

# SCALING A HIGH-GROWTH OPHTHALMOLOGY PRACTICE



How to maximize lifetime value, minimize customer acquisition cost, and drive profitability.

BY ROD SOLAR AND LAURA LIVESEY

Scaling a private ophthalmology practice beyond a few million dollars in revenue requires more than simply increasing patient volume. It also demands a deep understanding of key financial metrics—particularly the ratio of lifetime value (LTV) to customer acquisition cost (CAC). By optimizing this ratio, you can accelerate growth, sustain profitability, and gain a competitive edge in marketing and patient retention.

## WHAT IS THE LTV IN AN OPHTHALMOLOGY PRACTICE?

The LTV represents the total gross profit a patient generates throughout their relationship with your practice. Many people mistakenly equate LTV with revenue, but the true measure of a patient's financial value is lifetime gross profit, which accounts for the costs of delivering treatment.

To calculate the LTV of a patient, start by determining the average revenue per patient. Next, subtract the cost of treatment delivery to obtain the gross profit per patient. Finally, multiply this figure by the patient's average lifespan in the practice or the expected number of repeat visits or treatments to estimate their total LTV.

For example, a refractive surgery patient who pays \$4,500 for LASIK with minimal follow-up care has a high but one-time LTV. In contrast, a cataract surgery patient may require multiple visits, premium lens upgrades, and follow-up appointments, which increases their overall LTV. Similarly, an ophthalmologist providing ongoing dry eye management or glaucoma treatment benefits from a recurring revenue stream, further enhancing LTV.

The ideal model combines high-value, one-time procedures (such as refractive and cataract surgery) with long-term care services to maximize LTV.

## WHAT IS THE CAC IN AN OPHTHALMOLOGY PRACTICE?

The CAC represents the total investment required to acquire a new patient. It includes the marketing spend, advertising costs, and sales efforts such as consultations and patient coordination.

To calculate the CAC, start by adding up all marketing and sales expenses within a specific time frame. Then, divide this amount by the number of new patients acquired during that period. For example, if your clinic spent \$100,000 on marketing and sales and gained 200 new patients in a given period, your CAC would be \$500 per patient.

## WHY THE LTV-TO-CAC RATIO MATTERS

The LTV-to-CAC ratio measures how efficiently a clinic converts marketing investments into long-term profit. A healthy ratio is at least 3:1, meaning that for every \$1 spent acquiring a patient, the clinic generates \$3 in lifetime gross profit.

In other words, the value of a patient should be at least three times the cost of acquiring them. Clinics with exceptionally high ratios (eg, 10:1) can scale rapidly. Successful ophthalmology practices achieve this by leveraging premium services and long-term care models to maintain a high LTV while keeping the CAC low.

## HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR LTV-TO-CAC RATIO

You can achieve a higher LTV-to-CAC ratio by increasing your LTV and decreasing your CAC.

### Increase Your LTV

**Adjust procedure pricing.** Ensure your pricing reflects the premium outcomes delivered. A practice with a high LTV can allocate more resources to patient acquisition. Implement tiered pricing by offering premium lens

options, advanced diagnostics, and concierge-style postoperative care.

**Expand patient services for recurring revenue.** Foster long-term patient relationships by introducing ongoing treatments such as dry eye disease management, glaucoma monitoring, and myopia control programs. Offering financing plans can make premium procedures more accessible, increasing patient commitment and conversion rates.

**Encourage repeat treatments and cross-selling.** Recurring treatments naturally boost LTV. Patients with glaucoma or age-related macular degeneration require continuous monitoring, making structured follow-up services and subscription-based care plans effective ways to enhance retention. Cross-selling opportunities, such as premium lens replacement, postoperative maintenance, and ancillary products, can further increase LTV.

### Decrease Your CAC

**Optimize digital marketing for precise targeting.** Running highly targeted Meta and Google Ads campaigns focused on high-intent search queries, such as "private cataract surgery cost in Los Angeles," can help ensure marketing budgets are spent effectively. Patient testimonials and video case studies can also improve conversion rates.

**Streamline the patient conversion funnel.** Simplifying the booking process by enabling online consultation scheduling enhances accessibility for prospective patients. Improving website user experience design, removing unnecessary steps in the inquiry process, and optimizing lead nurturing sequences can improve the patient journey from interest to conversion.

**Leverage patient referral and retention programs.** Encouraging patient referrals through incentives or

- Aim for a high lifetime value and a low customer acquisition cost to scale your practice efficiently.
- Invest equally in patient retention and new patient acquisition.
- Continuously refine your marketing strategies to maximize your return on investment.

rewards can amplify word-of-mouth marketing efforts. Establishing loyalty programs (eg, discounts on repeat dry eye treatment) for long-term patients fosters retention while reducing the CAC.

**Build professional referral networks.** Referral patients cost less to acquire, making strong partnerships with optometrists, general practitioners, and influencers important for attracting high-value patients. Encouraging satisfied patients to recommend vision correction services to friends and family can also drive organic growth.

### THINK LIKE A HIGH-GROWTH OPHTHALMOLOGY BUSINESS

The most successful ophthalmologists treat their clinics as scalable businesses. High-growth practices maximize LTV through specialized care while optimizing CAC through digital marketing and operational efficiency.

### HOW TO TAKE ACTION

**Calculate your metrics.** Establish a baseline by computing your LTV and CAC. Then, track changes monthly or quarterly. Leverage analytical tools such as customer relationship management software (Hattie) to monitor trends and make data-driven decisions.

**Identify quick wins.** Increase pricing where feasible, reduce operational costs through process optimization, and expand service offerings to foster long-term patient relationships.

**Scale what works.** Double down on the marketing channels that have demonstrated the highest return on investment, refine patient acquisition strategies based on conversion data, and expand referral and retention programs to attract high-value patients.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

To scale your ophthalmology

practice, you must become fluent in business metrics. Understanding and optimizing your LTV-to-CAC ratio can give you confidence in your marketing investments, improve your profitability, and increase your market dominance.

By prioritizing strategies that increase your LTV or reduce your CAC, you can build a scalable, profitable practice that thrives in the long term.

Start tracking, testing, and optimizing your LTV and CAC today—your practice's growth depends on it. ■

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