

Retention rate

Goal: Convert patients to customers

How to increase revenue derived from patient base that is already in your practice

Vision Voice

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It costs five times more to attract new customers than to market to current patients. That being said, in a tight economy, we have all learned to make the most from the opportunities in front of us.

This article is designed to provide ideas and sales strategies to maximize opportunities to grow your business organically, or from the inside out. With competitive pricing today, it is suicide to jump into the price wars game or raise prices just to increase revenue. Patients want value. Escalating fees to increase revenue will sabotage the goal of retaining loyal patients.

At some point we reach price saturation and our patients will look elsewhere. We can maintain loyal patients by creating uniqueness in how we provide products and services in such a manner that each patient understands the value and the importance of the purchase. Let's explore other practical and easy-to-implement strategies to maximize opportunities within our current patient base.

The patient as a person

Converting patients to customers simply means that a person who walks into your practice is just that, a person; he or she needs to be treated as such. When that person enters the exam room, he or she tran-

Take-Home Message

Your patient base is a valuable asset and one that must be managed carefully. Although it is unlikely you'll retain all of your customers, you still should strive for a retention rate of 100%. It is much more cost effective to retain a customer than to obtain a new customer.

sitions into a patient and expects medical advice and the expert's recommendations. That's the doctor's responsibility.

The next critical step is the transition of that patient to a customer who makes an eyewear purchase from you. Following are three steps for converting patients into customers.

1 Benchmark and establish goals. Where are you now? Where do you think you need to be? Is it realistic?

Know your numbers as they relate to capture and revenue per patient. Use this information to access what opportunities exist to generate additional revenue per patient and to increase practice growth.

Make sure your goals are clearly stated and focused. Whatever you determine the initiative to be, the goal must be measurable and tracked.

Another important piece to achieving the stated goals would be to have some type of reward system. Brainstorm how to create a reward/incentive system. Keep in mind that external competition is productive and internal competition can be destructive. We recommend a reward structure that is team driven. Connect each staff member to the bottom line. You can also consider non-monetary rewards, such as time off, recognition, movie tickets, or gift certificates.

2 Realize that it all starts in the chair. The doctor needs to know that recommending eyewear solutions through premium products and multiple pairs is not selling. It's his or her professional responsibility to assure the patient's quality of vision is achieved. He or she can only control that through discussing and prescribing these options with each patient.

The doctor needs to present and docu-

ment recommendations to each patient. The doctor also needs to escort each patient to the dispensary, repeat his or her recommendations, and endorse the capability of the dispenser. If the doctor can keep that prescription in-house, he or she can maintain control over the quality of the products and services the patient receives.

3 Know the role of the dispenser. Provide professional assistance and be a guide by the patient's side. Present options and provide solutions and choices.

It's important for the dispenser to maintain control of the dispensing process. The most important first two steps are the greeting and establishing expertise. Many times patients are left to wander around and select their own eyewear. It is critical to the success of the practice and the patient satisfaction that the optician guides patients through this process.

Phrases such as, "Let me know when you find what you want," or "If you see anything you like, pull it out and come find me," give patients a perception that there is no skill or knowledge necessary in selecting eyewear and they may as well buy them anywhere (think online?).

It is the dispenser's professional responsibility to assess each of the patient's eyewear needs through effective questioning and a comprehensive needs assessment. Dispensers should take control of the eyewear selection process and must accurately pull through the doctor's recommendations by presenting appropriate product solutions using understandable feature and benefit dialogue. **OT**

author info



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