Tips for marketing an optical dispensary

by Ellen Stodola Staff Writer
In ophthalmology, some may only think about the doctors and procedures that go into the practice. However, it is also important to consider the marketing of a practice, and this includes the optical dispensary side as well. Vision Associates Inc. is a consulting company that specializes in marketing optical dispensaries. Two principals of the company, Joseph A. Casorio and Kurt Behrle, both licensed opticians, along with Mary Walker, COE, director of operations, shared tips for marketing an optical dispensary. There are many factors for a practice to consider when marketing the optical dispensary, from layout to ways to gain awareness from patients and potential customers.

The look of the optical dispensary
One of the first aspects to consider is the layout and look of the optical dispensary. “I think that every practice administrator, manager, [and staff member] should walk into the practice from the patients’ side,” Ms. Walker said. It’s important to see what the patients see when they enter. In addition, each staff member should wear a nametag so that patients can identify those who work there as soon as they walk in.

Oftentimes there is a lot of clutter in the dispensary. Although it may seem that signs and materials are helpful, Ms. Walker said that if there is too much signage, it may be difficult to read and end up having little to no impact. The atmosphere has to be one in which people will want to purchase, and this includes a clean, tidy dispensary.

Mr. Behrle said that it’s important to ask the doctors to look at their dispensary and see if it is a place where they would want to buy.

Cross promotions
Mr. Casorio mentioned cross promotions of products as a way to market a practice. He said offering patients who are there for a specific product or service a discount on another product could attract more business. For example, he said practices could offer contact lens wearers or LASIK patients savings on non-prescription sunglasses. This would help facilitate crossover between the clinic and the optical dispensary side of the practice.

Utilizing website and email marketing
Mr. Behrle said it’s also important for an optical dispensary to have a good website, which helps to attract outside patients and keep current patients informed. Make sure that the optical section of the website is kept up. Oftentimes, practices focus on highlighting services like LASIK, cataract surgery, and other subspecialties and might have a weaker optical page.

Collecting patient emails is a simple and valuable way to market a practice. Email marketing can be used for a variety of purposes, including informing patients about new technologies, including them know of events that are going on, or sharing human interest stories about the doctors or other staff members. Updating patients monthly with email newsletters can help them stay informed and keep the name of the practice in front of them.

Ms. Walker said another simple marketing practice to keep patients happy and coming back is to send a thank you note after a purchase. This helps set optical dispensaries apart from larger chain stores, she said. It’s especially easy if the office is already collecting the email addresses of its patients.

Community events
Mr. Casorio, Mr. Behrle, and Ms. Walker stressed the importance of events that practices can participate in to promote their optical dispensaries. Events like trunk shows can help draw excitement and attention from the community and showcase a variety of products. These can be designed to cater to specific products, brands, or even groups of people. Other events, like open houses or information booths, can help display the services that are offered. These can combine information on a practice’s products and services with food and social activities.

The effectiveness of marketing strategies can vary depending on the size of the practice, and it’s important to remember that each practice is unique. Certain ideas can work for one practice and not for another, and everyone is going to react differently to how things are done. Mr. Casorio said there is no magic wand that will help propel a practice forward. “It’s about doing all the little things right,” he said. “That’s where you build your practice because not only do you create patient loyalty, but you create patient referrals.”

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