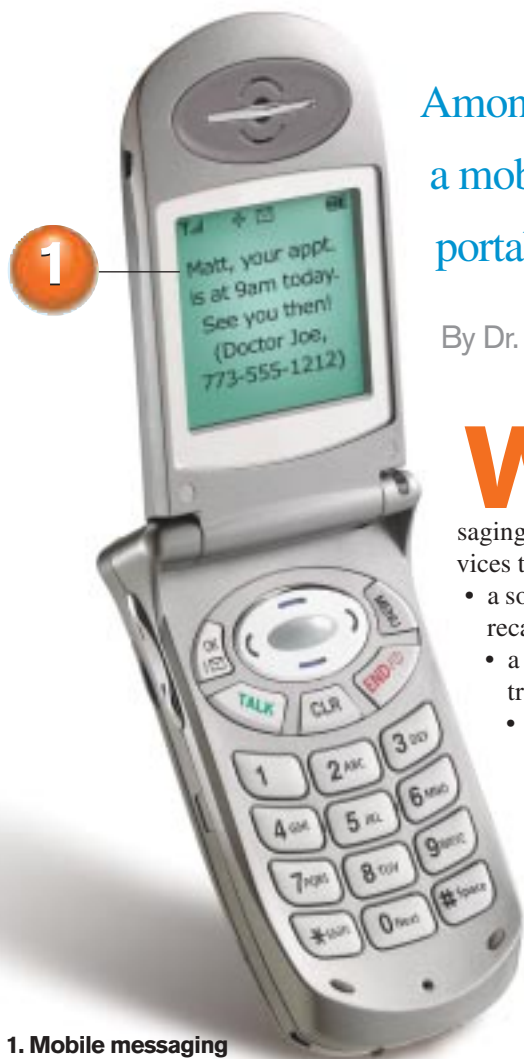


Nifty ideas for those on the go



Among the sleek innovations and gadgets for the mobile crowd are a mobile messaging service to reach patients on their cell phones, and portable storage media, display screens, and mice for mobile computing.

By Dr. Larry Emmott

Whether you're trying to reach the "mobile generation" or going mobile yourself, here are a new messaging service and three nifty electronic devices to speed you on your way, as follows:

- a software-based messaging system to send recall messages to patients' cell phones,
- a pocket-storage device that stores and transports files,
- a display screen to carry around the operator and,
- a handheld mouse to point out images on the display screen.

1. Mobile messaging

Mobile messaging—sending messages to mobile devices, such as PDAs (personal digital assistants), pagers, and cell phones—is a high-tech solution to one of the oldest and most frustrating problems in dentistry: confirming appointments and reducing missed appointments.

Every dental office knows how frustrating and costly it is when a patient fails to meet an appointment. What's the answer to this vexing problem? Should you call and confirm every patient's appointment? Management experts have wide-ranging opinions about a solution.

Phone confirmations can be a problem because they can take up a lot of staff time. Your staff can end up spending most of their day calling patients, rarely making contact with them, and, basically, leaving one message after another for them. In addition, staff calls can be intrusive to patients, and further, if patients come to depend on calls and don't get them, then it's your fault when they miss an appointment.

The solution may be Smile Reminder, a Web-based mobile messaging service from Smart Reminder, a division of Communitect Inc., a company specializing in mobile messaging technology.

Smile Reminder is a software application that allows you to send personalized, real-time text messages, which are automatically delivered to your patients over any, or all, of their mobile devices, including cell phones, PDAs, e-mail devices, and pagers.

The Web-based system gathers information about patients from a



DR. LARRY EMMOTT

doctor's office computer system and then sends a text message to a patient's mobile device. The message could be an appointment reminder or any other message, including treatment suggestions.

Messages can be sent one or two days in advance and, then again, a few hours before the appointment. Patients who are sent messages do not have to answer the phone and interrupt what they are doing.

All messages contain a patient's name and appointment time, and they can be customized for each office.

To use the service, you must have a compatible practice management software program (the system is compatible with many popular practice management systems), an electronic appointment book, and Internet access. You also should be gathering and storing patients' cell phone or pager numbers and their e-mail addresses (and the company will provide you with a checklist to help you do this.)

The system's cost, about \$200 a month, is easy to justify. The service should help you reduce your practice's number of missed appointments and, in turn, increase your revenues. (If you bring in just one patient a month, the service might pay for itself, according to a company spokesperson.) In addition, your patients will appreciate the reminders, and your staff will have the time to focus on other critical tasks.

1. Mobile messaging

Send dental-appointment reminders to your patients' cell phones using the Smile Reminder software-based service.

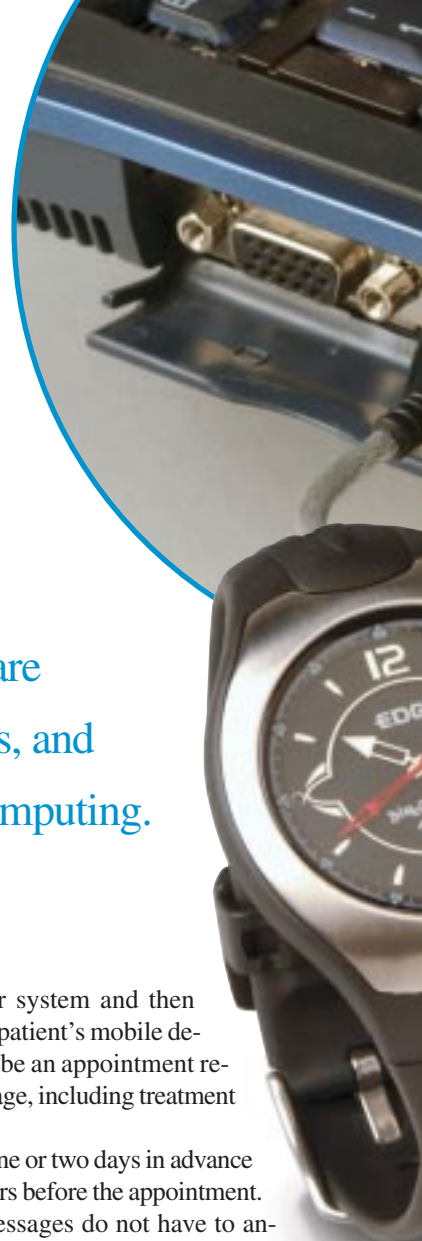
For more information: Go to www.smilereminder.com or call 866-605-6867.

2. Pocket storage

Store and transport files from your office to your home on a pocket-storage device. Plug the device into the USB port of your computer to download or add files. Shown on the right are three pocket-storage devices:

A. EDGE 128-MB DiskGO! USB Flash Drive, **B.** Belkin USB Flash Drive, and **C.** Fujifilm 256-MB USB Drive.

For more information: **A.** DiskGo! Flash Drive from EDGE Digital Media (www.edgememory.com), distributed by PC Connection Inc.: Go to www.pconnection.com, or call 888-294-0305. **B.** Belkin USB Flash Drive from Belkin Corp.: Go to www.belkin.com or call 800-223-5546. **C.** Fujifilm USB Drive from Fuji Photo Film USA Inc: Go to www.fujifilm.com or call 800-800-3854.



2. "Wrist" storage

Store and transport files from your office to your home on a pocket-storage device that fits on your wrist. Plug the device into the USB port of your computer to download or add files. Shown is the EDGE 256-MB DiskGO! USB Watch Drive storage device.

For more information: The DiskGO! USB Watch Drive device from EDGE Digital Media (www.edgememory.com), is distributed by PC Connection Inc.: Go to www.pcconnection.com, or call 888-294-0305.

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Note: the DiskGO! Flash drives come in capacities from 64 megabytes (MB) to 1 gigabyte (GB). The DiskGO! Watch drive is available currently in 128-MB and 256-MB capacities.

2. Pocket storage

One of the niftiest new high-tech items is a pocket storage device. The device is a combination drive and storage media that connects directly to a computer's USB port.

Pocket storage is the newest variation on a wide range of mobile storage devices that have emerged in the last few years. These electronic devices are high-capacity, small, and easily portable. Among the most common are the CompactFlash, Memory Stick, and SmartMedia cards, and the Zip and CD-RW (CD-ReWritable) disks.

These media cards and disks can be thought of as the new floppy disks. They are used just like the old-fashioned floppy disks. Here's how they work:

- The media is placed in a drive specifically designed for that media
- The drive is connected to the computer
- The user transfers electronic information to the media
- The user transports the data to another machine.

What makes these media so amazing is their capacity and size when compared with a floppy disk. A floppy disk has a very limited capacity—1.7 megabytes (MB). In contrast, a SmartMedia card can hold up to 100 times as much data as a floppy disk, and it is smaller than a credit card.

These media have one limitation, though—a drive. To transfer data from one machine to another using SmartMedia cards (or any of the other media), the machine the data is being transferred to must have a SmartMedia card drive.

Now, though, with the introduction of pocket-storage devices, the drive problem has been solved. Pocket storage combines both the media and the drive into a single device. The device connects to a computer's USB port, which is a standard feature on any computer made in the last four years.

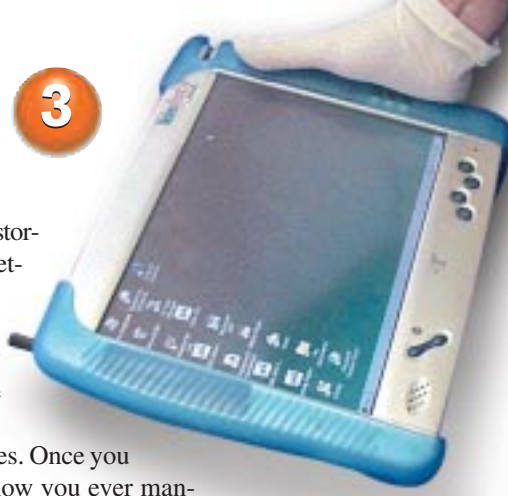
The memory capacity of a pocket-storage device is

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age device ranges from 16 MB to 1 GB (and the storage capacity keeps rising). As for size, a pocket-storage device is about the size and shape of your thumb; it can fit easily into your pocket. One manufacturer even has put the device on a watch to simplify carrying it around (see photo on page 46).

And, the device literally has hundreds of uses. Once you get a pocket-storage device, you'll wonder how you ever managed without one.



3. Mobile screen displays

Hand your patients a portable screen display to let them view digital x-rays while seated in the operatory. Shown left is the DOT (Digital Operator Tablet) smart display from Video Dental Concepts.

For more information: go to www.videodental.com or call 800-323-2690.

3. Mobile screen displays

Mobile computing is one of the most exciting and dynamic areas of change in technology.

Fast, secure, and reliable wireless connections have transformed mobile devices and will have a significant impact on how we use computers in the dental office.

Until last year, mobile computing was pretty well confined to laptops. For our laptops to be effective in the dental office, though, we needed to connect them to our office network, a power source, and possibly, special inputs for x-ray and video. As a result, the laptops really weren't mobile, and they usually ended up being an expensive way to provide limited functionality.

All this has changed thanks to two mobile devices said to have great potential in the dental office: tablet PCs and smart displays, as described in my last column, "Get unwired:



4. Mobile mice

While your patients are holding a DOT display screen (above, right) to view digital x-rays or other data, you can point out areas of interest with the trackball on the Micro Trac mouse (above, left) from Fellowes Inc.

For more information: go to www.fellowes.com or call 800-945-4545.

Mobile computing in the dental office," in DPR's June issue.¹

A tablet PC is a portable computer (think of it as the next generation of laptop). It is available in a slate-style model with a touch-screen, and in a convertible-style model with both a keyboard and a touchscreen. A smart display is a wireless, touch-screen panel, not a computer. It is portable, though, and "connects" to a computer using a wireless standard.

The tablet and the smart display look alike and function much the same, but they are quite different. One system, though—the DOT (Digital Operator Tablet) smart display from Video Dental Concepts—appears to combine the benefits of both concepts. The DOT panel is sturdy and portable. It can be used with a stylus to input patient data and with a mouse to point out data. The DOT panel connects to a computer on the office network using an 802.11b wireless connection. This allows the user true mobility. A staff member can move from room to room while carrying the display, make entries on it while walking down the hall, and access charts, photos, x-rays, health information, prescription data, and even the Internet, from anywhere in the office.

The DOT tablet also can be used to interact with patients. For example, the doctor can hand the monitor to a patient sitting in an operatory chair and call up digital photos, charts, or even use the Internet for the patient to view.

For example, it would be possible for a patient, using the DOT panel, to connect over the Internet to a financing service, such as CareCredit, and apply for patient financing privately, online, while sitting in the dental chair. (CareCredit offers practices healthcare financing plans that assist patients in paying for desired procedures.)



What's online



To access Dr. Larry Emmott's article on mobile computing, mentioned in References (below), go to our Web site, dentalproducts.net, move your cursor to "Search Content" and scroll down to "Article Index." The article is listed under "Management Articles" for June 2003.



4. Mobile mice

Another slick device, which works well with the DOT panel (page 48, top), is the Micro Trac mini-handheld mouse from Fellowes Inc. (page 48, bottom). The mouse, which has an egg-shape design, can be worked with one hand. It slips on your index finger like a ring. On its top slope is a trackball that you control with your thumb.

The advantage of the Micro Trac mouse is that you can hold it in your hand; you don't need "mousing" space—a desktop space or any flat surface—to operate it.

The Micro Trac mouse also comes in handy when using the DOT tablet. The doctor can hand the tablet to a patient, bring up digital x-rays or other photos, plug in the Micro Trac mouse, and then roll the trackball to point out areas of interest.

The Micro Trac is very cool.

What a great time to be a dentist! Technology just keeps getting better, I can hardly wait to see what's next. The future is coming and it will be amazing! **DPR**

Dr. Larry Emmott, a recognized authority on dental technology in America, is a practicing general dentist in Phoenix. He also is a professional speaker, a featured instructor at the Las Vegas Institute, and a member of the American Academy of Dental Practice Administration. He has written hundreds of articles on dentistry, computer use, and management. He also writes a monthly electronic newsletter, "Emmott on Technology," on using dental technology. Dr. Emmott offers hands-on technology seminars to selected dentists in his Phoenix office (the next one is Oct. 3-4). Plus, this summer (July 14-17), he is holding a technology seminar in Sedona, Ariz., that combines biking in the morning and classes in the afternoon. At these seminars you will receive personalized advice on setting up your office to maximize your high-tech future. Topics include digital radiology, cosmetic imaging, and treatment room design. To find out more, check out Dr. Emmott's Web site at www.drlarryemmott.com or call him at 602-279-1641.

References

1. Emmott, L. Get unwired: mobile computing in the dental office. *Dental Products Report*, 2003;37(6):50-54, 90-91.

Photo credits

- Photo of cell phone on page 46, courtesy of Samsung Electronics Co. Ltd.
- Photos of pocket storage devices on pages 46-47, courtesy of (A) EDGE Digital Media, (B) Belkin Corp., and (C) Fujifilm Photo Film USA Inc.
- Photo of DOT (Digital Operatory Tablet) smart display on page 48, courtesy of Video Dental Concepts.
- Photo of Micro Trac mobile mouse on page 48, courtesy of Fellowes Inc.