

From Airborne Ambulances To Online Therapy, Automated Appointments Save Time And Money

(NAPSA)—At first glance, an air ambulance service and an online therapy venue don't appear to have much in common. But a closer look reveals one crucial similarity—both businesses live and die according to the almighty appointment.

“To duplicate what we do with our appointment software and database would require two full-time employees,” said Judy Gifford, owner of Find-a-Therapist.com (www.find-a-therapist.com), who estimates that she's saved \$250,000 in one year. “Automating our appointment scheduling has been a lifesaver for us.”

Aaron Kreye, chief financial officer of Care Flight International (www.careflight.com), which offers airborne ambulance service throughout the United States, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, is equally enthusiastic about the evolution of automated appointment-making. Since switching from the paper-and-pen method, he estimates that Care Flight International saves between \$1,500 and \$2,000 per month and enjoys noticeably higher accuracy and convenience in scheduling flight and maintenance crews.

While Gifford and Kreye use the technology in different ways, both chose software called bCentral Appointment Manager, an offering of Microsoft Corp.'s Business Solutions division, which focuses exclusively on business management applications for small and medium-sized companies.

With five colleagues, Gifford runs a Web-based business that aims to connect people with the right therapist at the right time. The site serves as a referral service for some 10,000 prescreened therapists in 39 countries and offers therapy online—a format

Gifford says is increasingly popular. The site receives between 60,000 and 70,000 visitors per month.

They are greeted by Appointment Manager, which serves as a virtual receptionist that's available all day, every day. In a way that Gifford says is simple and straightforward, the visitor is able to select a therapist and schedule an appointment, which is logged in as pending until the therapist confirms it. The therapist and the patients receive the same reminder e-mail message before the appointment.

Kreye, on the other hand, uses Appointment Manager as an internal tool.

Care Flight International employs pilots, doctors, nurses, respiratory therapists, paramedics and maintenance workers—each of whom needs to be scheduled according to the needs of the patient being transported. Some of the employees are full-time, but many more work for other organizations as well, which further complicates scheduling.

“Appointment Manager helps us stay organized and has really cut down on the amount of time we spend on scheduling,” Kreye said. “We don't have to call around to see when crews are available. They simply fill it in. Appointment Manager is much more accurate, and it saves lots of time.”

As for Gifford, she's thrilled to have bid farewell to the old-fashioned way. “I can't imagine that everyone online won't be using a service like this within a year or two,” she said. “We couldn't operate the way we do now without it. I love it.”

More information about Appointment Manager and other bCentral offerings can be found at www.bcentral.com/default.