

Premium Refractive Surgery:

DEAD OR ALIVE?

Refractive surgeons should examine what business they are in.

BY SHAREEF MAHDAVI

What does it mean to be a premium refractive surgeon? This is a question surgeons should be asking themselves frequently, especially as the market's offering shifts from a one-product category (LASIK) to multiple products that allow surgeons to better customize the treatment to each refractive candidate.

I am often asked, "Is LASIK a product or a service?" This question is interesting, especially as it pertains to the concept of premium refractive surgery. After researching and writing about the marketing of refractive surgery for over a decade, I have come to a new conclusion: it's neither a product nor a service but is more aptly described as a consumer "experience."

As noted in their book *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage*,¹ B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore show how the US economy has shifted dramatically as consumers willingly pay more for services than for goods. Time-starved consumers gladly pay for lawn care services (rather than cut the lawn themselves), purchase birthday cakes from the bakery (rather than bake them themselves), and call The Geek Squad for in-home computer repair. The service provided typically costs much more than the good. Consumers are now placing more value on experiences than services. One example cited in the book is the continued success of Bass Pro Shops

for outdoor adventure equipment. Such experiences engage customers personally and emotionally, and these offerings help companies achieve greater economic value by commanding premium prices.

THE VALUE OF REFRACTIVE SURGERY

Refractive surgery offers far greater value to the patient than most of us realize. Unfortunately, offering a poor level of service and/or treating LASIK as a packaged good commoditizes that value and serves to reduce the procedure's market prices. Conversely, high levels of service that focus on making the overall experience (not just the outcome) the best it can possibly be are a large part of the premium recipe.

LEARNING FROM OTHERS

This month's cover series explores what premium refractive surgery looks like in a handful of practices from around the country. *Cataract & Refractive Surgery Today* asked seven surgeons to offer their perspectives on how their practices achieve, maintain, and differentiate a position as a premium provider.

You will note that these surgeons discuss the nonsurgical aspects of a refractive practice that help them move toward a highly valued offering and away from commoditization. These refractive surgeons want to make certain that what the patient sees, hears, and feels is consistent with the high-end image the practice wants to portray. The themes of planning,

measuring, experimenting, differentiating, training, creating staff loyalty, and developing core values are all evident in the following pages.

Rather than become paralyzed by low-cost providers entering the market, readers can take this opportunity to better understand what their colleagues already know: premium refractive surgery is indeed alive and well! High economic value can be achieved, yet the process of doing so is far from automatic. As refractive technology continues to evolve, surgeons will likewise have increasing opportunities to make these innovations work in their favor and in their patients. The follow-up question to this cover series is a good one: What business am I in? It forces refractive surgeons to think about what it is that they are truly offering their patients: Commodity? Good? Service? Experience? I hope the following pages will lead you to believe in refractive surgery's strength as a highly valued premium offering in the market. ■

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1. Gilmore J. and Pine BJ 2nd. *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press; 1999.