

The Power of Reinvention

Examining the “Apple” of your eye care practice.

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As a college student in the early 1980s, I fondly recall my time with Lisa, the hot new “personal computer” that resided in the engineering lab at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. It came from a company called Apple Computer, Inc. (Cupertino, CA), and by the time I graduated, I saw students toting their new Apple Macs around campus.

REINVENTION

Twenty-five years later, we know how the PC story played out. Microsoft Corp. (Redmond, WA) dominated the landscape, and the cool, user-friendly Apple computers were left with a paltry 5% share of the market. In a world full of Windows (Microsoft Corp.), Apple's very survival was threatened. Today, however, Apple is a very different company. One new product, the iPod, has revolutionized how we listen to music as well as how we acquire it: Apple's iTunes Web site sold more than one billion (with a “b”) songs via downloads in 2006. In fact, demand was so high on the day after Christmas that the site crashed, frustrating thousands of new iPod owners. Having reinvented itself, Apple has now officially dropped the word *computer* from its corporate identity and is known as Apple Inc.

Consider: Rather than keep your current practice in a rut, you should think about reinventing it. If you were starting over in ophthalmology today, what would your practice look like? What services would you focus on? What type of patients would you seek to attract?

THE BUYING EXPERIENCE

Apple has changed not only *what* it sells but *how* it sells. Have you ever been to an Apple retail store? The company has created an inviting environment that is cleverly designed and themed to reflect its corporate identity. Well-spaced tables with different models of iPods and iMacs invite you to come in and play. Friendly staff are available and easily identifiable by their T-shirt uniforms with a small Apple logo on the sleeve. These stores also have a counter called a *genius bar* staffed by techie gurus (the geniuses) who will help solve whatever technical issue you are having, free of charge. These stores do more educating than selling, a concept that is a far cry from most electronics retailers. I rarely go shopping, but,

if I see an Apple store, I eagerly take a few minutes to go in and browse. It is a fun experience, and I always learn something new about how to better enjoy my video iPod.

Consider: Eye care in general, and refractive procedures specifically, have a high educational requirement in order for patients to understand the what, why, and how of your services and their benefits. How can you alter the educational process to make it more inviting and fun? How can you create a great buying experience? Always remember, your patients are also your *customers*.

HALO EFFECT

Apple didn't abandon selling computers to focus on music players. The company has kept innovating the Mac and its processing capability, and the effort is paying off. Apple's financial reports demonstrate that the iPod's success is generating much higher sales of Macs.¹ Its computer sales for the most recent quarter were 35% higher than for the same period a year ago—tremendous growth for a product that is more expensive (with higher profit margins) than that of the other dominant players that run on Windows operating systems. This halo effect is a great example of how a company can breathe new life into an old product line.

Consider: You may not want or be able to abandon your core services. How could it ultimately grow if you focused on new opportunities in refractive surgery?

NO STOPPING AHEAD

Apple has indeed become a great iconic brand in our society. CEO Steven Jobs announced last month two new products, iPhone and iTV. The company is not resting on its current success but continues to innovate and reinvent itself and what it does ... and so should each of you! ■

Shareef Mahdavi's columns on refractive marketing and his e-newsletter on improving the customer experience are available at www.SM2consulting.com. Mr. Mahdavi is a stockholder in Apple Inc., but he holds no direct financial interest in any of its products.

1. Graham J. Proof arrives that Mac sales profit from iPod. *USA Today* [online]. October 19, 2006. Available at: http://www.usatoday.com/money/companies/earnings/2006-10-18-apple_x.htm?csp=34. Accessed January 15, 2007.