

Establishing Your Brand

Highlighting the use of unique technology differentiates your practice from the pack.

BY JARED R. YOUNGER, MD, MPH

When patients are diagnosed with a cataract and given a list of several nearby ophthalmologists, whom do they choose? When it comes to vision, patients want to feel confident in their surgeon and achieve great outcomes. With so many options, selecting a new surgeon can be difficult. Your challenge is to separate yourself from the others and to emphasize the value of what you have to offer by branding your practice.

Each practice is as individual and distinct as the doctors and staff that compose it. The goal is to identify and share those great things with patients through branding. Branding, per se, does not tie you to a single product or one manufacturer's line of equipment, for example. Patients want and deserve options, and practices succeed when they offer something of value such as new surgical technology, state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment, or expertise with a particular eye condition. Branding your practice may sound like a daunting, costly task, but the process is easier than you might think. Plus, the payoff can be well worth the time invested. With the majority of cataract surgery being performed still entailing standard monofocal surgery,¹ there is plenty of room for you to distinguish your practice and create value for patients by incorporating premium lenses and surgery.

MAKE TECHNOLOGY WORK FOR YOU

Has your practice invested in state-of-the-art equipment? Millions of dollars have gone into the research, development, and testing of these machines. Your purchasing decision was made after due diligence to verify the benefits of the device, adding value for patients. This technology might offer precisely placed incisions, easier

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removal of the cataract, shorter procedural times, and/or better outcomes. Potential patients should hear about the advantages of this technology. Because high-quality technology makes a good surgeon even better, your practice should highlight new acquisitions and offerings for potential patients.

Patients today have many options for surgery. By frankly explaining the benefits and limitations associated with each, you can confidently recommend the product you believe will be best for a patient’s lifestyle. Convey your experience with the recommended lens and why you think it will benefit the patient. For example, for more than 5 years, I have achieved great results with the Tecnis Multifocal Lens (Abbott Medical Optics), and I confidently recommend it to my patients who are candidates. This particular lens accounts for more than half of the premium IOLs used in my practice. I also find that toric IOLs and accommodating IOLs work nicely for select patients, and these account for the remainder of my upgraded cataract surgeries.

Today's patients are savvy. They know there is almost always more than one option and will quickly sense bias if their physician communicates a "this lens or nothing" approach. Let patients know that you care about their health and are recommending a plan that you sincerely believe is the best option.

BE OBSESSIVE

Be obsessive about accurate pre-operative diagnostics. As you review measurements with patients, let them see your preoccupation with accuracy. They will appreciate that you want the procedure to be perfect. Finely tuned diagnostics foster correct recommendations, which promote outstanding outcomes. Recommending a product that is well suited to a patient's particular needs, regardless if the lens is the newest technology, will help strengthen your practice's brand.

EDUCATE PATIENTS

After the initial consultation, each of my patients goes home with a packet of information printed on my letterhead and customized to his or her particular circumstances and treatment recommendations (Figure 1). This packet includes answers to frequently asked questions, details about the procedure and equipment I will use during the surgery, information about the recommended lens options, specific manufacturer brochures, and a detailed breakdown of surgeon and lens fees. I find that this practice boosts patients' confidence. Recently, I have implemented patient education software called TouchMD (TouchMD), which will convert these paper packets into an online personalized portal that can be reviewed during a consultation and also afterward by patients via their computer, tablet, or smartphone.

A doctor's recommendation should be more than a verbal statement and an admonition to research information online or peruse a few marketing pamphlets provided by product manufacturers. Patients need to feel confident that the plan is truly the best for them.



ORANGE COAST
eye center

**Frequently Asked Questions About
TECNIS® Multifocal Lens Surgery**

What is a multifocal lens?
Traditional standard monofocal lenses focus light to only one point in space. A multifocal lens has more than one point of focus.

What is the benefit of a multifocal lens implant?
A multifocal lens implant focuses light from distance and near simultaneously. This feature addresses both distant and near vision and makes one less dependent on glasses or contact lenses.

Is a multifocal lens similar to the natural lens of the eye?
No. The natural lens of a young person changes shape to produce a change in focus. As a person ages, the natural lens becomes more rigid and functions more like a monofocal lens, and then becomes cloudy as a cataract forms. A multifocal lens compensates for the eye's inability to change shape by allowing the eye to see at distance and near simultaneously through the same lens.

Are there any alternatives?
The primary alternative to multifocal lens implantation is a monofocal lens. With a monofocal lens, you will need to wear reading glasses for near vision tasks and computer, and possibly for distance. In other words, most people use bifocal spectacles after surgery with a standard monofocal IOL.

Will I need glasses after surgery?
If you opt for a Tecnis Multifocal lens implant, there is a very good chance you won't need glasses. This lens provides excellent reading vision and very good distance vision, and is designed to have improved contrast and optical performance over prior multifocal lenses. The intermediate vision is usually good but some patients who do computer work often, find they need to sit closer to the computer, make the screen font size larger, or use a pair of intermediate vision readers to make computer use work more comfortable. Our goal is the best possible spectacle-free vision, however it is important to realize that you are paying for the service and the implant, not a guarantee. 85% of patients implanted with the Tecnis in the FDA clinical trial never used glasses after surgery.

Can I be implanted with a multifocal lens in one eye only?
Yes you can, as long as your other eye has a clear natural lens or an early cataract. A multifocal lens should be implanted in both eyes ultimately.

Is a multifocal lens recommended for every patient?
No. It is recommended for most patients, but not for patients who were previously implanted with a monofocal lens in one eye, patients with a history of corneal refractive surgery (RK, PRK, LASIK), or eyes with reduced visual potential, such as those with moderate stage of macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, or glaucoma. This will be determined by pre-operative office testing.

Figure 1. Sample of the frequently asked questions sheet that is distributed to patients. Information continues on a second page regarding astigmatic correction, optional femtosecond laser use, and also out-of-pocket surgeon/lens fees.

PERSONALIZE CARE

Every patient wants to feel as if his or her care is special. Convey to patients that their situation merits more time than a brief office visit by listening with direct eye contact despite time constraints and the demands of electronic health records. Provide honest, accurate information on risks and percentages of successful outcomes. Always give patients a true assessment of whether surgery, an enhancement, or another procedure is required. You may consider apprising patients in writing that, although you cannot guarantee a perfect outcome, you developed this surgical plan based on a careful assessment of their lifestyle and needs.

Incorporate realistic information about what patients can expect as the final outcome and what to anticipate during the healing process. When patients obtain the outcome they expected, they feel they chose the right surgeon. Happy patients bring in more patients, so have an easy online review system in place.

DISTINGUISH YOUR PRACTICE

Regardless of market saturation, each practice has something unique to offer. Perhaps it is state-of-the-art diagnostics, new laser technology, or a specialization in a particular patient demographic. Maybe your practice excels in cataract surgery for postrefractive surgery patients. Determine your strengths, highlight them, and emphasize the value they give to patients. Use a tag line in marketing or online materials, within the practice's letterhead, and on literature distributed to patients (Figure 2).

TRACK METRICS

Despite a highly competitive market area or fluctuations in the economy, focusing on your practice's brand will help it grow. To maintain a percentage or experience growth in market share, you simply must do something different from other practitioners in your area. Tracking metrics is important in determining whether the strategies being implemented are effective. For every new patient that walks in the door, gather data on how he or she was referred to the office. Review these data quarterly or yearly to follow trends. By collecting this information, I found that, during the past 3 years, the number of new patients being referred by existing patients who had surgery with premium IOLs had doubled.

Because word-of-mouth referrals are a significant factor in growth, you must be aware of your online and social media presence. Patients can easily post a review online, good or bad, based on their experiences. These reviews can be seen by hundreds of prospective patients seeking information about local providers. Providing patients with a pleasant office experience, comprehensive information, solid recommendations, and successful outcomes sets the stage for them to leave positive, five-star reviews. Remember, this feedback is merely a few clicks away.



Figure 2. Adding a QR code to printed materials can give patients immediate access to more detailed information.

Although the penetration rate of premium IOLs is increasing, there is still plenty of room for improvement. Nationally, the acceptance rate for these lenses is 15.2%.¹ Since implementing my branding strategy 6 years ago, my conversion rate has risen from less than 5% to a stable 35%. In my opinion, this higher-than-average conversion rate is the result of my practice's consistent message regarding new technology and its delivery of high-quality care; it is not simply a byproduct of location or economic changes.

SUMMARY

Branding is an effective method of distinguishing your practice and attracting patients. Diligence in implementing a program and tracking the results shows exactly what works and what does not. Having precise diagnostics, delivering solid recommendations, and empowering patients with information tailored to their diagnosis results in happy patients—a practice's most effective marketing tool. ■

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