

WHITE GLOVE SERVICE

Anyone who knows me knows that I am an endurance athlete junkie—the more miles an event covers, the better. I've participated in endurance running, cycling, and swimming competitions and raced short- and long-distance triathlons. Generally speaking, I'm not overly concerned with the race amenities or swag; it's more about pushing my body to its limits and competing with myself (and, if I'm being honest, my fellow racers).

Yet there is one brand that I keep coming back to—the World Triathlon Corporation's *Ironman*, a 140.6-mile race consisting of a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike, and 26.2-mile run. I'm now an 11-time Ironman finisher, and I've been fortunate enough to qualify and race twice at the Ironman World Championships in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii. Simply put, there is no other experience quite like the Ironman.

The World Triathlon Corporation has a loyal following. With 40 official Ironman races per year, and approximately 1,500 to 2,000 participants at each race, there are roughly 72,000 competitors each year who attempt an Ironman.¹ From experience, I can tell you that the majority of those 72,000 are not new faces but rather seasoned Ironman athletes. They've completed one, five, 20, even 100 Ironmans before—it's true, I met someone who was attempting his 107th Ironman—and will eagerly sign up for another as soon as they cross that finish line.

In a world of so many options, even in the endurance sports arena, why are so many people hooked on the Ironman? The answer is simple: As far as races go, the customer experience of an Ironman is unparalleled.

Today in ophthalmology, surgeons are also faced with creating an unparalleled customer experience. With patients digging into their own pockets to pay for procedures and electing to upgrade to premium options, providing white-glove customer care is increasingly important. As this relatively new phenomenon continues to catch on in health care, knowing where to turn for advice and tips on providing a top-notch patient experience can be overwhelming. In this month's cover focus, practitioners who have perfected the patient

experience discuss the strategies and tools they use to exceed patient expectations and keep them coming back to the practice for years to come.

I've sidelined myself from racing this year to once again grow my family, but you'll be sure to find me racing again in 2019—and you'd better believe at least one of those races will be an Ironman. ■

Laura Straub

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1. How many people participate in Ironman triathlons each year? www.quora.com/How-many-people-participate-in-Ironman-Triathlons-each-year. Accessed June 7, 2018.