

White Paper

Conversational AI Goes Beyond the Digital Front Door by Empowering Patient Self-Efficacy



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The vision is to attract and convert patients, and ultimately set them on a personalized patient journey with your healthcare organization.



The term “digital front door” has been used to mean everything from search and scheduling to consumer-facing virtual health. Organizations deploy digital front door solutions to offer convenience and efficiency while lowering cost burdens— and better matching supply in healthcare services with consumer demand. The vision is to attract and convert patients, and ultimately set them on a personalized patient journey with your healthcare organization.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, this virtual suite of features is no longer an aspirational future but a necessary present as patients and healthcare providers work to avoid and reduce the spread of COVID-19, as well as handle the influx of patients needing guidance and information. More than ever before, healthcare organizations are actively incorporating digital front door strategies and solutions, and nascent pilot projects are now enterprise-scale due to rapid, overnight digital transformation.

Not surprisingly, widening the ‘digital front door’ has revealed its complexity and breadth.

The main reason? There is not just one single digital front door out there— consumers seek healthcare information and care tips from many different sources and channels across the board: word of mouth, social media, Google, hospital websites, hospital review sites, articles, and more. They also use a mix of devices (i.e. mobile devices, smart speakers, etc.) at all times of day and night.

Self-efficacy, first defined by A. Bandura in 1977, refers to the confidence a person has in their capacity to undertake behavior(s) that may lead to desired outcomes.¹

It's become clearer than ever that we need to move away from framing the digital front door as just convenient and cost-saving, but also as a way to empower patients and promote self-efficacy in their own healthcare journey.

Self-efficacy, first defined by A. Bandura in 1977, refers to the confidence a person has in their capacity to undertake behavior(s) that may lead to desired outcomes.¹ In other words; empowering people to meet and achieve their healthcare goals. What the provider advises can help inform the patient, but the patient may have very different goals around how they personally want to receive and manage their own care.



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Omnichannel

Certain patient populations may be better served via chatbot, voice assistant, SMS, or IVR depending on age, digital literacy, and other factors.

24/7 access

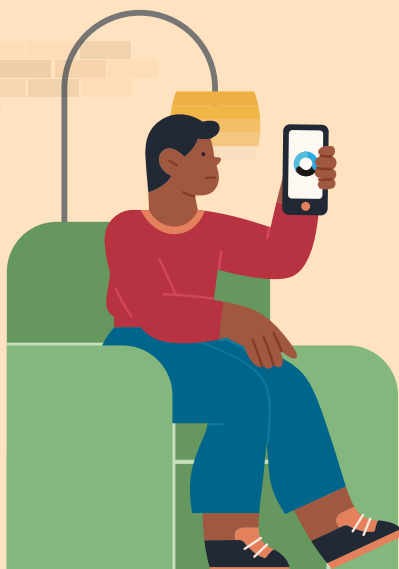
Patients want access to information on demand in a convenient way, not limiting them to clinic or call center hours, for example.

Accessibility

People may have different abilities, but they all have health needs; conversational AI solutions can be hands-free and eyes-free.

Multilingual

A report from the Migration Policy Institute found that 22 percent of the U.S. population does not speak English at home.¹



This white paper covers how a patient-centered conversational AI platform can go beyond the digital front door to take into account the entire digital experience of accessing and navigating a full care journey.



The Digital Front Door Has Revealed a Digital House

The rapid adoption of virtual care in 2020 highlights the importance of embracing and incorporating the digital front door concept in healthcare. According to a July 2020 [Accenture study](#), use of virtual tools has increased from pre-pandemic levels across the board with video conference calls 20-37%, online chat 24-36%, and apps 17-31%.²

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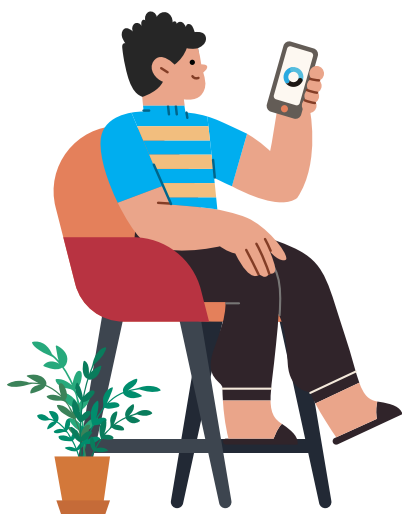
To facilitate virtual care, many hurdles were lifted in March 2020:

- 1) **First**, the [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services \(CMS\)](#) loosened [HIPAA compliance regulations](#).³
- 2) **Second**, physician reimbursement was made [equal to in-person visits](#), incentivizing doctors to participate.⁴
- 3) **Third**, continued pressure for consumerization has increased as the virtual patient population has expanded.

In this context, consumerization means personalization with AI— not just an improved website. Using AI in healthcare recognizes that patients are not following a linear path on their care journey. An individual's healthcare journey is unique (and sometimes complicated), so it makes sense that a patient's digital experience requires a variety of channels, touchpoints, services, and information.

Key to a digital front door strategy is recognizing that patients are more apt to take action when it's easy and frictionless. Today this means accessing everything online, at any time, and anywhere. This is why the convenience of dropping into an urgent clinic is appealing to many. It's familiar, more flexible, and fits the patient's own timeline.

AI is a fundamental component to a robust digital front door, as it offers personalized and meaningful experiences. AI creates consistency that reduces waste, optimizes your resources, and drives progress towards your quality objectives and financial goals.



How Does This Work in Practice?

A recent Society for Healthcare Strategy & Market Development (SHSMD)-sponsored [presentation](#) highlighted six touchpoints to consider within a broader digital front door strategy:⁵

An individual's healthcare journey is unique (and sometimes complicated), so it makes sense that a patient's digital experience requires a variety of channels, touchpoints, services, and information.

1. Provider Profiles

Confirm the quality and availability of provider profiles since they are one of the most frequented types of pages on websites, for both consumers and referring providers.

2. Location directories

Confirm completeness and availability to support key information consumers seek.

3. Patient portals

Enable self-service transactional features to increase adoption.

4. Third party listings

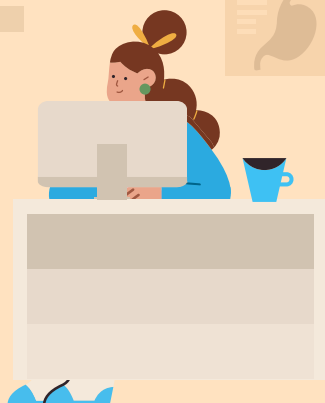
Proactively manage reviews and measure impact and insights.

5. Online scheduling

Facilitate frictionless appointment scheduling.

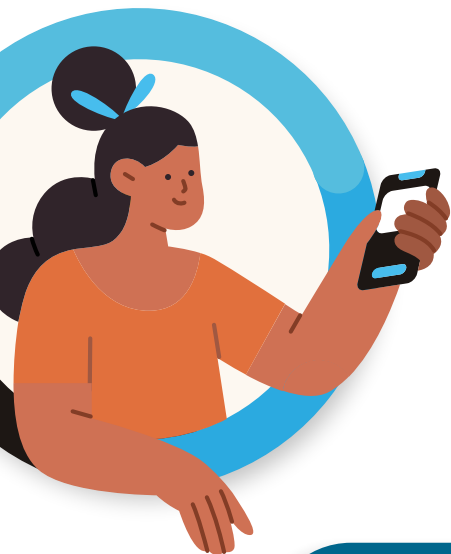
6. Social Media

Optimize location and provider-based strategies.



Notice that all of these are patient-centric. Patients typically make their initial healthcare decisions based on all of these channels and factors. SHSMD says that 77% of people search online before making an appointment.

Phynd Technologies offers this helpful analogy in [Beyond the Digital Front Door: The Digital House](#): *"The website of course would be the front door, patient portals would be a convenient second side entrance, the patient access / call center system would be a front porch, ... The electronic health record (EHR) system...is the basement. Provider data is the studs, walls, insulation, heating, water, electricity, plumbing."*⁶



Conversational AI helps guide patients and remove obstacles along their nonlinear journeys. The following use cases demonstrate the multitude of ways this can happen:

Care navigation

A chatbot allows a patient to check their symptoms and get recommendations on next steps for care.

- A patient sprained their ankle. A chatbot asks them questions and helps them understand their care options, whether it be urgent care, a virtual visit, scheduling an appointment with their primary care physician (PCP), or self-care at home.

Call center automation/deflection

High volumes of calls from patients to call centers or providers decrease as virtual assistants help offload tasks and provide patients with on-demand resources and information.

- A patient is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and needs to understand next steps for testing and care, a website chatbot can screen the patient and provide them with locations near their home for testing without having to experience wait times or add to the call center volume.

Patient bill pay and financial support

Virtual assistants provide transparency around care options and cost. With greater awareness, a patient can make an informed decision. In turn, patients are more apt to pay that bill because it won't be a surprise. assistants help offload tasks and provide patients with on-demand resources and information.

- A patient is experiencing low back pain and needs care. They're presented with options and costs and choose to have a virtual visit.
- Due to COVID-19 and an increase in unemployment, many diabetic patients are becoming non-adherent to their insulin treatments. Through a virtual assistant, a pharmaceutical company sends an SMS that it is now offering insulin for \$35 a month.
- A blockchain enabled company matches up preauthorization with the actual care delivery experience so patients don't get confusing and unnecessary bill statements. Said Amy Compton-Phillips, MD, Chief Clinical Officer at Providence St. Joseph Health in a recent [HLTH webinar](#). *"The bill gets seamlessly put through rather than having lots of people handing it off."*⁷

Symptom checker

Conversational AI platforms have information on different disease conditions so patients can understand more about their illness.

- A patient is feeling symptoms of COVID-19. When they call the doctor's office, a virtual assistant asks them questions about their symptoms and either gives them self-care instructions or helps them schedule an appointment.

Pre-and post-operative care

Conversational AI technology provides an accessible and reliable source to support patients pre and post-operatively.

- Two weeks before surgery, a healthcare provider sends an SMS message to her patient's mobile device so the patient has access to reminders, preparation instructions, and answers to any questions. One day before surgery, the patient receives reminders to ensure they complete pre-surgical instructions. One day post-surgery, the virtual assistant prompts the patient, now at home, to assess his symptoms. The virtual assistant knows the full context of his care journey, and can suggest a list of physical therapists and their availability.

Digital literacy

A healthcare organization needs to address varying levels of digital literacy (ex. aging population that is not as digitally literate).

- A campaign uses various channels to engage with older patients: i.e. first via an SMS, next via email, finally via phone outreach/conversational IVR.

Find a location and schedule a doctor's appointment

According to Chelsea Biel, BSN, RN, Senior Director of Customer Success and Clinical Informatics at Orbita, patients that schedule their own appointments are more likely to keep them.⁸ *"There's a belief that if a patient selects their visit time, they're more likely to stick to it because they've confirmed it works with their schedule."* They're also more likely to reschedule than be a no-show. No-shows decrease revenue and productivity.

- A healthcare organization uses a chatbot virtual assistant to address FAQs and help consumers schedule appointments.

Surveys, screeners, and assessments

A virtual assistant can send questions to patients to gauge their health status and safety.

- A not-for-profit hospital system uses a virtual assistant to send out a survey around anxiety and depression to employees as a way to help them understand their mental health and take next steps.
- A dialysis center integrates conversational AI into an IVR system to automate a COVID-19 screening tool for patients prior to their appointments.
- A private telemedicine company gathers information from patients in a virtual waiting room to update the history of the presenting illness and other key details that a clinician will need as part of their overall assessment. This increases their quality time with the doctor.

"There is no wrong door from the patient's perspective."⁹

*-Amy Compton-Phillips, MD,
Chief Clinical Officer
Providence St. Joseph Health*

"With the right kind of incentives to simplify our structures and get better aligned, the technology would be able to solve the problems that much faster. [But] technology only moves forward with people [who have] aligned incentives."

*-Firdaus Bhathena,
Chief Digital Officer
CVS Health*

Key Takeaways

1. By only focusing on the digital front door as one discrete part of the patient journey, we run the risk of only addressing the healthcare organization's problems— not the patient's needs at every stage of their journey. This risks further fragmenting the patient journey and can lead to diminished patient experience and poorer health outcomes.

Conversational AI can make the patient care journey more seamless instead of contributing to that fragmentation. Amy Compton-Phillips, MD, Chief Clinical Officer at Providence St. Joseph Health said in a recent [HLTH webinar](#), *"There is no wrong door from the patient's perspective."*⁹

Compton-Phillips shared an example of a family member with hearing loss being treated for cancer in the midwest as a case study of care becoming fragmented. Due to his hearing loss, the family member has to communicate electronically with multiple physicians by TTY. The recent pandemic has made that even more difficult as the communication channels have shifted and work across different networks.

His health care delivery system now has a disconnected inpatient versus outpatient record, and because he has communication needs that are beyond the ordinary; *"his care suffered dramatically, resulting in him going to the hospital twice for complications that were completely unnecessary because of the lack of coordination amongst providers. He had door number one, door number two and door number three, and all of them were right for a specific issue, but none of them were right for him across the continuum."*

-Compton-Phillips

2. Virtual care is demanding more connectivity and communication between organizations and systems— and revealing existing interoperability problems. Firdaus Bhathena, Chief Digital Officer at CVS Health, said in the same [HLTH webinar](#) that poor interoperability is exacerbated by a lack of shared incentive.¹⁰

Meet consumers where they are with a digital front door

Learn how your organization can remove friction and improve access to care with OrbitaENGAGE, a digital front door solution that helps consumers quickly and easily find the information they need to access and receive care. Using powerful conversational experiences like chatbots, voice search, and voice SEO, OrbitaENGAGE supports patients as they search for a doctor, location, service or activities like triaging and appointment scheduling.

"We're dealing with so many disparate, archaic systems. But a bigger problem is the incentive. Are we all incentivized to kind of do the right thing or are our incentives all over the map, which makes us behave in ways that prevent this kind of seamless experience from happening? ... With the right kind of incentives to simplify our structures and get better aligned, the technology would be able to solve the problems that much faster. [But] technology only moves forward with people [who have] aligned incentives." -Bhathena

Offering your patients ways to proactively drive their healthcare journey with conversational AI also helps your organization. Not only can it reduce tedious tasks for your staff and boost quality clinical time, it can also make patients more likely to follow through with appointments, pay their bills, and understand and adhere to their plan of care. Enabling self-efficacy and removing friction for the patient (and not just providing consumer-friendly digital tools) can lead to better health outcomes.

About Orbita

Orbita provides market-proven voice and chat solutions for healthcare and life sciences sectors, and the most powerful conversational AI platform enabling entities to cost-effectively create and manage HIPAA-compliant virtual health assistants for the enterprise. Organizations tap the power of Orbita's voice search-enabled technologies for consumer marketing, customer service, patient engagement, outcomes improvement and cost reduction initiatives. Customers include Amgen, Brigham and Women's Hospital, ERT, Libertana Home Health, Mayo Clinic, Merck and University of Chicago Medicine. Partners included Amazon, Cognizant, Deloitte, Pariveda, and ServiceNow.

See Orbita's Digital Front Door solution in action



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