

Speaker 1: Welcome to the Pharmacy Marketing Simplified podcast, part of the Pharmacy Podcast Network. Pharmacy Marketing Simplified focuses on easy and proven marketing tips from pharmacy owners and industry experts to leverage in your independent pharmacy business. This podcast is all about pharmacy marketing and how to be successful in today's competitive marketplace.

Nicole McClure: Welcome to the latest episode of the Pharmacy Marketing Simplified podcast. I'm your host, Nicole McClure, president of GRX Marketing. Today we're going to discuss the constantly evolving world of communicating with your patients, specifically address communicating with them via text messages. I'm so excited to welcome our guest today, Jace Treat, who is a sales manager with Zipwhip. Zipwhip offers a two-way texting platform for pharmacies and has become a recent partner of GRX Marketing. Jace, welcome to the show.

Jace Treat: Hey, Nicolle. Thanks for having me on.

Nicole McClure: Yeah. Let's just start by talking, I guess, in general how you have seen the world of communication has changed over the past 10 years.

Jace Treat: Looking at communication and how it's changed so much is really an interesting thing because even in the last 10 years, a lot of stuff has changed. Phone calls have been around forever. Letters have been around forever. It's really just had a lot of evolution from back in the days of carrier pigeons or even people just running the marathon to deliver one single message, but the big thing that's really changed with communication in the last 10 years has been because of two things, mobile phones and the internet. Both of these have just changed how we interact with the world.

When it comes to your mobile phones, it gave us the ability to take communication on the go with us, and it gave us the ability to have everything be immediate. Then the internet changed how we engage with not just people, but how we engage with everything, how we engage with businesses, how we engage with media.

If we look at just cell phones and how the mobile phone changed how we engage with each other, it gave us options and it gave us immediacy. With mobile phones, we have the option now to choose to call each other, to text each other, and even email with each other. It's not limited to one thing. When you had your old landline back at home, you could only make phone calls from it. You didn't have the ability to do anything else. You also couldn't leave the house. It had to be in that location. The cell phone really gave us the ability of mobility and the choice to communicate with our friends and our family whenever we wanted.

Then when we combine that with the internet and social media, now, just like how before a computer was in a home or maybe it was a laptop, it was limited to the internet access of whatever wifi you were on, but now the mobile phone

has internet on it. It has data on it, and so it made it so that you could stay connected at all times. The interesting thing when we look at specifically social media is that you can look at Facebook and you can look at Twitter and Instagram, Snapchat, all the above, you could look at all of those and some might think to themselves, "Doesn't Facebook do it all? Doesn't Facebook make it so you can post pictures or a random thought or a long status? Why do we need all of these other different platforms?"

The reason why is because just like how we want to choose how we communicate with our friends and our family, we also want to choose how we experience social media. It's a really interesting thing to see that this one system, Facebook, kind of does it all, but then all these other channels are thriving while all that's happening. It really just goes to show that it's not about can one thing do it all. It's really how does your consumer, how does your customers, your patients, how do we as individuals, how do we want to experience our communication and our engagement with each other, whether it's over the phone or whether it's on the internet. We want to choose how we do that.

That kind of leads to the next part of this. As businesses, as pharmacies, there's a lot of people living in the past right now and thinking that the way things were are still what's going on. We look at online reviews today and how powerful they are and how if you don't pay attention to them, it can come back and really hurt your business.

Nicole McClure:

Right. Yeah. I would definitely agree. A consumer can make a decision to not even try out your business just by stuff that they see online. You could be offering this great service and doing all these great things, but if they go online and they either can't find you or maybe look at your reviews or what you've got on your social media platforms and whatnot and it doesn't resonate with them, they could just immediately check you off the list without even giving you a fair chance. Right or wrong, that's just kind of how the consumer mind works these days.

Jace Treat:

Yeah. The modern consumer now has more information than they've ever had before. They have all of it before they even step into your pharmacy, before they even call you. There's so much online now, and they all rely on each other to provide this information. Whether it's a bad experience or a great experience, that information is all there. It's never been more important than today to really be aware of that and to understand how the consumer thinks. How does your patients want to interact with you when they're not in the pharmacy? How do they want to communicate with you? How do they want to receive content from you? There's so much now that business owners and pharmacies and pharmacists have to be aware of that if they're not listening to their patients, and they're not accommodating them, they're not going to be able to provide the best service to them.

Now, Nicolle, I want to pivot for a second. I want to ask if I could do kind of a weird analogy for a second.

Nicolle McClure: Perfect. Please do.

Jace Treat: Great. Have you ever seen the movie Tommy Boy?

Nicolle McClure: I have, yes.

Jace Treat: It's a great one, and it's one of my favorite just sales movies of all times. A quick recap. It's the story of this guy who has to go and save his family's business, and the only way he can do it is he has to sell a lot of brake pads. One of the things that happens as they're going along is, him and David Spade, is they're going to these customers one by one and they are just trying to sell all of the little features about it. They're like, "They're the best brakes. They have this material. Blah, blah, blah, blah." They are just saying what they know and they're not really engaging with the customer.

There's this scene where they're just tired, they're beaten down and worn out, and all Tommy Boy, Chris Farley, wants is some chicken wings. When he's talking to the waitress, says, "Sorry. We're not doing hot food right now." He then does something amazing. He relates to her. He talks about how things are hard and sometimes you just need a little victory. He relates with her and connects with her. It becomes a little crazy and weird, but then ends with him getting chicken wings. The waitress, she empathized with him and said, "Hey, I'll go turn on the fryers and we'll get there."

There's that moment of realization that if Tommy Boy can speak to people instead of speaking at people, then they'll listen to him. Then they go and they go to these other customers, and they start falling back into their old ways of talking about this and that, the features, and blah, blah, blah, blah. Then David Spade hits Tommy Boy and says, "Hey, remember, chicken wings." Then he remembers, "Oh yeah. I've got to connect. I've got to relate. I've got to speak to my customer the way that they prefer, the way that they respond best to."

In the end, he goes and he saves the company. Some more crazy stuff happens, but if you haven't seen the movie, any of the listeners, I highly recommend it. This is a great lesson for us and for all of these business owners that if we want our audience, if we want our patients to respond to us, we have to speak to them in a way that they'll listen, in a way that they prefer, that they understand. We can't force people to speak the way we want to speak to them. If we do, the problem is that nowadays, with technology and everything, if you're not accommodating your patient, then somebody else will.

That's the scariest thing about not opening up all these channels and providing your customers with options in how they want to communicate with you, how they want to engage with you. In every other area of their life, they have

choices and they have options of how they get to do that. That's why it's so important because you want to provide your patients options.

Nicolle McClure: Yeah. I think you bring up with that story just a great reminder of how that can translate across all of a pharmacy's marketing. I think sometimes we tend to get focused on, "I need to sell this. I need to sell this. I need to make sure the consumer knows we can do x, y, and z", but not taking a step back and looking at, "What does the consumer really need from me?" We try to hammer that home with our clients when we're promoting different services, especially on social media, constantly reminding them that you can't every post, every Tweet can't be about what you're selling because it will just burn out the consumer. They want to know how can you help them, how can you help their total health, how can you help them feel their best.

I think just taking that step back and remembering at the end of the day, it is about the consumer because otherwise, pharmacies wouldn't be in business. To your point, I think independents can really use their ability as a smaller business and not a large chain to be more nimble and flexible so when a patient says, "I'd really like to receive all my communication via text", they're able to make that switch, not just, "Well, that's great, but we're going to call you anyway." It's a real differentiator for the independent pharmacy that they can definitely capitalize on.

Jace Treat: Yeah. I think that's such an important part of this is the independent pharmacy compared to these large chains across the country. Independent pharmacies have that nimbleness that you mentioned, that ability to make adjustments because they're hearing what their patients want. They're hearing that feedback. They're seeing these, "I wish I could text my pharmacy." Whereas with all these large chains that have so many layers to go through, so many levels of decision making, that it might be months before they actually take any action. It might even be years. Who knows? But the thing that's important to know is that they're going to hear it. Eventually, that's going to happen.

This is the opportunity for pharmacies, independent pharmacies, to really be ahead of the curve and really put their foot in the ground and say, "We care about our patients, and we care about what they want and how they want to communicate and how we can accommodate that. If you want to send an email, great. We'll accept your email. If you want to make a phone call, we'll accept your phone call. We'll accept your text. It doesn't matter. You could talk to us on Facebook. We have a full communication strategy that allows you to communicate with us the way you want."

Now that sounds great and all, and it's easier said than done. All of us, every person in the world, there's some level of hesitation to change. There's that whole saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." What we really have to start looking at as small business owners is the pain of change and new systems and new operations is not worth the consequence of not changing and not adapting.

While it can be hard in some cases to make these changes, they have a huge benefit, and especially when it comes to this, because the thing with texting is that adding texting is not a hard thing. There's not a lot of pain to adopt that. It's just something different, and we've never thought about it before.

What we need to do is we really need to look at how we're looking at our business and our strategy and really think about, "Is this something that is worth ignoring? Is it something that is obvious that we should take?" That's why I have a question for you, Nicolle. If you could have a phone that could only send text messages, it couldn't make phone calls or emails or social media, only text messages, would you want that?

Nicolle McClure: I would, yeah. I text probably 90% of the time. When somebody actually calls me, it kind of startles me for a second. I'm like, "Why is this ... What is this device doing ringing? What's this alert that I'm getting?", because my son, my husband, friends and family, we communicate via text. A phone call is almost an out of the norm these days.

Jace Treat: Nicolle, I think you might be the biggest fan of texting I've ever spoken with.

Nicolle McClure: Yeah. I am.

Jace Treat: It's funny because honestly, when I asked that question, I didn't expect you to say that because I think a lot of people wouldn't want that. I think a lot of people, like if I was just to hand you a phone and say, "You can have your phone that you have right now or this phone that could only text", they would say, "Why would I want that? I have choices. My phone right now can do more than just text." That way of thinking, we need to apply it to our businesses. We need to think about if you wouldn't accept a phone that could only text or could only make a phone call or only email, then why do we make our patients, why do we make our customers, make that decision when they don't have to?

Because they can take texting and they can apply it to how they communicate with your pharmacy. The best part about texting is that it doesn't replace the other forms of communication. It doesn't replace phone calls. It doesn't replace emails. The interesting thing with texting is that it's actually the only other form that makes other channels more effective because right now, phone calls, unless you're in their phone, your call's not going to get answered. They're probably not going to listen to voicemail. Also, when it comes to emails, I think we all know that emails don't really get read that much anymore. It's like less than 20%.

What texting can do is texting can make those better because if you're having a conversation with a patient over texting, you can notice that they're having a lot of questions, that there's a lot of back and forth, and maybe you just say right then and there, "Hey. It seems like you got a lot of questions. Maybe we should have a call instead. When are you available for a call?" Now that call is more

likely to get answered because they're going to know the number that it's coming from.

Also, with emails, if somebody is texting you and they ask a question that your pharmacist knows is not a short answer, then what they can do is just they can text them back and say, "Hey, this is not a short answer. I don't want to send you book-long text messages, so I'm going to send you an email. It's going to be more detailed. It's going to have everything that you want to know regarding this." Now that email has gone up a lot in the chances of it actually being viewed because now the customer's actually looking for it. Emails right now are so much of the time just stuff that we forget that we subscribed to so long ago. When we look at our email inbox now, we just look real quick for the stuff that we actually are looking for. We're not looking for all these newsletters and things like that.

What texting ultimately does is it really just rounds out that communication strategy and it complements all the other forms of communication because even texting has its limitations. I'm sure a lot of us have been through situations where you send someone a text for one question or something to be quick and then it becomes this long back and forth. It's like, "Man, a phone call would have made this way faster." Now you can utilize all of these to really have a strong communication with your patients.

Nicole McClure:

Right. Yeah. I think you bring up a really good point with how texting and phone calls can work together. By pharmacies using texting as another communication platform, they really open up the lines for communication with their patients. Patients can feel more comfortable reaching out. Maybe they're too embarrassed or not sure how to approach somebody over the phone or in person, but to start that conversation via texting and then have that branch out either by an in-store visit or a phone call I think could be really powerful in the way of building customer loyalty, adherence, things like that.

Jace Treat:

Yeah. All that just comes back to your patients, your customer base, and how you interact with them. The better relationship that you have with your customers and with your patients is going to be how they better interact with you. It's reciprocal. You treat them well, they'll treat you well.

One of the first things when it comes to how you develop that with them is, are you trying to force them to do something that they're just not really doing outside of interacting with businesses? Right now, a lot of pharmacies, their main demographic and their patients are people that didn't grow up texting maybe. I know for my generation, we were texting a lot in high school and everything like that. We were the only ones that were doing it. Also, we were the only ones really using social media. Now we look at how everyone uses social media, everyone uses texting. It's because it's fun. It's how people want to communicate.

I was blown away when my mom started texting. Now she'll text me all the time, but what really started it is she wanted to better communicate with her kids because she also wanted to see their grandkids. My siblings, they would text pictures to my mom of her grandkids. At first, my mom didn't really totally get it because she wasn't texting very much, and now she does it all the time.

That's kind of the other side of this. As a business, you want to appeal to your main customer base right now, but you also want to look to the future. What's the next demographic that is going to be looking for a pharmacy? What's the next group of people that are going to need a pharmacist? When they need that, where are they going to go? Are they going to go to their nearest pharmacy or whatever, or are they going to think about you, your pharmacy, because that one time they went maybe a couple months ago for a flu shot, they got a text message? They're like, "Oh that's really cool. I can communicate with them the way I want to."

Now not only are you servicing your customers right now and how they prefer to communicate, but really, you're opening yourself up and making an impression on the next group of people, the next generation, the next demographic of people that are going to need a pharmacy at some point in their lives.

Nicolle McClure:

Yeah. I think that's a really good point. It just also gives the pharmacist an opportunity to connect with that younger demographic as well. I know all age groups these days are texting. I was so excited when my mom started texting a few years ago. Talk about opening different lines of communication. I think as pharmacy owners, they struggle with how to reach that younger market. They know it's something that they need to do to constantly grow their business, but how can I do it? It's the social media. It is the online presence, but I think they struggle a little bit beyond that in communicating with them. I think texting, again, is a fabulous way to do that.

Jace Treat:

I agree. I think that brings us here to the last part of this whole thing. We've talked about what needs to happen, how do we do this, why. Now let's just break it down. The solution to all of this is just to complete your engagement strategy and your communication strategy. All that breaks down into two parts.

Part one is to build your online presence, which you can do by embracing technology. I know that can be hard to think about, like, "Technology, it's so complicated. It's so hard", but the reality is that it's never been easier to create a new website or find someone who can, to learn about social media and how to use it, get better with your phone systems and organize your business. All of that is so available now. In the same way that it's available to your patients, it's also available to you, you and your staff.

The second part of this is to have a complete communication system and strategy, which means the patient can reach out to you via social media, phone

call, email, and text. When you really look at how you do all of that and how it all works together, this really leads you to where your current patients and your future patients can communicate with you. They can communicate with you how they prefer to communicate.

Maybe right now your patients, you have a great communication with them and everything's cool, but looking at the next generation and why texting is preferred amongst them, the reality is that texting is the most preferred form of communication by at least three to one over phone calls and emails. Most text messages are responded to in an average of 90 seconds. 98% of text messages are read. I know that emails don't have the read rate, and calling someone, there's less percentage of them actually answering it on that first call.

You're likely to get a response from a text message than a phone call, especially when it's from an unknown number. I know for me, like when I see an unknown number, I am not quick to answer that call. I want to see if they leave me a voicemail because I know my friends and my family, if they want to get a hold of me, they're not going to leave me a voicemail. They're going to send me a text message, and then I'll call them back.

Like we talked about before, texting doesn't replace what is already there. The interesting thing with communication channels is that they don't really go away unless they were never really meant for two-way communication. An example of that is fax machines or carrier pigeons. They were meant to send a message one way and not really come back the other way, but channels like letters and emails, their role changes in how society communicates. Emails are now for long form communications. Phone calls are for longer discussions. Text messages is quick exchange and short conversations. Utilizing all of these is not only how pharmacies but every business stays relevant in today's fast paced world, but the best part is that the same technology that drives this consumer's behavior is the same technology that enables businesses to keep up with their customers.

Nicole McClure: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. I think as independent pharmacy owners, they're constantly looking for ways to connect with their customers. I've been in the industry for over 14 years. I've heard countless stories of how they've gone above and beyond to do something right for a patient and help a patient. Texting is just one more way to give them that opportunity.

Jace Treat: That's why people go to independent pharmacies, because it's more personal, it's more relational. In the end, if something helps you provide a better service for your patients, and it also at the same time makes things more efficient for you and your staff, it's a win-win. When we look at how we're going to do this and how we're going to adapt and evolve with society, looking at how text messaging is a part of that has to be included in how you look at the evolution of your pharmacy, at the growth of your business, and really what you want the future to look like.

- Nicolle McClure: Mm-hmm (affirmative). That's one thing I love about your guys' platform is you make it so easy, and the fact that you use the pharmacy's phone number. It's not another number that they have to use or the pharmacy owner doesn't have to use his or her personal cell phone, things like that.
- I think you have a special offer for our listeners today if they're wanting to get started with Zipwhip and texting their customers.
- Jace Treat: Yeah. Absolutely. If any of the listeners, if you want to learn more about how texting can fit in your communication strategy and in your pharmacy, please text GRX, GRX, to 206-582-3725. Again, that number is 206-582-3725.
- Nicolle McClure: Perfect. Jace, thank you so much for joining me today. I think you gave a lot of great information on communicating with patients.
- Jace Treat: Thank you, Nicolle, so much for having me on. It was a lot of fun talking with you.
- Nicolle McClure: All right. Thank you for listening to another episode of the Pharmacy Marketing Simplified podcast. Be sure to reach out to us at [pharmacymarketing.com](#), or check out [zipwhip.com](#). Thanks so much.
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