Why Native Mobile Apps Are Essential to Real-Time Engagement and Operational Awareness

A case study of how Piedmont Healthcare deployed their extensible wayfinding platform to manage patient flows and access to care.

Introduction

The urgency of communicating COVID-19 safety, education and access to care brought the reality of on demand access to real-time data into focus for many healthcare systems. As Gartner reports, "The real-time health system (RTHS) is an operational, management and technology paradigm for the next-generation healthcare provider. The RTHS acquires, analyzes and acts on operational intelligence in real time — to improve the speed and quality of interventions, collaboration and decision making." [1]

"PiedmontNow offers patients transformational, next generation access to medical services and a unified hassle-free experience."

Katie Logan, Chief Consumer Officer
Piedmont Healthcare

While many hospital systems lag in adoption of a robust digital experience, It is critical that hospital systems lean on the mobile device to ensure patients have up to date information and easy access to care to ensure better outcomes.

Piedmont Healthcare exemplifies how a dynamic, native mobile platform is essential to both a hospital's response to Coronavirus and operational readiness.

Background

📱 **100K**

More than 100,000 downloads and Average session frequency of 4-8 times per user
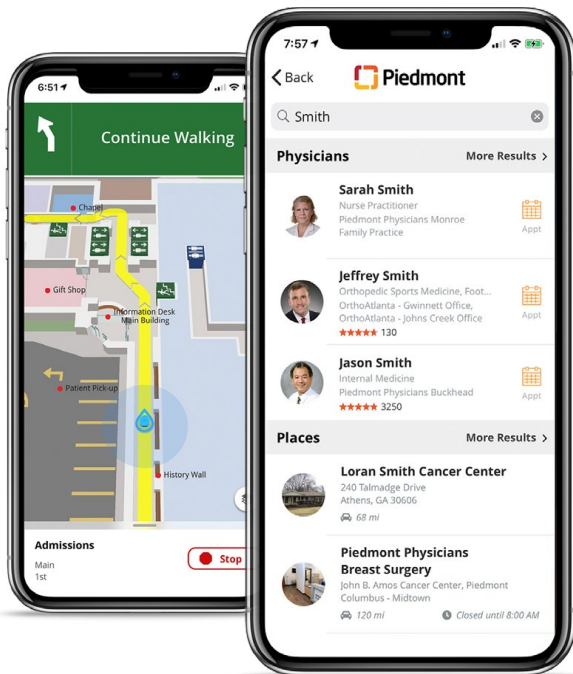
PiedmontNow provides users with interactive maps and step-by-step navigation to doctor's offices, on-site dining, pharmacies, restrooms, parking decks and other points of interest. This extensible platform also offers advanced features that give patients access to urgent care and emergency department wait times, appointment scheduling, virtual care, physician directories, electronic health records, ride share services, bill pay, and more.

Providing this continuity of care through their hospital-branded mobile app supports the organization's goals of providing a patient-centric model of care and is a key driver for revenue at Piedmont.

Out of the gate Piedmont's mobile wayfinding platform proved to be a service that differentiated the system from competitors. The analytics of the adoption and usage rates of the app are impressive. In the three years since its launch the mobile wayfinding app has accomplished:

✔ More than 100,000 downloads

✔ An average session frequency of 4-8 times per user

✔ A conversion rate from click to fulfillment of mobile appointment scheduling at thirty percent (30%)

✔ Over 30% of all online scheduled patients are new to Piedmont

✔ The payor mix for all online scheduled patients is 67% commercial making this functionality a key revenue driver for the healthcare system

"The demonstrated success of our mobile wayfinding platform helps to realize Piedmont's mission of quality, safety and service," says Katie Logan, Chief Consumer Officer, Piedmont Healthcare. "

The Essential Role of PiedmontNow in COVID-19 Response

With the PiedmontNow mobile platform an established source of trust for patients, Piedmont Healthcare was at the ready to transform the mobile app into the hospital's digital Coronavirus communications and operational management tool. Piedmont leadership acted quickly to take advantage of having a direct conduit to patients and tap into the regional network of active app users. Immediate updates to the app dashboard allowed Piedmont to surface critical information providing three essential functions:

✔ Communicate Coronavirus symptoms and protocols for virtual triage

✔ Manage patient flows by directing patients to testing, virtualcare or appropriate treatment location within the hospital or ambulatory clinic

✔ Update staff on operational safety and location closures

Coronavirus response required that the focus of the PiedmontNow platform shift from navigating patients to in person care to directing patients to in person care only when necessary. To support this operational change, Piedmont featured COVID-19 information and resources on the app dashboard to help patients determine what level of care they needed. Being able to update operational changes in real-time had a positive impact on patient flows to actively keep people away from the hospital. It also allowed the system to focus on capacity management, lowering transmission rates in the community, and keeping staff and patients safe.

Communicating visitor protocols was also critical information to deliver throughout the care network. The PiedmontNow app had the ability to notify the community of visitor restrictions at all of their 11 hospitals in real-time.
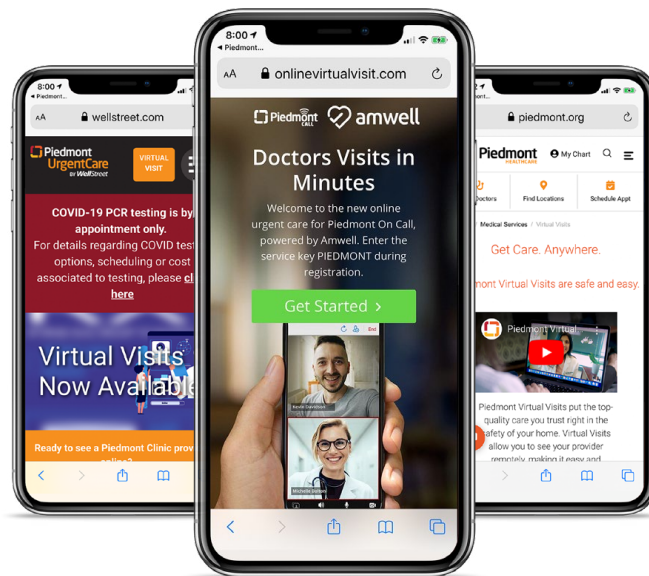
When compared to the clunky interfaces of EHR patient portals, PiedmontNow mobile alerts have the advantage of notifying users' smartphones instantly, avoiding the frustration of having to log in multiple times as required by the EHR. Piedmont virtual visits have also taken off during this time. With the system's virtual care functionality integrated into the PiedmontNow app, patients have one app on their phone where they assess symptoms and then have the option to access a virtual care appointment.

Seamless integration of virtual care and appointment scheduling on their mobile app provides a hassle-free experience and gives patients what they want – immediate access to care

Staff app adoption and promotion of the app has always played an important role in the success of PiedmontNow. During the height of the pandemic response, the location-aware platform allowed facility changes to be quickly communicated to staff who might be stationed at new locations in the hospital and meet rapidly changing clinical care needs. Indoor navigation was also an invaluable resource to temporary staff new to the complex facilities of the large health system. As the Piedmont returns to providing elective care, PiedmontNow allows staff to communicate contactless arrival protocols and gives patients the reassurance of keeping their health and safety a top priority when returning to in person appointments.
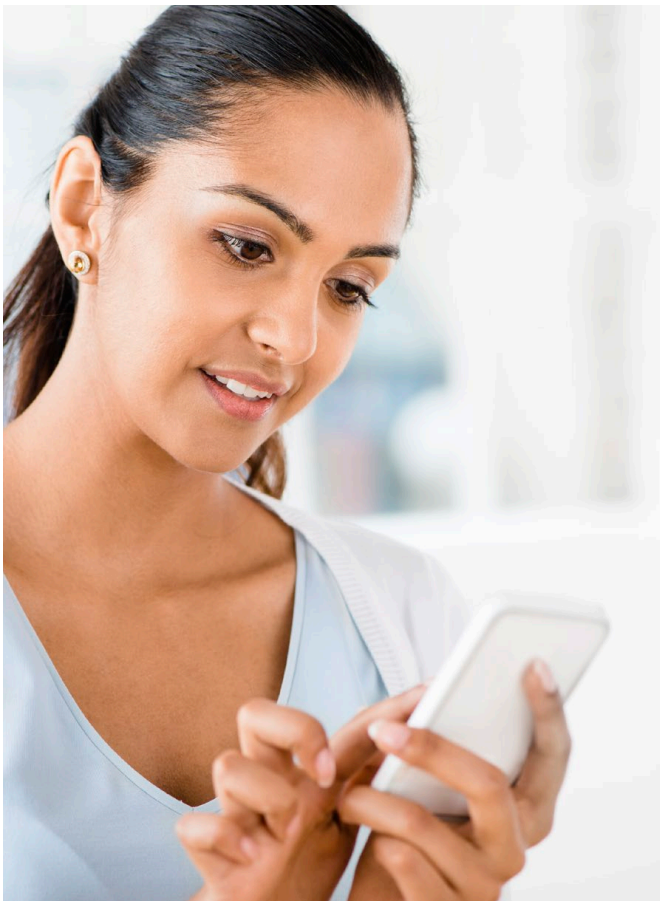
Conclusion

With an anytime, anywhere connection between hospitals and patients, an extensible mobile platform takes patient engagement to a whole new level. Coronavirus brought to light how the real-time digital response of a location-aware mobile platform allows a healthcare system to stay agile and act immediately on situational awareness. As Gartner reports, "The indoor location application platform market continues to evolve and consolidate. Digital workplace infrastructure and operations leaders must be able to use location information to address the growing business analytics needs and the personal information security requirements of their end users." [2]

The success of PiedmontNow before and during Coronavirus demonstrates how extensible mobile wayfinding solutions have quickly changed from a novel, nice-to-have service offered to patients to an essential component of a healthcare system's clinical and operational functions.

Most importantly, the PiedmontNow mobile platform proved its resilience during the unprecedented operational challenges that COVID-19 presented and allowed Piedmont Healthcare to deliver care to a community in crisis.

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[1] Gartner "Healthcare Provider CIOs: Overcome COVID-19 Challenges with Real-Time Health System Technology," Barry Runyon, 10 April 2020
[2] Gartner "Market Guide for Indoor Location Application Platforms," Annette Zimmermann, Tim Zimmerman, 25 February 2020