

Auditdata



# **PLAYBOOK:** Making the new normal work in hearing care

Learn how COVID-19 modernised hearing care and how you can start taking advantage of remote services.

# Impacts of the pandemic on hearing healthcare

The COVID-19 pandemic has sent shockwaves through virtually every industry - hearing healthcare is not an exception. As social distancing and stay-at-home orders globally have cut down in-store visits, audiology clinics and retailers have had to upgrade their technological capabilities to accommodate demand. That necessity has boosted teleaudiology which was already building well before the pandemic.

With many regular audiology clients falling into the highest-risk categories for COVID-19, more clients are looking for remote options. As technology quickly adapts to meet the new normal, it is likely that the demand for teleaudiology will continue to grow even after the pandemic has receded.

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# How the pandemic hit audiology practices?

“ While teleaudiology practice and technology were on the rise well before the pandemic hit, hearing health has long been a decidedly **in-person business**.

One of the few silver linings of the past year, not at least for the audiology industry, is that it has forced both the suppliers of hearing aids as well as the shop owners to reevaluate their approach delivering service to their clients. Both in terms of repairs, adjustment and fitting. The creativity of setting-up drive-throughs, home deliveries, and usage of remote assistance has been immense.

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As visits to primary care doctors [dropped by as much as 60% during the pandemic](#), remote care usage jumped [from 8% in December 2019 to 29% in May 2020](#). That disparity is likely even higher in the hearing health industry.

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A March statement from the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warning people older than 60 against seeking non-essential in-person medical treatment [preceded an 80% to 85% decrease in hearing aid sales](#) in April.

Even beyond the highest-risk clients, some clients with less profound hearing loss may dismiss hearing care as a “luxury” health care item not worth venturing out for during a crisis. That makes it imperative for audiology practices to embrace telehealth technology if they wish to retain their client base and attract new clients.

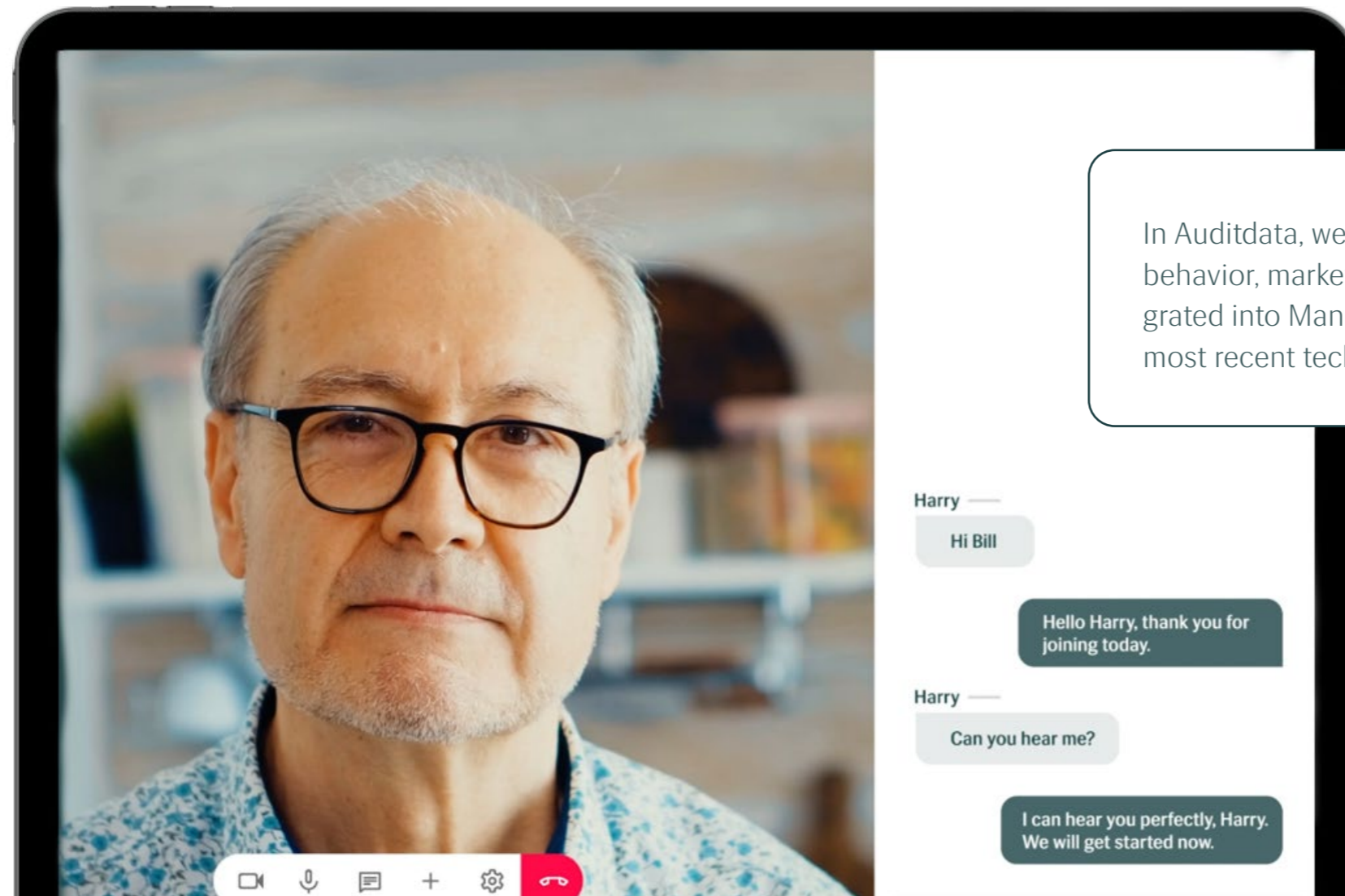


# What is teleaudiology?

“ **Teleaudiology** is a catch-all term for a wide range of hearing health practices wherein audiologists and clients connect remotely via tools such as phone calls, video conferences, or other electronic communication.

Unlike more traditional audiology practices revolving around in-person visits, teleaudiology allows clients to receive treatment and check-ups from any location with a reliable internet connection or a phone. Its use has been on the upswing over the past decade as online communication tools, client capabilities, remote hearing device control and privacy protections have improved.

With the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, the need for remote hearing health care increased tremendously and shops have been forced to be creative in delivering services in a new setting.



In Auditdata, we keep our fingers on the pulse and follow trends about behavior, marketing, and connecting data. All of this knowledge is integrated into Manage meaning that your shops will be up-to-date with the most recent technologies.

Harry —

Hi Bill

Hello Harry, thank you for joining today.

Harry —

Can you hear me?

I can hear you perfectly, Harry. We will get started now.

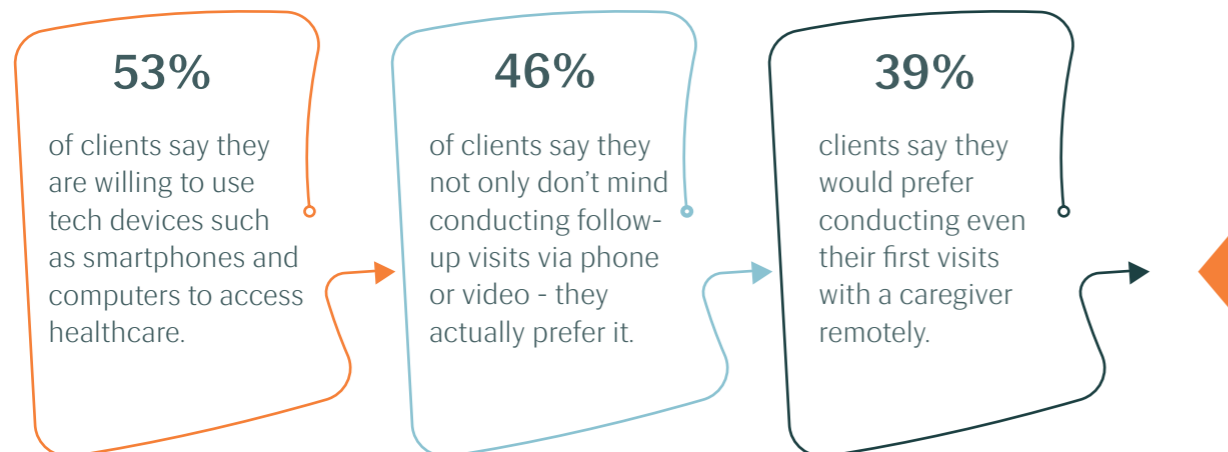
# Changing attitudes towards remote care

## COVID-19 boosted remote health care generally

[A survey conducted by Capgemini Research Group](#) in summer of 2020 researched the attitudes towards remote healthcare before and after the COVID-19 crisis. Before the coronavirus pandemic struck, 38% of surveyed said they felt comfortable with the increased reliance on technology for managing healthcare. When the survey was conducted in July, that figure had risen to 46%.

As the threat of serious illness moved from theoretical to frighteningly tangible, it seems clients' willingness to embrace new technologies responded accordingly. After this pandemic and the risk of infection is over, the clients will be more accustomed to use new means of communication and will decide which one they prefer. For shorter appointments, like fitting or adjustment, remote care will be a great option. Whereas for appointments, like hearing test or molding the client, will have to come into the shop.

Unsurprisingly, age plays a role in clients' attitudes toward telehealth. Before the pandemic, **51%** of clients in the age range of 23 to 54 years said they would use online resources to research health issues. During the pandemic, those numbers jumped by up to 11% . For the "Baby Boomer" generation (ages 55 to 75), the attitude before COVID-19 was that only **27%** would use online resources to search for health issues, this grew to **34%** during the crisis. That bears out the conventional wisdom that older clients are less likely to embrace technological solutions to hearing health issues, but also underlines that a significant portion of clients of all ages are actively searching for online information about their health conditions.



While some of those figures may seem unimpressive at first glance, the fact that one-third of healthcare clients are willing to embrace remote healthcare options is evidence that remote care has become an unignorable factor.

# Is teleaudiology likely to spread further?

Although hearing health clients have been trending younger in recent years, this is still an industry whose client base trends towards older clients. That poses a two-pronged challenge for hearing health providers.

## 1 Risk

Older clients are considerably more at risk from the coronavirus and therefore less likely to make in-person visits unless necessary.

## 2 Adaptability

The older age demographic also tends to be less technologically savvy thus more difficult to sway to new technologies.

## Telecare increases direct contact to client

Another hurdle is the perception of difficulty for providing personalized, client-specific care. A recent study in the [Journal of General Internal Medicine](#) suggests that both clients and providers may overestimate just how personalized their current medical service really is.

- **Not as personal as you thought**

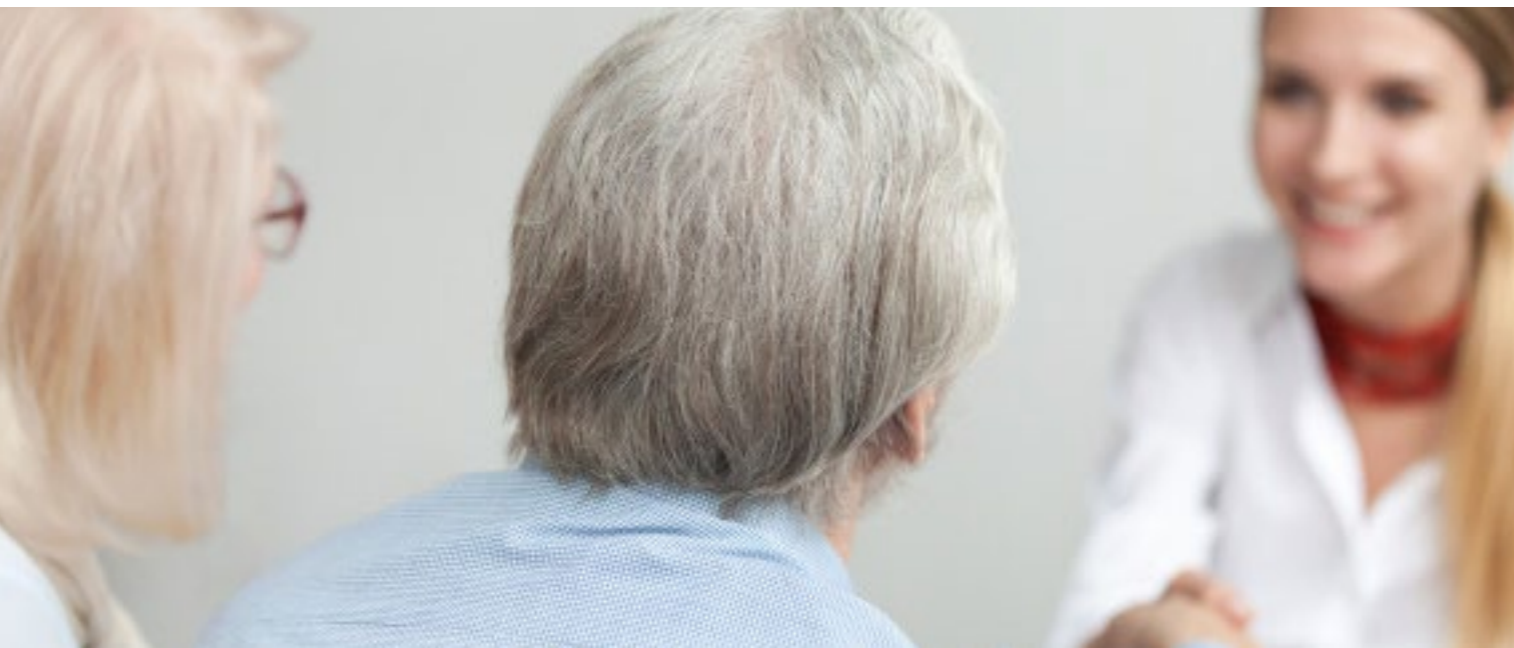
In traditional office visits, U.S. medical specialists [fail to even ask their clients what they've come in for 80%](#) of the time and give clients only about 11 seconds to explain their symptoms.

- **Spend more time with the clients**

Meanwhile, approximately **95%** of the average online consultation is spent on direct contact between the client and the provider.

- **Join the trend**

From that perspective, it is not surprising that **62%** of clients now say that there is no substantial decline in service between an in-office visit and a tele consultation.



# Direct effects on hearing care

HCPs attitudes towards using teleaudiology has changed. According to the [UK research study of HCPs](#) during COVID-19,

**30%** of HCP respondents said they had used teleaudiology prior to the COVID-19 restrictions

**98%** of HCPs had used teleaudiology at the time the survey was conducted in June 2020

**86%** of the HCPs said they would continue to do so even when restrictions are lifted

Reasons for prior non-use of teleaudiology were associated with clinical limitations/needs, available infrastructure and client preferences. Respondents believe teleaudiology will improve transport, convenience, flexibility, and scheduling, and that it will have little/no impact on satisfaction and quality of care, but that it will negatively impact personal interactions.

[Clients attitudes have also changed](#). During the COVID pandemic, the only way of seeing an HCP has been remote. An overwhelming amount of those who have tried remote services stated they were satisfied with the experience and already have or will consider scheduling another one in the future. Nearly two-thirds of those who have already had a remote appointment have had more than one.

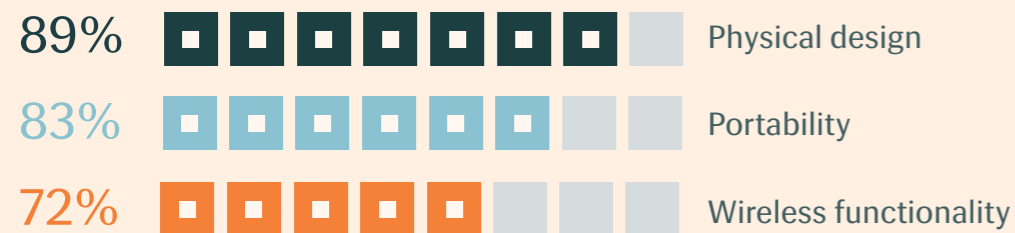
[The survey of U.S. clients about attitudes toward remote care](#) conducted by the Sykes group yields similar results. **97%** of respondents said they had used remote care services before or were at least open to using them in the future. At the same time, the survey made clear that the healthcare industry still has work to do when it comes to spreading the word of remote care: more than **60%** of respondents said they did not know anyone who had personally received remote care or if their hearing care provided this care.

Considering the overall willingness to give remote care options a chance, clients still expressed concerns about the accuracy of remote diagnoses, the vulnerability of sharing private medical information over the internet, and the awkwardness of not meeting in-person with a healthcare provider. But those concerns are at least partially offset by the reasons people are excited by the prospects of remote care, including quicker access, more flexible scheduling, and avoiding crowded offices and waiting rooms. Perhaps most noteworthy, nearly **60%** of respondents said the COVID-19 crisis has made them more likely to give remote care a try.



Auditdata's own research support those findings as well. A **2020 survey** on client needs and expectations found that the majority of respondents believe online hearing testing, online fittings, remote audiology services with full diagnostics, and hearing testing via mobile devices will all play major roles in their practices in the immediate future. Very few respondents believe that face-to-face consultations will return to being their primary method of client treatment after the pandemic. That thinking also goes for hardware, where clients place more value on devices that can be used easily in home visits and other remote services.

The changing attitudes towards remote care is reflected on demand for hardware. HCPs place more value on devices that can be used easily in home visits and other remote services. The most important consideration when purchasing new audiometric equipment is as follows:



Clearly, audiologists are looking for equipment that goes where they do as they move their focus beyond the clinic walls with reliable equipment to help their clients.

Non-related to the pandemic, it is worthwhile noting that the overall audience for hearing health treatments is expanding rapidly. Spending for clients over age 60 rose **50%** more in the past two decades than it did for clients under 30 years. Clients with more spending power and a greater than ever understanding of their own health needs are more likely to invest time and money in audiology treatments to keep young. At the same time, advanced analytics and artificial intelligence are driving a massive spike in the amount of client data available to healthcare professionals. As audiologists incorporate more and more technological solutions into their operations, the potential for targeted, proactive treatments continues to grow. Trends, which were in motion before the pandemic hit, were only amplified by the pandemic, and the health care industry needs to adapt accordingly.



# How to get your company ready for teleaudiology?

In the following section, we will go through the steps required in order to get ready for teleaudiology. First of all, start by spending time on segmentation of your existing clients. Secondly, decide on your reach by exploring the many opportunities teleaudiology will give you to expand your reach. Lastly, decide which services you want to offer online. Below, we will deep dive into each step of your remote journey.

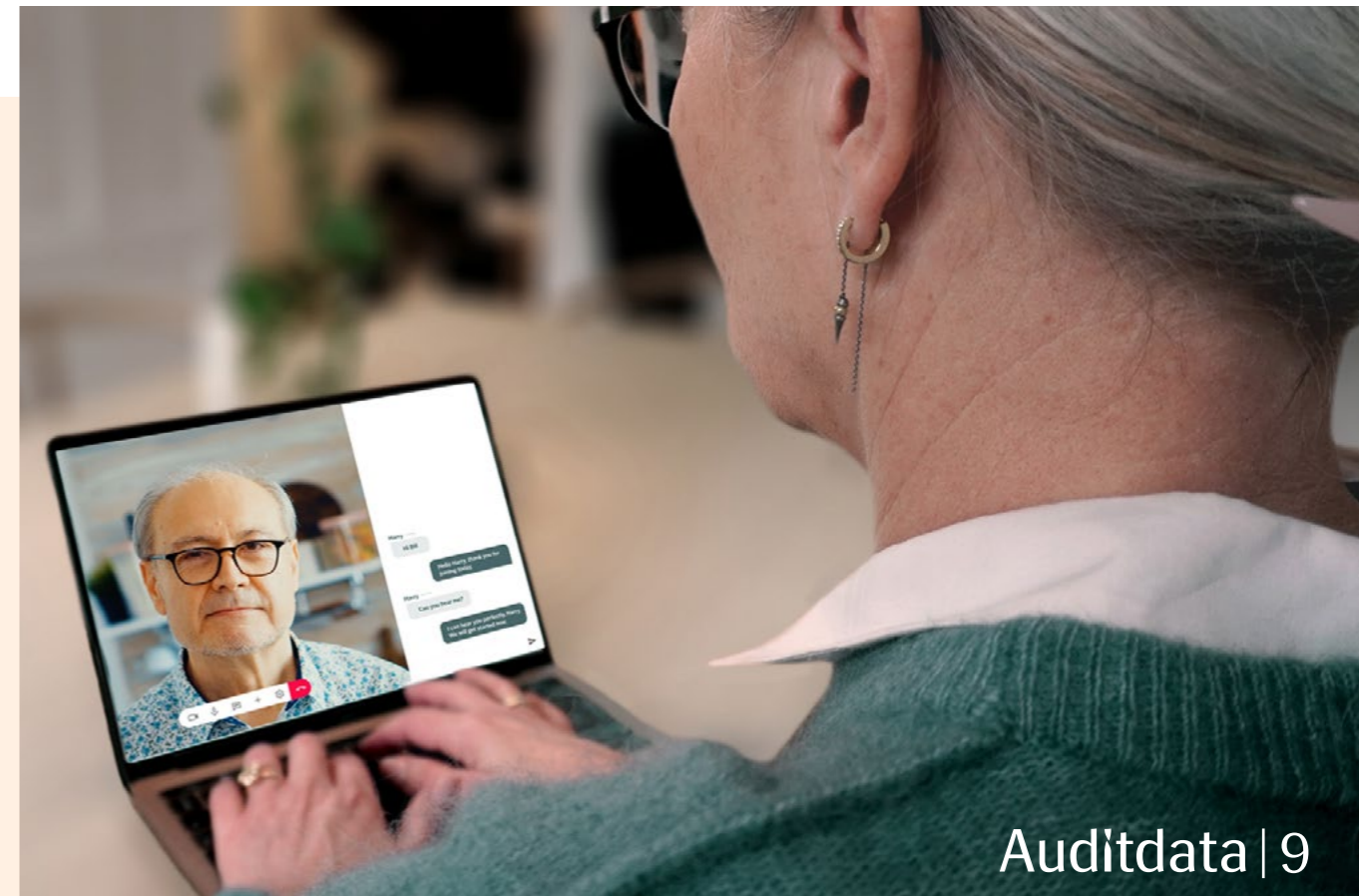
## ● Segmentation

When it comes to assessing your client base for teleaudiology readiness, many of the same factors that would be considered during your standard market research come into play. While some new clients may seek out your practice specifically looking for teleaudiology services, it is equally important for you to build a strategy for guiding your existing clients towards your teleaudiology services. As mentioned earlier in this guide, client attitudes have shifted toward embracing remote medical service, but many clients need assistance with assessing their options and navigating your offerings.

Being aware of your clients' level of technological abilities is crucial to building a functional teleaudiology platform. Keep in mind that the general client base for audiology services tends to be older and less-versed in the tech tools to manage their hearing health remotely. This requires a bit more patience and clear communication from you. Personalized client service that allows your audiologists to walk each client (and often spouse) through every step can not only help you evangelize for and increase engagement with your new services, but also build stronger relationships with the clients who are the lifeblood of your business.

[Auditdata Manage](#) is designed to help your practice provide advice and guidance to clients with a wide range of technological skills. Our [Tele-Health module](#) was developed early in the COVID-19 crisis to integrate easily with our existing practice management software.

You can simply enable the online video meeting option in the system and send an email link to both the client and the clinician - this allows you to seamlessly conduct virtual meetings. For any client with internet access and a computer or mobile device, this approach can be a game-changing opportunity to expand their access to a good service and advice from an HCP.



## ● Flexible resource planning

Consider the physical location of your practice and the range of in-person clients you currently reach. While teleaudiology can help you expand your reach, it may be wise to continue thinking locally. In a chain with multiple shops, centralizing remote care to one shop might be an option to cut costs. Or if you are very busy in one shop, remote care can help you create a more adaptable schedule using staff from multiple locations to assist each other.

Since most audiology practices will offer a hybrid model of both remote and in-person services, making it as easy as possible for clients to use both is beneficial to all parties.

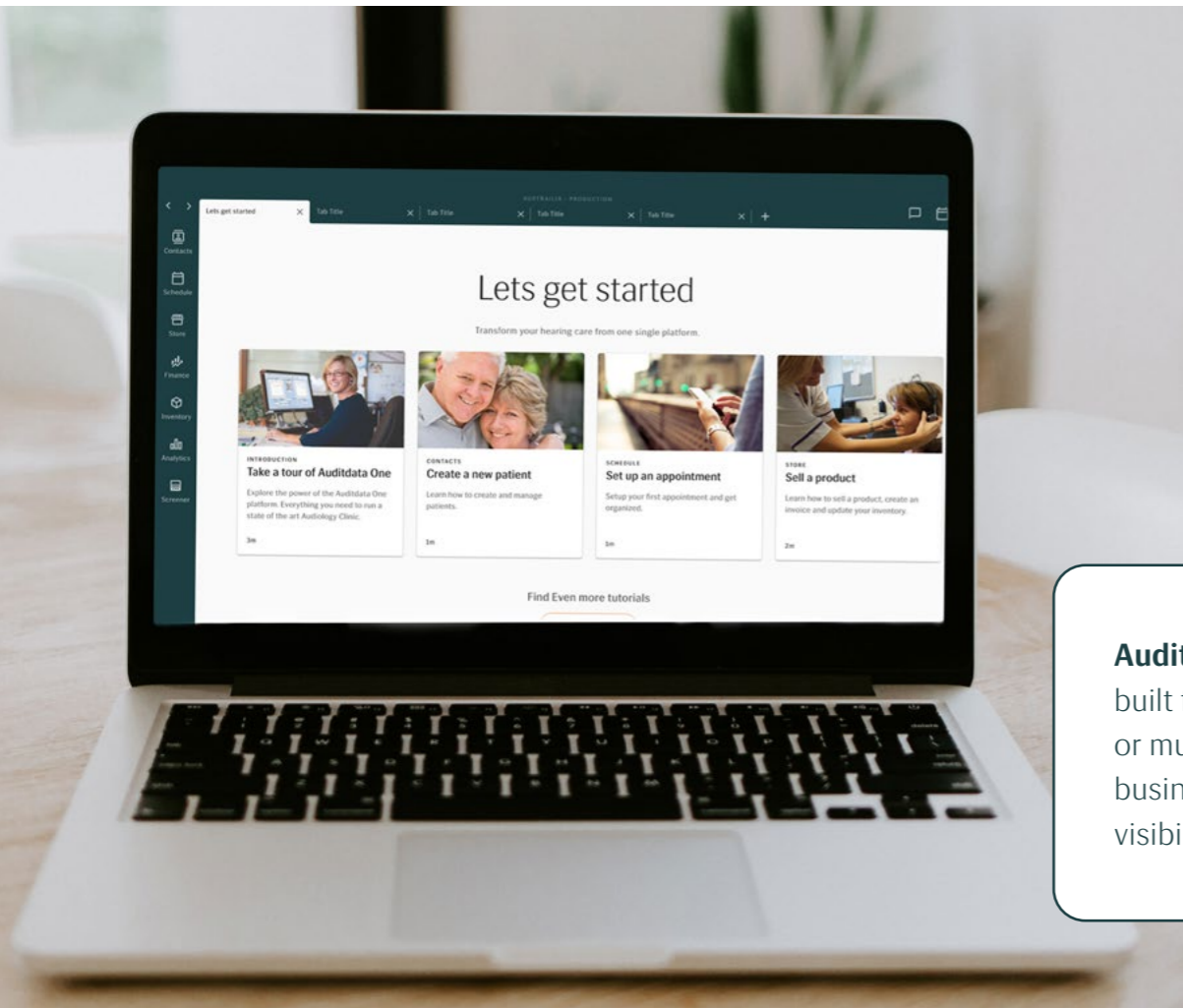
## ● Decide which services you want to offer remotely

Before making the move to a more remote-based hearing health experience, it is important to take stock of the internal and external aspects that will impact your efforts. Evaluating your customer base, the specifics of your business, will all play a vital role in building a successful teleaudiology practice.

Taking an audit of the in-person services your practice currently offers and the technology that supports those services gives you a strong starting place for assessing your teleaudiology needs. While offering a one-to-one replication of your physical tools and services may not be realistic, you should strive to provide remote equivalents to as many of your office-based functions as possible and potentially set-up easy instructions to at-home self assistance with e.g changing batteries or tubes.

The telehealth module built into Auditdata Manage helps you adjust your day-to-day functions to easily accommodate a focus on more remote client care. This module integrates with our practice management software, allowing you to seamlessly schedule online appointments, run video conferences with clients, and maintain records of both remote and in-person appointments. A wide range of marketing features makes it easier to reach out to potential telehealth clients and manage campaigns that capture the specific strengths of your practice.

**Auditdata Manage** is a data-driven cloud-based practice management system built for private hearing care providers. Whether you're operating a single outlet or multiple locations, it provides the best possible platform to manage your business operations, marketing and clinical tasks while offering you complete visibility of the data you need to make strategic decisions.



# Common approaches to teleaudiology

[An estimated 95% of the clients](#) in the average hearing health clinic could be treated via low- or no-touch solutions. The bulk of the services provided by most audiology practices involve fittings, routine examinations, and check-ups that can be handled remotely with relative ease.

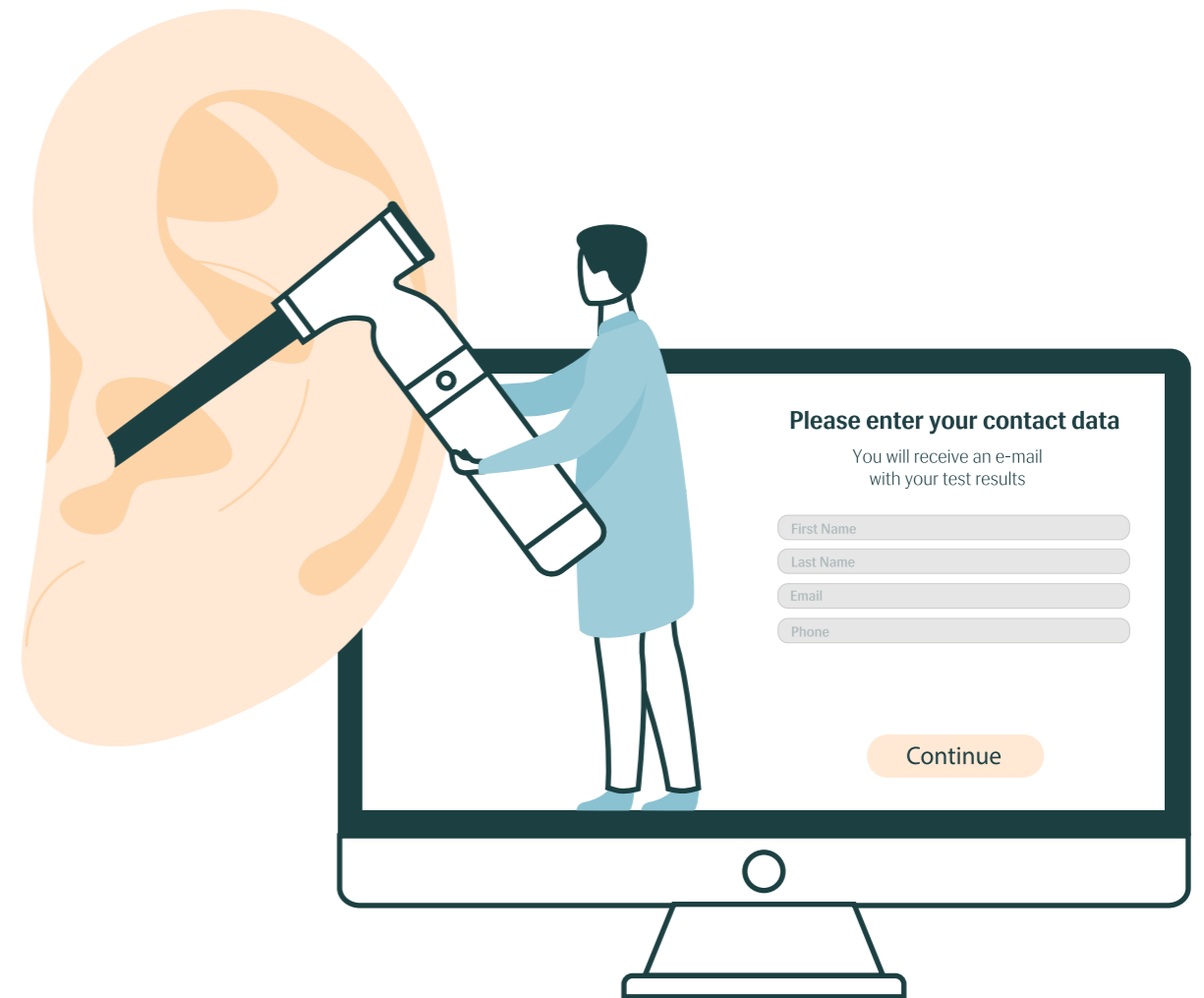
Let's take a closer look at several of the most common approaches to teleaudiology.

- [No-touch audiology services](#)
- [Low-touch audiology services](#)
- [Home visits](#)

## No-touch audiology services

No-touch audiology services are those that literally involve no physical contact between the client and the audiologist. This will often involve clients administering tests on themselves at home while an audiologist supervises over the telephone or a video call. Some services, which can be performed remotely, include:

- Self-administered, at-home tests, such as pure-tone audiometry using air conduction, speech-in-noise testing, and ear risk assessments
- Completing Client Ear Disease Risk Assessment questionnaires
- FDA-prescribed ear disease screening questionnaires
- Examinations based on photographs or smartphone video-otoscopes
- Follow-up and refitting of recently purchased hearing aids
- Guidance of usage, cleaning of hearing instruments



# Low-touch audiology services

A low-touch solution is often a hybrid model of in-person and remote audiology services. This may be the model that makes sense for most practices, as it provides a relatively safe way for audiologists to address a wide range of client needs.

A low-touch experience may begin with a remote consultation to get an understanding of potential issues and establish a connection between the client and practitioner. The next steps will likely entail a combination of self-testing at home, online communication, in-office testing, and drive-through or in-person consultation depending on your practice's capabilities. This approach is especially useful for new clients, those who need physical assistance with some tests, and those with less technological experience.

## Home visits

For clients whose needs cannot be met with teleaudiological solutions and who might also be uncomfortable with or at significant risk from in-office visits, home services may be a feasible solution. One-on-one appointments are not without risk for neither the client nor the audiologist, but it is generally a safer approach than visiting an office with multiple staffers and more in-and-out traffic.

In the coming months most of these clients will be vaccinated but home-visits might still be a suitable option due to restricted mobility or other.

Home visits require easily [portable audiology equipment](#), like the **Auditdata Measure Primus** series paired with **Auditdata Manage** clinic management software. By administering at-home hearing tests, measurements, and fittings while maintaining instant access to client records, scheduling programs, and diagnostic tools, audiologists can provide personalized, low-contact hearing health treatments that better serve the clients who need it most.



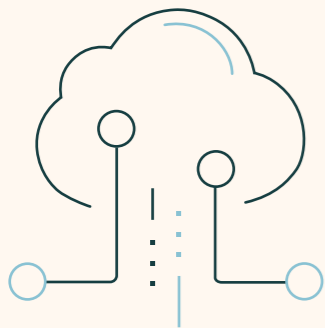
# Let us help you get started with teleaudiology

What does it take for an audiology clinic to transition to a more remote friendly approach? Let's look at the functions offered by Auditdata Manage for some illustrative examples.

## Integration with existing software

A teleaudiology solution can do more harm than good if it doesn't integrate and operate easily with your existing software. Auditdata Manage is a fully cloud-based system features an open application programming interface (API) that makes it easy to communicate and access vital information across platforms. This allows you to integrate new tools smoothly without overhauling your entire system and makes it easier to work with both partners and clients.

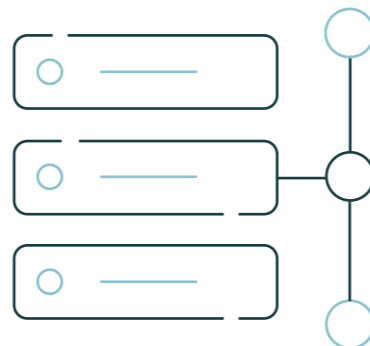
Our full Noah integration ensures that your team can access client records where and when you need them, including via our mobile app.



## Marketing and promotion

Marketing isn't always the strongest suit for audiology professionals, but in the digital age it's a necessity. Convincing a client base that tends to be older, less technologically adapt, and cautious about changing their medical routines to embrace a relatively new technology such as telemedicine requires a well-thought out communication plan. This should be aligned across your business. In shop windows, on your website, call center information and direct communication.

**Auditdata Manage** offers built-in tools which help you build a centralized database for contacting clients as per their individual needs. Our campaign management module provides an easy-to-use framework for communicating your message to the digital channels your clients use, from social media to email to text messaging. Our customer journey and client retention tools help you keep track of individual clients as they experience the HCP service that gives you the opportunity to further fine-tune and tailor your messaging to your clients.



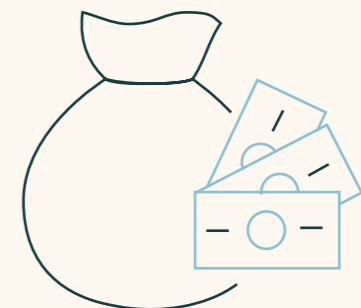
## Potential cost savings

Understanding how much your new teleaudiology measures will cost your practice is obviously a major consideration. While upgrading to a new system of communication and client care it is likely to be a considerable investment. But it will pay off in the long term.

Beyond the potential growth in clients met, offering more remote options can help your practice save money:

- 1) A client who can contact a hearing health professional with a single click is less likely to require a much more costly emergency appointment.
- 2) Assisting clients via phone or video calls also saves on expenses, like office supplies, wear and tear on equipment.
- 3) Office hours can be shortened or made more flexible, cutting down on labor costs and improving employees' work-life balance.
- 4) Flexible utilization of staff

The above may seem like small considerations at first glance, but those small expenses add up quickly.



# How to protect client data?

As with any healthcare industry endeavor, compliance with all relevant laws and regulations is crucial. Expanding your teleaudiology outreach brings new compliance considerations. It is of course important to make sure that anyone who administers examinations or medical advice via remote systems has the necessary training, licenses, and certifications to serve in that capacity.

The biggest area where teleaudiology represents a compliance challenge is data privacy. However, healthcare providers should already be familiar with the client protections laid out by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) in the U.S. and the General Data Privacy Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union.

Both of those regulations set strict, specific guidelines for how client data (which HIPAA refers to as “electronic Protected Health Information,” or ePHI) is collected, stored, and disseminated within an organization.



Teleaudiology by definition takes client information beyond the walls of an audiology office, which means providers need to take appropriate precautions to protect that information in an online space. To stay compliant, your practice needs to have a system in place that:

- Allows only authorized users to access ePHI
- Includes a secure communication system
- Allows monitoring of all communications involving ePHI to prevent breaches and violations

Noncompliance with certification and data protection regulations can lead to significant fines, sanctions, and even the loss or suspension of medical licenses. Auditdata Manage simplifies the data storage and analysis process across your organization, allowing your business to quickly access and manage all personally identifiable data and making it easier to ensure that sensitive information is being handled in accordance with all applicable laws.



Auditdata offers a wide range of certified hearing health systems and products that can make your transition to a more digitally focused audiology practice smooth and seamless. From our Auditdata Manage suite of practice management software to our state-of-the-art [Auditdata Measure](#) audiometry equipment to the innovative self-service tools of our [Auditdata Engage](#) line, we build solutions that keep you connected where it matters most. [Contact us](#) today to learn more about the many ways Auditdata can help you move your practice to the next level.

# Auditdata

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With Auditdata Manage you get a cloud-based practice management system built for hearing care providers. Create seamless client workflows, optimise operations, personalise your marketing efforts and clinical tasks.

To be able to make the correct management decisions and engage with your existing client database, Auditdata Manage offers you complete visibility of the data you need to run your business efficiently and professionally.

[Start your free trial](#)

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