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Serving the Baby Boomer Population through Virtual Healthcare

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Originally Published August 2016

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01 INTRODUCTION

“With a growing population of baby boomers in the United States putting pressure on an already stressed healthcare system, virtual healthcare services can be an especially viable option for healthcare providers to consider.”

Virtual healthcare services, often referred to as telehealth or telemedicine, allow patients to meet with physicians and receive diagnoses remotely using a computer, tablet or smartphone. A rising trend in the healthcare industry, online doctor appointments offer patients convenient on-demand access to professional health advice and allow healthcare providers lower-cost options to treat non-emergency

With a growing population of baby boomers in the United States putting pressure on an already stressed healthcare system, virtual healthcare services can be an especially viable option for healthcare providers to consider. Baby Boomers, the 76 million Americans born between the years of 1946-1964, are less healthy and suffering from more chronic conditions than previous generations. In 2010, over 40% of Baby Boomers suffered from hypertension, 38% were obese, and 12% had been diagnosed with diabetes.⁽¹⁾ These numbers have and will continue to increase exponentially as people in this generation continue to age.

This is concerning, because people with chronic conditions account for 86% of total healthcare spending.⁽²⁾ Baby Boomers are also living longer, which means that they will require care for a longer period of time. Medicare spending was \$632 billion in 2015, and the Congressional Budget Office expects the spending to increase at an average annual rate of 1.5% between 2014 and 2024.⁽³⁾

1 [HTTP://WWW.CDC.GOV/NCHS/DATA/HUS/HUS14.PDF](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/hus14.pdf)

2 [HTTP://WWW.CDC.GOV/CHRONICDISEASE/](http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/)

3 [HTTP://WWW.CHCF.ORG/PUBLICATIONS/2015/10/ BABY-STEPS-BOOMERS-MOBILE-HEALTH](http://www.chcf.org/publications/2015/10/baby-steps-boomers-mobile-health)

Blink UX conducted interviews and usability sessions with Baby Boomers who were trying online doctor appointments for the first time. In addition, we surveyed 300+ Baby Boomers in the United States to gauge awareness, use, and opinions of virtual healthcare services. With a goal to understand the specific needs, attitudes, and desires of the Baby Boomer generation, Blink UX identified barriers of adoption and areas for improvement in the user experience of online doctor appointments.*

Although some Baby Boomers are unaware of online doctor appointments, those who are acknowledge the benefits. All study participants and respondents noted that they would value the convenience, ability to wait in their own home, flexibility of appointment times, and other advantages. Perhaps surprisingly, our study also found that Baby Boomers are not very concerned about the privacy of the services. None of the participants stated that they worried about the information or data they were sharing and all respondents denoted privacy/confidentiality issues as their lowest concern. Rather, Baby Boomers are hesitant to have online doctor appointments because they are not confident in the services' effectiveness and continue to perceive them as inferior to in-person physician visits.

One way to change Baby Boomers' perception is to ensure that they have a positive user experience during their first interaction with a virtual healthcare providers' site and service. Indeed, participants who tried an online doctor appointment left feeling surprised and pleased with the doctor's ability to effectively diagnose their condition.

Blink UX has identified actions that virtual healthcare providers can take to further improve a Baby Boomer's experience with online doctor appointments.

* In the rest of the report, the use of "participants" refers to the interviewees/usability study participants. The use of "respondents" refers to the survey respondents. All participants and respondents were baby boomers.

GLOSSARY

Virtual Healthcare Services

Clinical services that are conducted remotely through the use of technology.

Online Doctor Appointment

A consultation with a doctor or nurse practitioner using an online video conferencing service. This is one type of virtual healthcare service.

Virtual Healthcare Providers

Entities that offer virtual healthcare services.

Baby Boomers

The generation of people born after WWII in the United States between 1946 and 1964.

User Experience (UX)

User Experience encompasses all aspects of a person's interaction with an organization, its products, and its services. This includes factors of usefulness, usability, accessibility, credibility, ease of use, and value.

Usability

The extent to which a system, product, or service can be used to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction.

Baby Boomers value the personal relationship they have developed over the years with their primary care physician and are unsure about how effective an online doctor appointment can be. In order to engage this population, it is important for virtual healthcare providers to build trust upfront by connecting to what is important to Baby Boomers.

Key Insight: Baby Boomers trust their primary care physician the most when seeking information related to health conditions.

While this may not seem surprising, baby boomers are less trusting of online sources than people in younger generations and are more likely to rely on referrals. In particular, participants stated that they would be most likely to use a virtual health-care service if it was recommended to them by their primary care physician. Survey respondents who had engaged in an online doctor appointment before listed “recommendation from doctor” as one of their top three motivations. The other top motivators were cost and convenience.

Design Recommendation: Virtual healthcare providers should establish trusted relationships with primary care physicians in order to increase patient referrals.

Doctor testimonials should be included on the website to validate credibility.

Key Insight: Baby Boomers may feel discouraged when they don't feel like the service represents them and their needs.

Participants mentioned seeing pictures of families and younger individuals but did not see people in their age group represented. This made them feel like the service was not intended for them. Participants also mentioned the lack of language options available.

Design Recommendation: Virtual healthcare providers should ensure that photos on their site represent the Baby Boomer population.

Photos of both patients and doctors should include a diversity of age groups. To better serve baby boomers as well as the rest of the patient base, language assistance or options for patients who are not as comfortable with English should be available.

“If it wasn't recommended to me or required by a doctor that I see, I wouldn't use it.”

04 SETTING EXPECTATIONS

Baby Boomers are more skeptical of online services than younger generations, and their adoption rates of new services is lower. Survey results showed that 55% of respondents are aware that virtual healthcare services exist, but only 9% have used them. To encourage use, it is important to use clear and upfront messaging to set expectations about the service.

Key Insight: Baby Boomers want to know the cost of an online appointment and if it would be covered by their insurance company before trying the service.

Our participants expected to see information on a virtual healthcare provider's homepage about what insurance providers are accepted and how the cost would compare to their office visit copay. 58% of survey respondents said that their most important consideration when looking for a new doctor is whether or not the doctor is covered by their insurance company.

Design Recommendation: Virtual healthcare providers should ensure cost and insurance coverage information is clearly stated and easy to find on the landing page.

The information should detail how patients' copays will be calculated and describe any steps patients must take to obtain reimbursement from their insurance company.

Key Insight: Baby Boomers appreciate having transparency into how much time they have to wait or spend with the

Participants liked seeing a countdown timer that told them their exact wait time. It gave them the freedom to get other things done during the interim. However, some were worried about what would happen if they missed the doctor's call. Similarly, seeing a countdown timer during the appointment made participants feel rushed and nervous about not having enough time to receive the care they needed.

Design Recommendation: Virtual healthcare providers should continue to show patients a countdown timer of their wait time and should describe what the patient should do if they miss the doctor's call.

During the appointment, the doctor should discreetly manage the time rather than showing the patient a countdown timer.

FAQ

Is this covered by my insurance?

How does this work with my copay?

Baby Boomers who are considering online doctor appointments for the first time might be hesitant and concerned about who they will be meeting with and how they will be treated. Addressing these concerns upfront is important in keeping them motivated to use the service.

Key Insight: Baby Boomers are concerned about how a doctor will diagnose and treat them without physical touch before engaging in an online appointment.

This was the biggest concern for participants in our study. Participants browsed the list of conditions treated by the virtual healthcare provider, but were not convinced that doctors could diagnose and treat them correctly through video. They wondered how doctors would examine their symptoms without probing and how clearly they would be able to show their problem (ex: back pain) via the webcam. They noted that certain issues (ex: a skin rash in a private area of the body) would be also be uncomfortable to share via a webcam.

Design Recommendation: Virtual healthcare providers should include case studies and videos that detail how doctors treat different conditions.

Descriptions should include what questions doctors may ask, what actions they employ in place of physical probing, and how they examine conditions using a webcam.

Key Insight: Baby Boomers are concerned about the credentials of the doctor they will be meeting with.

They are used to being able to choose a doctor based on their qualifications and specializations. Participants did not understand that the doctors shown on the homepage were only a sampling of the doctors working for the service. Participants thought that if they clicked on the “See a Doctor Now” button they would be taken directly to that doctor.

Design Recommendation: Virtual healthcare providers should show the credentials of the doctors currently available for appointments and explain the patient/doctor matching process.

Patients should understand upfront what factors will be used to determine what doctor they will be meeting with.

FAQ

Can this medical practitioner really do a good job over the Internet?

How can the doctor make a correct diagnosis without seeing me?

Do I know anything about this medical practitioner?

Does practitioner have good medical ability?

Technology complications and frustrations are unique to virtual offerings and often deter Baby Boomers from using virtual healthcare services. To prevent discouragement, these technology barriers should be minimized as much as possible.

Key Insight: Baby Boomers can be especially frustrated by error messages that do not tell them what the next steps should be.

While nobody likes to receive an error message, some Baby Boomers have a harder time troubleshooting issues with an online platform. Vision problems also increase the likelihood that patients will miss subtle error cues (e.g., tiny red text noting the password does not meet the criteria).

Design Recommendation: Virtual healthcare providers should make sure error messages are easy to notice and describe the steps that the patient needs to take to resolve the issue.

Additionally, error messages should be focused on the platform, rather than blaming the user.

Key Insight: Baby Boomers want to retain the details of their appointment, either for personal use or to incorporate into their Electronic Health Records (EHR).

Baby Boomers want to track the care that they received for future use. They enjoy having all their information in one place and value the ability to easily review their health history before making healthcare decisions. Participants stated that they liked receiving a report 24 hours after their appointment. In addition, Baby Boomers are interested in being hands-on and tightly involved in the management of their healthcare.

Design Recommendation: Virtual healthcare providers should provide patients with the option to securely share or incorporate their appointment details into their EHRs.

This could be via a link, PDF document, or through direct integration with a provider/network's EHR system.

“When you are sick your patience level is a little lower and your expectations are a little higher.”

07 BULDING CLEAR, EASY-TO-USE WEBSITES

Particular site elements can help baby boomers react favorably to virtual healthcare services. Survey results identified that 47% of baby boomers have never used a video conferencing service such as Skype, FaceTime, or Google Hangouts. Consequently, it is particularly important that baby boomers feel comfortable when they are on a virtual healthcare provider's site and preparing to engage in an online appointment.

Key Insight: Baby Boomers prefer clean, direct, and simple webpages that include only the information they need and nothing more.

Vision impairments make it harder for baby boomers to sort through a large amount of information. Excess information can also lead to confusion and mistrust. For example, one participant commented that the promotional information on the site made "it come across as more geared toward [the service] than [him]."

Design Recommendation: Virtual healthcare providers should ensure information on cost, insurance, doctor credentials, how the service works, and what they treat can be immediately found on the landing page as these are the pieces of information our participants and respondents identified to be the most important.

Virtual healthcare providers should also remember to follow the guidelines for designing for an aging population.

Key Insight: Some Baby Boomers appreciate more hand-holding and being walked through processes from start to finish.

Some Baby Boomers are more hesitant about new technologies than younger generations, so they want to be guided through processes, especially if the process has multiple steps. For example, participants liked that the pre-appointment forms were broken out into several sections.

Design Recommendation: Virtual healthcare providers should break out long processes (ex: form filling) into several steps and provide clear directions.

Patients should be able to complete the onboarding and setup processes in several, clearly outlined steps. It is the responsibility of the service to ensure that Baby Boomers are ready for their appointment.

"I like that the site and landing page look simple and easy to understand."

"I like that the (appointment sign-up process) was broken into chunks."

As Baby Boomers age, they will experience vision problems such as presbyopia (the loss of ability to clear see close objects or small print), cataracts (cloudy areas that cover part of or the entire lens inside the eye), reduced pupil size, and other health issues that affect their ability to interact with websites. In fact, 100% of us will experience presbyopia at some point in our lives. Thus, when designing websites for an older population, it is important follow the design guidelines below.

Fonts/Text	Site Elements	Colors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size 16px or greater • Sans Serif • Regular thickness in weight (avoid thin and light fonts) • Left aligned • Consistent with the golden ratio (Line Width = Font Size x Font Height) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prominent call-to-action buttons that are easily clickable • Simple site navigation and layout • Underlined text to indicate links • Minimized vertical scrolling, no horizontal scrolling • Clear labeling of links, headers, menu items, etc. • No technical language and jargon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In contrast with each other, in particular for fonts versus the background • No blues or yellows (harder for older people to see) • Ample white space on pages

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09 CONCLUSION

93% of survey respondents who have engaged in remote doctor's appointments in the past would also recommend them to a family member or friend.

With a growing population of older adults in the United States putting pressure on an already stressed healthcare system, virtual healthcare services are a viable alternative for providers looking to treat these patients. As outlined in the previous pages, there are several actions virtual healthcare providers can take to ensure baby boomers have a positive user experience when engaging in online doctor appointments.

This is important, because people who have a positive user experience the first time are more likely to use the service again. Our usability study participants were hesitant before starting an online appointment, but were surprised and very pleased afterwards with the pleasant, personalized experience they received as well as the doctor's ability to effectively diagnose their condition using remote technologies. 93% of survey respondents who have engaged in remote doctor's appointments in the past would also recommend them to a family member or friend.

By establishing patient trust and setting expectations upfront, using clear messaging and a simple onboarding processes, virtual healthcare providers can increase service adoption of people in the Baby Boomer generation.