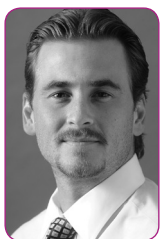


MARKETING YOUR PRACTICE ACROSS MULTIPLE GENERATIONS

With all eyes on the millennials, your social media strategy has to be sharp.

BY JEREMY KIEVAL, MD



Firmly established in our community for close to 50 years, my colleagues' and my practice has an excellent reputation and a loyal following that began when the baby boomer generation was in its youth. Many of our patients first came to our office as children and have stayed with us. However, an evaluation of our ophthalmologic practice brought us to the realization that, if we wanted another 50 years, we would need to reach out and cultivate a younger patient base. To accomplish this, we implemented a new multifaceted marketing strategy designed to connect us to the up-and-coming generation while still maintaining the quality and services our long-time patients expect. Our efforts are proving effective, and we are reaping the benefits of a growing practice.

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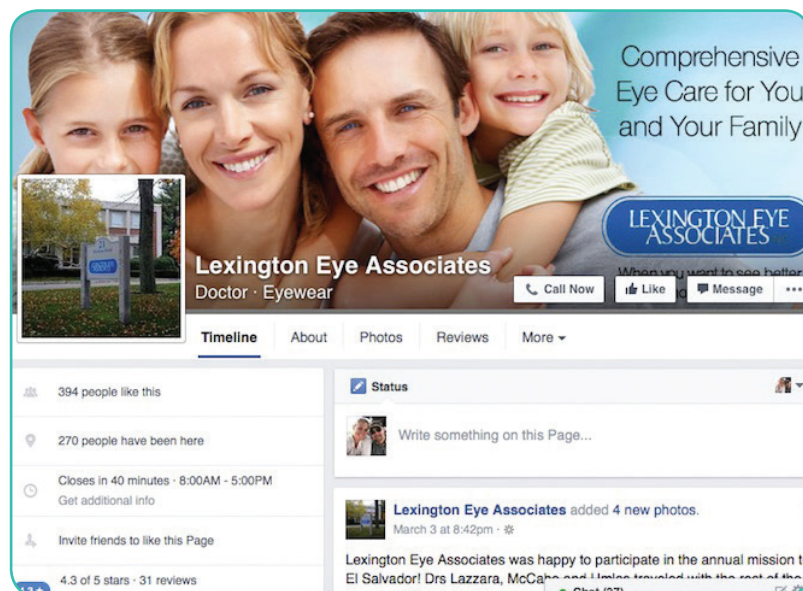
DEFINING A GENERATION

First, we sought to understand the demographics and collective traits and habits of our potential patients. We then developed a plan to target the largest demographic market while amping up our efforts to retain our core baby boomer demographic.

Historically the most influential generation of the modern era, the baby boomers are exiting the workforce and declining in number and spending power. Boomers range in age from 52 to 70 years old and are predictably brand and establishment loyal. It has been well documented that boomers tend to respond to personal referrals and traditional marketing methods.

Sandwiched between the two larger—and louder—generations, generation X (gen Xers) grew up as technology was emerging. The gen Xer is generally considered to be between the ages of 36 and 51 years old and is apt to respond to strategies that appeal to both the boomer and millennial generations; therefore, we focused our marketing efforts on those two groups.

All marketing eyes are currently upon the millennial



generation, which includes individuals who came into adulthood near the turn of the 21st century (currently 19-35 years old). Their influence has grown markedly, and they both outnumber and outspend gen Xers and the once-dominant baby boomers. Millennials are rarely seen without an electronic device in hand; access to instant information on the Internet is a necessity, not a luxury. This generation is wholly dependent upon connectivity in every aspect of their socially networked lives. Collectively speaking, millennials tend to respond to social network marketing and rely on the recommendations of friends and independent, online research.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Reaching the millennial generation necessitated that we create an online presence and market through various social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter. Initially, we contracted with website designers and companies that focused on search engine optimization and



social media marketing. Once we were up and running, we created an internal committee within the practice consisting of administrators, office staff, and physicians to provide guidance. We engaged the services of companies like Constant Contact for email marketing and created a blog to educate our public on topics of common concern across all ages, such as “when should your child’s eyes be examined,” or “advances in cataract surgery technology,” which also serve to cross-market our services.

Of particular concern when entering the realm of social media is how to control negative content posted by Internet trolls (people who deliberately set out to provoke emotion by posting inflammatory comments simply for the sake of sparking arguments or to harass) or the occasional unhappy client. Fortunately, the most common social media platforms, such as Facebook, have various security settings and controls allowing us to monitor and approve comments before they are posted. However, there is another category of social media that is much more difficult to regulate. It includes “rating” sites such as Yelp, HealthGrades, vitals.com, and WebMD. Although no setup or maintenance is necessary to maintain these sites, it behooves you to know what your brand and image look like to your public and to develop a policy to respond to negative comments.

Effective marketing on social media requires interaction with your audience through various giveaways, contests, and questions crafted to encourage people to “like” your business on Facebook, tweet, or Instagram their

experience. Getting your audience involved equates to free marketing, and if done right, millennials practically do all the marketing for you in those venues.

WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT

Your website is your voice; this is the place to direct all of your social media and blog traffic. Millennials generally seek their information almost exclusively online and learn through multisensory platforms; therefore, creating an engaging, educational website is a top priority to speak to this demographic. You want to present your practice and brand in the best light possible, remembering that the majority of individuals across all demographics now access websites from a mobile device.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Developing a presence in the community contributes to brand familiarity and is an effective vehicle by which to establish and maintain trust among baby boomers and gen Xers. Drawn to quiet, classroom-style learning, boomers are particularly interested in seminars addressing eye health and services for the aging population (cataract surgery, premium IOL options, and presbyopic correction). They enjoy face-to-face contact such as speaking to representatives at hospital-based health fairs or listening to speakers at National Council on Aging or similar organizational events. Although gen Xers do participate in these forums, we are more likely to reach the middle-aged population by sponsoring events such as local concerts and 5K fun runs.



AT A GLANCE

- The author implemented a multifaceted marketing strategy designed to connect his practice to the up-and-coming generation while still maintaining the quality and services his long-time patients expect.
- Reaching the millennial generation necessitated that the practice create an online presence and market through various social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter.
- A personal touch has different meaning to different generations. The practice's in-house counselors adapt and cater to the needs of patients at every stage of life.

OFFICE AESTHETICS

Marketing to a new demographic was just the first step. Once patients walk through our doors, we wanted (and needed) to exceed their expectations of a medical practice. Office aesthetics speak to all groups, and we wanted our patients to have an incredible experience that could bring them back to us for all of their eye health needs. We completely renovated our offices—located in an affluent suburban area—to present a classy, elegant atmosphere for health care delivery.

Fulfilling all eye care and eye health needs in one stop appeals to multiple generations. We added a full-service optical shop and cross-market our out-of-pocket services such as cosmetic procedures, oculoplastics, premium IOLs, and refractive surgery.

THE PERSONAL TOUCH

A personal touch has different meaning to different generations. Our in-house counselors adapt and cater to the needs of our patients at every stage of life. For millennials, they serve as a liaison between digital media and the office. Counselors work with the gen Xers to educate them, answer questions about our cosmetic procedures, and streamline the process of booking surgeries. On the boomer side, the counselor is a critical piece. Generally, this population is not going to do research like the younger generations. Rather, they will seek advice and solicit recommendations from people in the field; people they can put a face to, like our counselors.

PREMIUM TECHNOLOGY

Most patients understand technology in terms of what you are capable of doing and the essence of your office setup. Cataract patients are drawn to offices that provide

“Digital imaging, electronic records, and general connectivity are particularly impressive to the younger generation.”

femtosecond laser cataract surgery and enhanced refractive outcomes, even if they ultimately do not elect those procedures. I have always been a fan of multifocal IOLs, and the new Tecnis low-add multifocals (Abbott Medical Optics) have doubled my enthusiasm. We continue to investigate and incorporate other advances, including corneal inlays for presbyopia, DropLess cataract surgery (Imprimis Pharmaceuticals), and dry eye procedures such as LipiFlow (TearScience). It is essential to always be upgrading your offerings. Digital imaging, electronic records, and general connectivity are particularly impressive to the younger generation, and we show off our technical capability with appealing aesthetics such as well-designed LASIK suites and big, comfortable chairs in an elegant waiting room.

Our mature patients take advantage of educational technology. Patients can view animations (Echo; Eyemaginations) in our office on a tablet device; whereas the independent researcher can access this material from our website at his or her leisure. We use our seminars to target patients who can benefit from technological advances in cataract surgery.

WRAP IT UP

Reaching and retaining a multigenerational patient base is paramount to sustain longevity in the marketplace. Our practices must adapt and evolve to meet the needs and expectations of the tech-savvy millennial generation while maintaining the quality and customer service demanded by the boomers. We can accomplish this by expanding our marketing efforts online to include social media and creating brand recognition in our community. We will keep our patients by exceeding their expectations with comfortable, elegant office facilities, personal service, and the offering of products featuring the latest technological developments. ■

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