

# FOCUSED ON 2023



Operational dynamics to consider as you plan for the new year.

BY FIELDING EMMOTT

The end of the year marks a time when individuals and businesses alike reset, plan for the year ahead, and identify strengths and weaknesses. This article focuses on the last group. Where did your practice succeed in 2022, and how can you improve it in 2023?

To maximize efficiency, a practice should analyze every aspect of its operations—from staff and software programs to marketing and cybersecurity—and consider where new operations could be implemented. Maintaining efficiency is an ongoing challenge that requires consistent focus and effort. It is accomplished incrementally through analysis, implementation, and execution. Consider two overarching operational dynamics when analyzing your practice for efficiency improvements.

## NO. 1: AN INSPIRED TEAM

**Workplace culture.** Staffing shortages have been a challenge for many practices in recent months. Hiring, training, and retaining staff can be all-consuming for practice owners and administrators. Building a strong culture and inspiring your team are the best way to attract and retain talent. Is the culture within the practice a professional, supportive, and familial environment? Have staff members been asked to describe the culture? Creating a strategic plan for inspiring the team takes time. A 12-month plan is recommended.

Some practices foster a positive workplace culture successfully by establishing a team of representatives from each department to plan parties, fundraisers, team-building activities,

and reward systems. The efforts shouldn't cost a fortune. Additionally, regularly featuring team members in social media posts, online videos, and marketing campaigns can boost morale. Maintaining a social media calendar that mixes engagement, branding, and education can also positively impact public perception of the practice.

**Employee engagement.** Invest in employees, communicate with them frequently, and help them accomplish their career goals. Managers should schedule regular one-on-one time with employees to understand their long-term career goals and offer support and access to the relevant training to achieve them. Employee engagement is directly influenced by manager engagement.<sup>1</sup> One-on-one time can impress a caring attitude from manager to employee, and the manager can receive valuable feedback and insight internally.

Prioritize the training and development of skills that meet both individual and organizational goals. This type of consideration from leadership creates more effective, engaged employees.<sup>2</sup> Leaders who communicate logical, attainable, and valuable goals to their employees influence their behavior more positively than those who don't.

It is not enough to have performance goals. Employees must understand the goals and have faith they've been given adequate resources to reach them. The end goal, its deadline, and how it is measured and contributes to the overall organization must be clear. Reinforce the big picture and communicate it often.

## NO. 2: IMAGE AND REPUTATION

A practice's brand is designed to represent its uniqueness and reflect the values and mission of its organizational leaders. Changes in ownership, board members, services offered, and even physical location are not uncommon for ophthalmic practices. Over time, changes like these may require updating the brand or rebranding altogether.

**Branding.** A medical practice's branding should reflect the nature of its services—high-end, sophisticated, and professional. Maintaining a clean, modern brand requires refreshing it from time to time. Timelines will differ from practice to practice. When updating a brand, consider where the brand will be seen most. Emails, text messaging, websites, social channels, online reviews, and other digital content constitute the bulk of a brand's public perception today. This is good news for businesses that can access the skills of a graphic designer. Once the rebrand or updated design has been developed, updating the practice's branding online can move relatively quickly.

**Google Reviews.** Google owns 90% of all search engine queries. Its application Google Reviews has transformed business reputation over the past 10 to 15 years. More than 95% of patients reported that they consider online reviews an important resource in decision-making, and 40% refused to visit providers with poor reviews.<sup>3</sup> A high score isn't the only important metric for online reviews. Patients reported businesses with a rating of 4.7 (out of 5) that had many reviews to be more trustworthy

than businesses with a rating of 4.9 but only a handful of reviews.

Incentivize strong work habits and positive patient engagement with a customer relationship management tool. Actionable feedback from patients should be used by practices to improve their reputation and sharpen their image. To ensure continued improvement, solicit feedback from patients. Determine your practice's Google Reviews score, compare it to the competition, and identify tactics to raise your score. Based on the review, ask yourself: Would I want to work for this practice?

**Patient engagement.** Text messages have revolutionized patient communication. Practices can optimize their reputation proactively by using inexpensive digital communication tools—primarily email and text message—to engage with patients. If a patient has a poor

experience, the practice should be aware; the same is true of good and average experiences. Negative reviews can result from a seemingly minor issue that a patient had in an otherwise seamless experience. Other times, a negative review could be posted simply because the reviewer was having a bad day.

Negative reviews can appear inaccurate and emotional, which can be frustrating to practice administration. Sometimes, a thoughtful reply from the practice can appease the poster of a negative review. ■

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