Why Enterprise is Moving to Online Scheduling Software
**Introduction**

Scheduling appointments and booking reservations are routine and common tasks among many enterprise businesses and organizations. Regardless of the type of service or activity being scheduled, an efficient method of managing this process is essential in ensuring an entity runs efficiently and to its fullest and most profitable potential.

Unfortunately, traditional methods of scheduling and managing appointments and reservations—such as over the phone, by e-mail or in-person—are neither effective nor efficient. Depending on the number of appointments or reservations scheduled on a daily, weekly or monthly basis, this seemingly simple task can have a significant and negative impact on how an enterprise runs and, ultimately, its bottom line.

There’s a simple solution for enterprises looking to automate, streamline and improve the scheduling process: appointment scheduling software.

**How Enterprises Use It**

Appointment scheduling software instantly improves the way enterprise businesses and organizations schedule and manage their appointment and reservation processes by giving their customers, clients and patients the ability to book their own dates and times online and at any hour of the day, not just during normal operating hours. Just as the scopes of business vary greatly among enterprises, so too do the types of appointments and reservations that can be self-scheduled with appointment scheduling software.
These include:

- Job applicant interviews.
- Interviews and internal training of new employee hires.
- Inbound shipments and deliveries.
- Lessons, meetings and general services.
- Donations, such as blood and plasma.
- Department of motor vehicle licensing appointments.
- Trade show/product demonstrations.
- Employee financial services and advisement.
- Tech support.
- Physical training and exercise classes.
- Consulting.
- In-person workshops, seminars and events.

Among the industries that utilize online scheduling software are:

- Retail
- Medical and wellness
- Manufacturing
- Distribution
- Logistics
- Finance
- Sales
The Benefits of Online Scheduling Vs. Traditional Methods

Traditional scheduling methods all have one thing in common: they have a manual component to them.

Whether appointments or reservations are taken over the phone by staffers, submitted by customers or clients by e-mail or fax, or made in-person, a manual scheduling process requires a significant amount of staff time and resources that may not be immediate apparent when analyzing its effect on overall operating procedures. The scheduling does not end when a date and time is confirmed. Information related to the scheduled appointment or reservation must then be managed and maintained. Additionally, any type of appointment or reservation process is also factored into the scheduling chain.

Automating the scheduling process through appointment scheduling software and its self-scheduling functionality has instant benefits not found in traditional scheduling methods. These include:

**Time savings**, as employees spend less time on the phone scheduling, canceling and rescheduling candidate interviews. Scheduling software also eliminates or significantly reduces time spent managing contact information, returning voice mail and e-mail messages, and on appointment/reservation reminders.

**Monetary savings**, which is a common off-shoot of the time savings experienced. Staff members can focus on more pressing tasks and primary responsibilities they were hired for, eliminating the need for overtime pay to accomplish these or hiring a new employee to assist in the scheduling process.
Greater flexibility and convenient for booking individuals, as they’re able to schedule their
dates and times 24 hours a day, not just normal business hours.

A dramatic reduction in errors, such as over-bookings, incorrect appointment/reservation
dates and times, and inaccurate client, customer or patient information.

Greater accessibility to appointments/reservations, contact information and related data, as
these can be viewed from any Internet-connected device.

Instant staff access from any Internet-connection when away from the facility or working
remotely.

A significant drop in “no-shows” who miss their scheduled appointment/reservation times.
This helps ensure that available time slots are filled.

Another intangible benefit is the peace-of-mind knowing that the scheduling process is
automatic, streamlined and effective.

The Characteristics of Enterprise
Appointment Scheduling Software

As described in this document, online scheduling software for enterprise businesses and
organizations is a Software as a Service (SaaS) application completely accessible online. Unlike
more traditional software programs limited to an individual computer or network, cloud-based
scheduling software is securely and safely housed on external servers and maintained and
updated by the service provider.
Adoption rates for online scheduling software and other cloud-based applications continue to grow at a fast pace, as evidenced by findings in a March 2012 IBM survey released at its Pulse 2012 conference that predict the number of enterprises turning to cloud computing will double by 2015.

Features
Features commonly included in appointment scheduling software applications include:

- Online self-scheduling.
- Automated e-mail and text message reminders sent prior to a scheduled appointment or reservation time.
- Record-keeping and reporting capabilities that allow for quick and seamless data collection, management and retrieval.
- Customizable staff access types that allow enterprises to grant different access levels to staff (for security purposes).

Unlike more traditional software programs limited to an individual computer or network, cloud-based scheduling software is securely and safely housed on external servers and maintained and updated by the service provider.

Advanced Functionality
The scheduling needs of enterprise-level businesses and organizations typically stretch beyond the standard features and functionality of appointment scheduling software systems, given the size of their operations and the number of separate locations they run. Some online scheduling software providers have developed services and functionality specific to these needs. These may include:

- High scalability of the system. This is important for enterprises, as it allows them to accommodate large numbers of appointments and reservations, staff, and customers/clients/patients across multiple locations.
• Web services that integrate into existing software and scheduling processes already in use at the business or organization.

• High configurability to accommodate more specific and advanced scheduling needs.

• Readily available, 24-hour live customer support from locally-based representatives.

• Customer graphic user interface (GUI) development.

• Dedicated business and support contacts to quickly address questions, concerns and requests.

Given the knowledge, experience and manpower necessary to sufficiently provide advanced functionality, it’s offered only by a few scheduling providers.

Common considerations include:

Features and Functionality

Professional Services

Security

Cost

Customer Support

Dependability

Implementation

Implementation of appointment scheduling software depends upon how it’s to be used and any advanced functionality included with the service. Given the unique considerations of enterprise-level organizations and businesses, the scheduling provider will typically assign a representative to work with them on their specific needs, integrations, system settings and other necessary steps to employ. Once configured, an enterprise can begin to utilize the self-scheduling functionality rapidly. Since these systems typically are pre-built with functionality and security measures already in place, the “go-live” timelines can be cut up to 90 percent than those of traditional software implementation.
What to Look for When Selecting a Provider

Due diligence and research should be conducted when selecting an appointment scheduling software provider, given the important role it will play in an enterprise’s operations. Common considerations include:

Features and functionality
Although some features and functionality come standard with some scheduling systems, they can vary widely among the many service providers. A current analysis of both current and future needs can help enterprises in the selection process. Creating a specified workflow typically requires the most time in the analysis process, and a provider should utilize the services of a team of specialists experienced with multiple variations of scheduling processes.

Professional services
Enterprises oftentimes have unique scheduling needs that stretch beyond the standard functionality of the system, as stated in the above. Many providers do not offer the professional services necessary to accommodate these needs. Inquire on what the provider currently offers and its limitations for customization and advanced services.

Security
This is an important consideration for enterprise businesses and organizations, given the transfer and flow of online data. Reputable providers incorporate the latest security measures and practices, such as secure server databases, data storage and back-up procedures, as well as processes related to failover and federal regulations, if applicable.

Cost
Pricing for an enterprise suite of services is typically a bit different from a basic subscription for
a small business or proprietorship that utilizes only standard services and doesn’t require any customization. For enterprises, some scheduling providers offer a more cost-effective monthly package to accommodate the high usage and multiple locations common with most of these operations. (These costs would otherwise add up quickly if purchased as individual accounts.) Reputable providers will write up a contract that includes all work to be done, requirements, the total cost of the work and monthly fees, and other information pertinent to both parties.

Customer support
24-hour, live support should be a requirement when researching an online scheduling software provider. The ability to immediately reach a dedicated contact or support representative is imperative for a scheduling application that needs to be functional at all times and one that reaches across multiple locations.

Dependability
Longevity is usually a good tell-tale sign of a dependable service provider. Learn how long the provider has been in business. Another sign of a dependable application is feedback from other enterprise businesses and organizations that currently use the service. Most providers are willing to provide references upon request.

Conclusion
Enterprises of all sizes and scopes of business can instantly benefit from online scheduling software for booking a wide variety of services, events and activities. Implementing such a
system not only makes the scheduling process more convenient and easier for customers, clients and patients, it can translate into significant time and monetary savings, greater efficiency for staff, and a complete automation of booking procedures from start to finish. The flexibility and functionality of some online scheduling systems mesh perfectly with the unique scheduling needs of enterprise-level businesses and organizations, making online scheduling software the best choice for transforming this necessary, but oftentimes burdensome, task.

To learn more about online scheduling software and how it can improve your booking processes, visit www.appointment-plus.com.

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