

# 20 Ideas to Kick-Start Your Marketing

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**In a service industry such as medicine, a negative experience can often carry more weight than a positive one.**



I am often asked to provide marketing ideas for start-up as well as established practices. In my experience, unless a practice is trying to achieve high volume in LASIK surgeries or in cosmetic procedures, most need not break the bank in their marketing budgets. That being said, the practices that are best at marketing don't rest on their laurels. They constantly evaluate and re-evaluate their marketing efforts. In this article I want to provide some "best practices" marketing insights that will, I hope, inspire improvements to your current marketing efforts.

**Don't rest on your laurels.** Regularly evaluate your services to ensure they are still relevant and priced correctly.

**Get the message to the right people.** When looking at advertising or promotional opportunities, select only those that reach the highest number of your target group, not those that reach the most number of people in general.

**Learn what patients don't like.** In a service industry such as medicine, a negative experience can often carry more weight than a positive one. Put yourself in the patient's

position—surf your website, call for an appointment, ask questions to learn if answers are correctly given, take yourself through the whole patient experience to identify what can be improved.

**Keep in touch.** Have a follow-up system to ensure that patients become repeat visitors to the practice. Make sure that when they think of eyecare they think of you.

**Repeat, repeat, and repeat the message.** Provide a consistent message across all marketing efforts (internet, ads, mailings, etc.). Patients are bombarded with ads. By

repeating a consistent message you increase the likelihood that it will take hold.

**Stick to your plan.** Do you make an annual marketing plan? If so, stick to it, even if results aren't immediate. Have faith in the planning you put in place and don't change it on a whim; change only if a careful analysis indicates that change is necessary.

**Don't take existing patients for granted.** Practices often give incentives to entice new patients, and this can sometimes be off-putting to longtime patients. Don't take established patients for granted or they may become someone else's new patient.

**Use your best patients.** Identify the best patients in your practice and find a way to incentivize them to refer their family and friends.

**Do more of what works.** If you find a marketing idea that works, emphasize it. Put more energy into proven and successful strategies than in trying to be overly creative with unproven efforts.

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**Do your own marketing research.** Go into the waiting room and talk to your patients. What brought them to you? What keeps them coming back? Is there anything more you can do for them?

**Don't ask a patient to do what you won't.** How long would you wait to be seen? If you had a complaint or issue to be resolved, how many people would you tolerate dealing with in order to get it fixed?

**Create a positioning statement for your practice.** Be able to describe—in one or two sentences—what sets your practice apart from the competition. Keep it short and simple. Once done, test it. Does it appeal to your existing and new patients? If not, refine it until it speaks to their needs. Then create marketing efforts that reinforce your position statement.

**Have a logo.** Studies have shown a consumer (in this case, your patient) will remember a logo or color scheme.

**Does your office decoration and layout reinforce your image in your marketing efforts?** When a new patient walks in the door, what impression will s/he have of your office? Make sure the decorations, layout, staff appearance/attitude, etc. sell who you are. This doesn't mean big expenditures; it means using creativity and ingenuity.

**Make sure your marketing efforts and materials have a clear objective.** Every marketing effort should have a specific purpose. Design the effort and material around that purpose.

**Set aside a specific budget to build on successful efforts.** Consider setting aside a portion of each annual marketing budget for use on those efforts that are producing the most success. If the entire budget is spoken for, you will have no additional monies left over to put into those marketing efforts that have proven the most successful to date.

**Make sure you can be found on the internet.** Register your website with all the search engines. Test your "searchability" by visiting Yahoo and/or Google (or others), searching your practice's name, ophthalmologists in your community, and eyecare in your region. See how often you pop up and in what order compared to others. If possible, improve your positioning.

**Monitor the competition.** Be aware of your competitors' advertising and visit their websites. What messages are they sending? Can you put your own spin on any of their marketing efforts?

**Involve your employees.** Too often the employees are the last to be involved in promotional efforts. Your employees are your front line to the patients. Get your employees' feedback on their interactions with the patients as this may generate ideas for your marketing plan.

**Do your homework.** You can find a lot of free information about demographics on government census websites or small business administration websites. Your local chamber of commerce may also be able to provide you with demographic data to assist in your marketing efforts.

### **Words to the Wise**

What works for one practice in one geographic area may not work for another practice elsewhere. The purpose of this article is not to provide specific marketing ideas but to plant seeds that may inspire thoughts on how to improve your current marketing efforts. In marketing, there are no right or wrong ideas, and what works this year may not work next year. The key is to stay on top of what is working and then reinforce those efforts as much as possible. **AE**



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