



# HOW TO EVALUATE YOUR PATIENTS' PERCEPTION OF YOUR PRACTICE

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**F**irst impressions are hard to change. It's been said that it only takes seven seconds to make a first impression in a face-to-face encounter and just two-tenths of a second for your website's visitor to form an opinion of your brand. If a prospect's first impression of your vision practice isn't favorable, chances are you'll lose that prospect forever.

The truth is that prospects begin to form a perception of your practice long before their first visit to your office. The average patient takes 12 to 24 months from a first interest in an elective procedure until s/he actually decides to have surgery. That said, you must treat every prospect and patient interaction as if it's the very first impression you're making. And this has to be accomplished in face-to-face encounters, in your physical space, and in the virtual arena.

When you are entrenched in your practice day-in and day-out, it's easy to become wrapped up in your own "inside

reality" and lose sight of your "outside perception." A good way to keep these two things in balance is by enlisting the support of an impartial "secret shopper" to perform internal and external audits to analyze every touch point you have with prospects as well as patients. This means "shopping" your practice online, on the phone, and in person to get the full patient perception.

You should audit from the very first contact with your practice (usually the online contact) through the surgery process and one year following a procedure.

## ONLINE PRESENCE

Your website is one of the most important marketing tools for your practice. If you have only two-tenths of a second to capture a visitor's attention, does your website do the trick? Your site must look professional but also have easy navigation and effective calls-to-action. It must also make you stand out from the dozens of other practices in your area.

Your site must also be optimized for mobile devices. This means that when a person pulls up your site on a smartphone, the site will be easy-to-read and concise while still differentiating you from the competition.

Your online presence also extends to social media and review sites. Your prospects have the power to research everything they can about your practice online. If they find unfavorable reviews, or nothing about your practice at all, you're missing out on a huge marketing opportunity. The more you ask your happy patients to post their experiences online, the better chance you'll have at attracting more patients.

## EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR OFFICE

Look at what your exterior and interior office space and signage reflect to outsiders. Do you appear trendy, upscale, sloppy, relaxing, dull, etc.? To get a good idea of the impression you're giving, stop and use your senses:

- **Sight:** What do people see when they come to your office? Is your office cluttered and outdated or clean and tidy? Does it feel like a medical office or does it have more of a spa feel?
- **Smell:** Are there any offensive smells emanating from your break room or in the surrounding area outside your office?
- **Touch:** Do you offer clean, current magazines, newspapers, or tablets to use while patients wait for their appointment?
- **Hear:** What do people hear inside the office...soothing music, rap music, silence, complaining, gossip, etc.?
- **Taste:** Do you offer refreshments in the waiting area?

Even seemingly small changes will go a long way.

## STAFF AND DOCTORS

The appearance and demeanor of the office staff, assistants, and doctors will have a huge impact on the patient experience.

- The entire staff should dress professionally; employees who show up with a sloppy, been-out-all-night look will not instill confidence in your surgical abilities.
- Patients should not hear gossip or office politics, only professional discussions.
- Doctors and other staff members should not appear frazzled and stressed out – even if that is what they are feeling.
- Doctors should speak to patients in layman's terms, leaving technical medical jargon for internal staff discussions.
- All staff should give patients the impression that they are the ONLY ones who matter when you are with them. Never make patients feel rushed – even if you are behind schedule.

# You don't get a second chance to make a first impression.

## PATIENT FLOW

Analyze the level of service you provide during free screenings or consultations. If there are areas where new patient traffic is getting blocked, determine ways to improve the process so consults and surgeries can be increased.

## BILLING

Nothing is worse than being blindsided by a surgery bill for more than what you thought your procedure was going to cost. Ensure that every patient is told up front about the entire cost of the procedure and make sure that exclusions are explicitly spelled out.

## COMMUNICATIONS

If it takes a prospect up to two years to decide to have surgery, it's simply not enough to contact that prospect only once and expect your interaction to be so spectacular that the prospect immediately schedules a procedure. It's important to have a follow-up protocol in place to consistently communicate with prospects, without appearing too pushy or aggressive, to keep your practice top-of-mind and help them better understand their treatment options. Your practice will be perceived as the expert and the obvious choice when they are ready to schedule an appointment.

## ADVERTISING

Both online (pay-per-click) and traditional advertising (print, radio, television, billboards, etc.) can position your practice as the right choice... if you are truly differentiating your practice from the competition. The average person is bombarded with

5,000 marketing messages each day, so what you are paying to advertise needs to break through the clutter.

## CALL CENTERS

Many prospects research their vision options during "off hours." If your practice does not have a system in place, such as a call center to facilitate inquiries, you may be viewed as less professional and lose leads to your competition who answers calls 24/7. Make sure that the call center you choose has a specific script to follow and employs professional individuals.

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The more your practice is involved in community activities, the more you will be viewed as an active, caring member of the community. You can start by sponsoring charity events, participating in marathons, or having a booth at sporting events. The options are limitless.

The bottom line: You don't get a second chance to make a first impression...but sometimes you won't even know exactly when you are making that first impression. Set your practice up for success by making sure you're presenting your staff, your office, and your online presence in the very best way possible. **AE**



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