

The Three D's of Eyecare Practice Marketing

Posted: August 9, 2017

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About Author

As executive director of a prominent optical dispensary management firm, I work with leading eyecare practices nationwide to convert eye patients into eyewear customers.

Officially, my role is one of divide and conquer: busy ophthalmologists are trusting me to manage an often overlooked subset of their business — their optical dispensary — and increase its efficiencies and profits (all while the practice retains ultimate control, of course).

Unofficially, however, my role over the years has become more far-ranging. When you show an inundated ophthalmologist, or a buried-in-paperwork practice manager, that the stale stack of frames adjacent their waiting rooms can be transformed into an effective customer engagement center and significant secondary profit stream, their first reaction is typically a blend of surprise and appreciation.

Their second reaction is “what other advice do you have that can increase business?” It’s a reasonable question to ask someone who just turned your optical orphan into Cinderella. Over the years, I’ve come to realize that many of my recommendations, at that point in the relationship, revolve around an alliterative trio.

To attract and hold new customers — and to encourage them to utilize the full scope of your services — eyecare practices must **Digitalize, Design and Diversify**.



Digitalize

First impressions count. While “curb appeal” and the look of your practice is incredibly important, in today’s world the very first contact your customer is likely to have with your practice will be on the Internet. Which means your “web appeal” is exceedingly important. Your website, and any social media presence you have — Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter — must be informative, consistent, compelling, and reflective of who you truly are.

Does your website clearly state what you do, or is it cluttered with unimportant information? Is it responsive (meaning, is it effective and easy to navigate on smartphones and tablets)? Does your site display all the services you offer, including information about the wide selection of eyewear available in your dispensary?

What about “patient-centricity”? Does your site enable potential customers to easily request an appointment? To discover what insurance providers you work with? Some patients also seek more in-depth information about your doctors and staff — and may appreciate photos and background information regarding staff training and prior employment.

You also want your site to be pleasing to the eye in terms of color, design and flow. Many viewers appreciate inclusion of color photos and videos that help tell your story, and educate them a bit about eye conditions. Above all else, your potential patients are looking for authenticity and assurance — they want to know your practice is of the highest quality, and that your doctors and staff can be fully trusted.

Design

That’s the non-brick-and-mortar part of your marketing. We then come to the curb appeal of your actual office space. The look, feel, and sound of your office speak volumes about your practice — both literally from the curb (before you walk in the door), and inside the building.

Which brings us to **design**. Your office design tells your patients who you are, how you practice and what you believe. Take a good look at your office from a patient-centric point of view. What does the design of both your indoor and outdoor space say from the moment he or she pulls into the parking lot?

Is the entrance clearly marked and easy to find? Does the door open smoothly, or do your patients have to struggle with it? How does the area around the door look? Even if you don’t own the building, you have some control over the appearance of its entrance and need to make the maintenance crew aware of any problems.

What’s the first thing your patients see when they enter the building? Is there a directory and is your suite clearly labeled? Make sure your building directory clearly shows your practice name, each provider’s name, and your suite number. Many patients know their doctor’s name, but not the name of the practice.

The next thing to consider is what your patients see when they first walk in the office door. Is the front desk clearly visible? Is there a glass window that must be opened before the patient is greeted? Is there a person seated at the desk, or just a sign-in sheet with no visible human being? Many patients are uncertain and a bit nervous when they’re new, and feel a sense of relief and gratitude when a friendly staff member welcomes them.

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What is the waiting room experience like? Is seating plentiful and comfortable? Are your magazines current, in good shape, and appropriate for different demographic groups? Is the furniture clean and in good repair? What about the carpets? Are the walls hung with pleasant photography or artwork? What about signage? You don't want the first visible sign to be a co-pay notice, or one about needing to pay if an appointment isn't cancelled in time. That may be your policy, but it's not the way you want

to greet a patient.

Now have a "listen." Is the office noisy? Is there pleasant music or perhaps a television? If you utilize a looped video, is the video so short that patients will see and hear the same information over and over again?

And of course, there's my bread and butter: the optical dispensary. Is it inviting and attractive? Your dispensary is a vital marketing tool and can be an important revenue generator, if managed correctly. Does your optical shop look like a great place to shop? Is it adequately staffed? If opticians are in a back lab area and not visible up front, patients can be deterred, so it's important to make sure an employee is visible and available to help at all times.

Diversity

I could have made the third 'd' dispensary but, for emphasis, I'd rather give that honor to its most important aspect: the **diversity** of eyewear. Does your dispensary have not only the right quantity of frames displayed, but also a diverse variety that is appropriate for your clientele?

As experts in managing and running successful dispensaries, I strongly emphasizes the importance of displaying a frame selection that reflects your patient demographics. It is vitally critical for you to have variety in both styles and price points. It's also extremely important for your lenses to be clean, and your frames straight with tightened screws. Even "demo" frames should be bench-aligned and in proper shape.

Here are some more questions to consider. Is your eyewear display pleasing to the... well... eye? Is the signage bright and easy to read? Are the frames displayed on your posters in stock? Is it easy and conducive to try glasses on at the display desk? Can you sit down and move around without knocking over a mirror or counter cards? This patient area should be neat, tidy and not overcrowded. Lens educational materials are appropriate, but having too many can be confusing. In the best-case scenario, the optician should hand-deliver a pamphlet to the patient, along with a personalized explanation.

When all is said and done, the entire patient journey — from searching online for information about your practice, to the experience of signing in, sitting in the waiting room, being examined, choosing new glasses and finally, checking out — should be a positive one that keeps patients coming back for years to come.

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