

## ZOCDOC MAKES SCHEDULING DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENTS EASY

Service helps with selecting, rating medical practitioners

by: *Steve Morgenstern*

In the Internet age, it's become routine to order everything from books and DVDs to groceries and even restaurant reservations conveniently online. Why not set up doctor's appointments the same way?

That's the promise of ZocDoc, a free service that lets patients find a doctor and book an appointment directly from a computer or smartphone, without enduring the blood-pressure-raising experience of calling the office, waiting on hold and negotiating for an available time slot.

The idea began in 2007 when Cyrus Massoumi, a management consultant, suffered a ruptured eardrum on a flight to New York. To his surprise, it took him three days to find a reputable doctor who accepted his insurance and had an available appointment. A seasoned online shopper, Massoumi saw a business opportunity here, and together with Dr. Oliver Kharraz, an expert on electronic medical records, and Nick Ganju, the chief technology officer, they founded ZocDoc.



Making your next medical appointment could be as easy as picking up your smartphone. — Photo by Illustration Source/Getty Images

The company started small, limited to dentist appointments in lower Manhattan, but as the concept proved popular, they expanded. Today ZocDoc serves nine cities (New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, Philadelphia, Houston, Washington, D.C., Atlanta and San Francisco) and 12 medical specialties, with plans for rapid growth in the coming year.

A visit to the website quickly makes it clear why patients appreciate ZocDoc. To get started, you enter three simple pieces of information. Select a medical specialty, choosing from a drop-down menu listing. Enter your ZIP code. And choose your health care provider and plan, again from a drop-down list. Click the orange "Find Doctors" button and the system produces an easy-to-read report of doctors and available appointment times.

If you prefer, there are several other ways to search through ZocDoc. You can find doctors by city, by specialty, or insurance plans accepted, or search directly by doctor name, practice name, hospital affiliation or procedure.

Each doctor listing includes three patient rating scores, for overall Recommendation, Bedside Manner and Waiting Time, plus additional information such as languages spoken, educational background and professional memberships. When you're comfortable with your choice of doctor, click on a convenient time (only available slots are displayed) and make an appointment — simple as that. You can request text message and/or email reminders be sent a few hours before

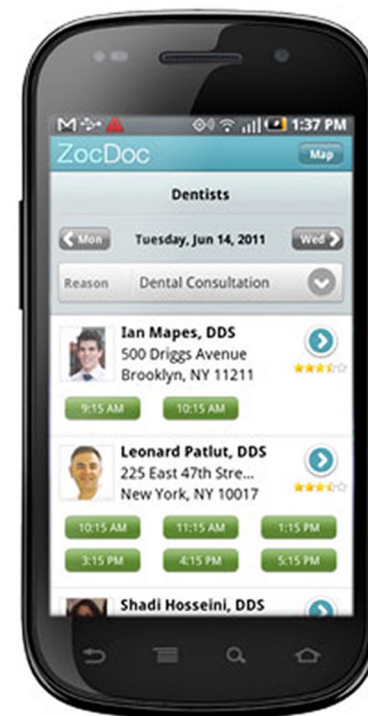
your appointment time. And if you need to cancel or reschedule the appointment, you can handle that through ZocDoc as well.

There are several advantages to the ZocDoc system, for both patients and doctors. You can set an appointment at your convenience, even when the office is closed. You see a wide range of doctors and available appointment times at a glance, so there's no need to tediously make phone call after phone call when looking for medical care. And since a large number of patients cancel appointments on short notice, you may be able to snap up a vacancy and see the doctor right away. There's no charge for patients to use ZocDoc; doctors pay on average \$250 per month to participate in the program.

It's also worth mentioning that you're not left on your own if you have questions: there's a toll-free number available to reach a real, live person at any time.

You don't even have to be near a computer to take advantage of ZocDoc, which is good news if you need medical attention when you're away from home. The company offers free downloadable apps for iPhone and Android phones. The app versions of the service don't squeeze as much information on a page as a computer screen, of course, so there's a certain amount of scrolling and clicking required to reach the information you need. And some of the more advanced search functions aren't included in the mobile versions. The core ability to find a doctor in a particular specialty, located in your area, who takes your insurance, is all there, though, complete with ratings and appointment management. And if your phone's GPS receiver is turned on,

you can even skip a step by letting the software determine your current location, without having to enter a ZIP code.



The ZocDoc app is available for iPhone and Android (pictured) smartphones. — Photo courtesy of ZocDoc

ZocDoc is already an extremely valuable resource. And if the scheduled changes to the health care system kick in, a wave of previously uninsured people will be added to the patient pool, making appointment shopping that much more challenging. ZocDoc has limited coverage areas right now, but if you would like them to come to your town, they're listening, basing expansion plans in part on user demand. You can visit [www.zocdoc.com/vote](http://www.zocdoc.com/vote) and let the company know you would welcome them to your area.