

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
What To Look For: 4 Key Considerations	4
What To Avoid: Red Flags To Watch Out For	6
3 Questions You Need To Ask An Answering Services About HIPAA	8
What To Expect: An Answering Service Should Save You Time And Money	10
Why Choose Voice Link of Columbus, Inc.?	11
Free Offer	14



Introduction

Anyone in the healthcare industry understands how important it is to be accessible to their patients at any given time of the day or night. Whether patients are calling to refill prescriptions, schedule appointments, ask advice, or because they're having an urgent health issue, their calls must be answered promptly and professionally.

Today's patients expect personal customer service and quick answers to questions about their medical concerns. They also expect to receive care and attention if those concerns are urgent, whether it's day or night. They are quickly frustrated if their call is put on hold, or if they receive voicemail when calling a healthcare practice. In fact, a survey by the Consumer Reports National Research Center revealed that 75% of those polled said the most irritating customer service experience is when they "can't get a live person on the phone." This is especially true when they are calling a medical provider.



For this reason, many healthcare practices are turning to answering services, or call centers, for help. But just as there are great doctors and not so great doctors, there are also great answering services and not so great ones. This guidebook will help you know the key components to look for and which red flags to avoid when choosing an answering service for your medical practice.

What To Look For:

4 Key Considerations

Outsourcing is becoming more popular as technology advances, and the medical field is no stranger to the trend. Many medical practices already outsource billing, and now many are also outsourcing some or all of their phone calls. The right answering service will help you save time, save money, and make your patients happier with improved communication. A top-notch answering service can help you meet your goals and grow your practice. The following questions can help you evaluate any answering service:

1. What are their performance standards?

- Can you tell by the sound of the ring that you had reached an answering service?
- Did you reach a voicemail recording or a live operator?
- When you called your answering service's customer service department, did they call you back on the same day?
- Did the receptionist have the same pleasing phone personality that you would hire for an employee in your office? Because remember, that is exactly what you are doing.



2. How do they screen calls?

Patients call to schedule appointments, find out hours of operation, to check on the status of their prescriptions, or if they're having a health crisis. It's crucial that the answering service receptionists knows your practice and your priorities, and can quickly identify which calls you consider urgent. Based on your protocols, the receptionist must then know which team member should be immediately contacted depending on the time and nature of the call.

Conversely, the live operators must also know which calls are not urgent, such as if a patient is calling about directions or refills. All calls will be recorded and logged, including details about the reason for the call, the response that was given, and any follow-up that's required.

3. How quickly are calls answered?

Ask how quickly they typically answer calls, and what services they provide. They should cover the total number of calls that are likely to be placed on hold per month and the average hold time of each.

Obviously, no hold time is preferable, but may not always be an option. Look for a service that has a hold time less than 30 seconds.

4. Are the operators based in the U.S., and better yet, local?

Some answering services may outsource their work overseas. Language barriers may become problematic if your patients can't understand what the operator is saying, or vice versa, the operator can't understand what your patient is requesting. However, it's helpful if the answering service offers Spanish as well as English as part of its support.

When possible, choose an answering service that's local to your business. You are much more likely to get personal service with the set-up and maintenance of your system and in-person education for your staff members who will be using the system. You will also be more likely to work with people who know and care about your community, and who may even have the same dialect as some of your patients.



What To Avoid:

Red Flags To Watch Out For

The receptionist answering your phones serves as the first impression of your practice, and how each call is or isn't handled can either build or break your practice. So that you can identify the best answering service for your healthcare practice, it's helpful to know which red flags you should watch out for.

1. Your patients are put on hold for too long.

Research has shown that if callers are directed to voicemail or put on hold for more than 30 seconds, more than a third of them will hang up and not call back. This is particularly true when patients are calling a doctor's office. Even though they understand that a medical practice is likely to be busy, they also want to know that their health and well-being is a priority. If your staff is too busy to answer phone calls in a timely manner, patients intuitively assume that office visits and even emergencies will also involve delays.



2. Calls are mishandled or directed to the wrong person.

No doubt you've heard horror stories about a patient in distress who called a doctor's office but didn't receive a call back for an hour or more or was transferred to the wrong doctor. It goes without saying that time is of the essence when it comes to most medical issues, but if you don't have a plan in place for calls to be handled thoroughly, correctly, and quickly your practice—not to mention your patients—will suffer.

The answering service staff must be confident in how you need your patient calls to be directed. Calling the wrong doctor in the middle of the night regarding a patient in urgent distress is not just annoying, it's a potentially liable situation.

3. Information is incomplete or inaccurate.

A top answering service will know the importance of logging and recording all calls and responses accurately so that you know who called, when, and how the call was handled. Careful attention to detail is critical in the healthcare industry, and incorrect information is unacceptable. Patient records must be accurate for a practice to be reputable and reliable.

Answering service receptionists are responsible for ensuring that the information they convey is meticulous — even a small mistake in the spelling of a patient’s name can lead to a trail of complications in maintaining accurate patient databases.

4. Plans aren’t flexible or there are hidden fees.

The nature of the medical field is unpredictable. You shouldn’t be expected to define or limit how many calls you’ll receive any given day, week, or month, and you shouldn’t be charged if you go over your call limit one month. Many call centers have extra fees for these situations or charge extra if you change the on-call contact person, for example. Look for a call center that offers flexible plans to meet your needs.



3 Questions You Need To Ask An Answering Service About HIPAA

If you work in the healthcare industry, you already know how imperative it is to protect your patients' health information (PHI) in compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Even if a PHI breach is unintentional, your practice can be fined up to \$1.5 million, so it goes without saying that it is absolutely necessary that you and your staff are HIPAA compliant— and this includes your call answering service.

1. How are operators "trained?"

Answering services can claim to be HIPAA trained and operated, but dig into what this means to determine if you could be at risk for a HIPAA violation. Ask to speak with the service's HIPAA compliance officer about how many operators are HIPAA trained and how often their education is updated and tested. They should pass certification exams annually.

Ask for detailed information about how messages are transmitted, stored, or destroyed. Understand what kind of access you have to all the information concerning your patients and your business. Think of your answering service as part of your staff, and verify that they're trained to handle your patient data by following the same rigorous regulations you do.

And by all means, choose a live answering service over an automated call center—your patients will feel more secure giving their information to a live person versus an automated voice, and the information you receive is likely to be far more accurate and complete.

2. Is data encrypted on both ends?

It's not uncommon for healthcare professionals to assume that if they receive a text or email from a third party, such as an answering service, they aren't responsible for HIPAA violations on their end. This isn't true. Physicians are responsible for the secure and confidential transmission of PHI on both the sending and receiving of any data. If an answering service sends a text with patient information, it may be encrypted on their end but not on the physician's screen. Your answering service must clearly identify how [PHI is securely encrypted](#) on both ends of all communication.



3. Do they offer technology advantages?

Top medical answering services today are able to provide greater security and reliability through advanced technology used to legally record and transmit information. Top medical answering services will offer a [secure communication app](#) that lets care-providers text patient information without putting patient PHI at risk. The app allows the provider to send secure messages to other providers or to all members of their group. The provider can also attach their dictation right on that message using the app, and the message can be downloaded right into a patient's electronic chart.



What To Expect: An Answering Service Should Save You Time And Money

Outsourcing your medical practice calls is typically much more cost effective than paying a full-time employee salary and benefits. An answering service has the staff and technology to answer your calls 24/7 and frees up your staff to be more productive with office tasks during business hours. As a result, wait times are lower and patients are more satisfied. Your practice gains the reputation of being orderly and caring, which are two qualities potential new patients are searching for.

You can choose to have an answering service handle all your calls, day and night, or just some of your calls. Many medical providers use answering services to manage calls when staff members are already on other calls, or when the staff is all in a meeting. These “rollover calls” go to the answering service when the staff isn’t able to answer them, rather than being funneled into voicemail.



And of course, live answering services are also extremely beneficial for handling after hours calls. Choosing a medical call center with 24-hour service means patients will always speak to a live, trained receptionist. This is especially useful if the call is urgent and needs to be directed to an on-call staff member promptly.

There’s nothing more frustrating for a patient who’s in need of immediate attention than getting an answering service with a long list of options for which number to press depending on the nature of their call. Medical emergencies are frightening for patients or those who are caring for them and wondering when their call will be returned only escalates the fear. A live answering service can quickly connect patients to the doctor or provider without any delay.

Why Choose Voice Link of Columbus, Inc.?



[Voice Link](#) specializes in providing answering service solutions to the medical industry because founder JoAnn Fussell has first-hand experience in the field as a Radiation Technician. Her experience with low-quality, overpriced answering services taught her exactly what she wanted in a service, which is why she created Voice Link to meet the unique needs of medical practitioners.

Voice Link's friendly, professional receptionists answer calls in your practice's name and know your priorities and protocols when it comes to patient communications. Your patients won't even realize that they're talking to someone at a call center rather than a receptionist in your office or an on-call staff member after hours. Our operators are trained to know which questions to ask to discern if the call is an emergency or not. Per your instructions, the operator will know how to handle each call and who to contact on your staff given the time of day and nature of the call.

Some services merely answer calls for your business, but Voice Link becomes a part of your business. You come to count on our reliability and professionalism just as much as you do your most valued employees—because, essentially, that's what we are.

Voice Link offers a [secure communication app](#) that lets care-providers text patient information without putting patient PHI at risk. This app allows the provider to send secure messages to other providers or to all members of their group. The provider can also attach their dictation on that message using this app, and the message can be downloaded right into the patient's electronic chart. The app also makes it easy to track if messages are received or not.

The secure app is just one of the many ways we customize communication solutions to make it easier for healthcare providers to enhance patient care. In addition, we offer web portal accessibility so medical providers can be in charge of their on-call schedule so that we know who to call in the event of an after-hours emergency.

- **Hospitals**
- **Physicians' offices**
- **Dentists**
- **Dermatologists**
- **Surgical groups**
- **Medical Supplies**
- **Hospice**
- **Home Health Care**
- **Veterinary offices**

Let us prove how good we are with a free month trial.

Most telephone answering services are good at telling you how good they are, but they're not able to prove—or disprove—it until you've signed a contract. Don't settle for an answering service that just tells you how good they are; make them prove it.

VoiceLink of Columbus, Inc., will prove it to you with referrals, [testimonials](#), and a free one-month trial to test our services, with no strings, no commitments, no expectations. All the risk is on us, and you've got nothing to lose. If you decide to continue with our services after the first free month, we offer answering plans starting at \$29.95/month.

Day or night, outsourcing your practice's calls will ensure that your patients are attended to with care and compassion, 24/7, 365 days a year so that you can sleep better at night. Voice Link offers 26 years of experience in medical answering services and provides live answering services that exceed your expectations.

Request information online or call us at (800) 262-2799 for a free consultation.

**Schedule Your Free Consultation
and Claim Your Free Month Trial!**