

Patient Acquisition in Today's Busy Digital World

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One of the biggest challenges facing the independent eye care business in today's digital world is navigating new patient acquisition. Every business in every sector requires new customers in order to survive, but the landscape has shifted dramatically over the past decade. The competitive environment has expanded beyond the big box chains and now includes online retailers, funded by venture capitalists and looking to gobble up as much market share as possible. To stay viable, you need to play by a particular set of rules – rules set forth to ensure the health of your eye care business.

Rule #1 – Be Willing to Play Their Game

The days of running a great business and expecting growth to come organically through referrals are gone. Every business *will* get referrals, but not enough to survive. Online retailers are in front of every consumer, every day. They know how to target them, they know what to say with the convenience of online ordering. To compete head to head, you must be in the same arena as the online retailers – online! If the online retailers are investing in Facebook marketing, you should be too. Why not – if it didn't work for them, they wouldn't continue to invest heavily in online marketing.

There are two ways to really grow your eye care business in today's digital world – a great retail location (yes, still!) and marketing to customers online. There's no real way around it. People are busy, distracted, impatient, and price sensitive. To capture their attention (and their wallet), you must be in the right place at the right time. This is either through investing in a location with a high volume of foot traffic or growing your prominence online. Now, how much should you invest? That is a great question, but unfortunately too

many variables exist to paint every situation with the same brush. The right amount is dependant on the goals set out by your business and the combination of internal and external factors facing your business. A good rule of thumb is to be willing to invest 10–15% of *desired growth*. For example, if you want to grow your revenue by \$200,000 – you should be willing to invest at least \$20,000 – \$25,000 towards marketing your business online.

Rule #2 – Get Your Angle

Online retailers have their *angle*. They offer lower prices and higher convenience by allowing their patients to order from anywhere and anytime. We all know the drawbacks though – returns are *inconvenient*, selection can be limited and without a registered optician the right product is hard to convey to your patient as they are unsure how they'll look in their new frames or sunglasses.

Apparently the pros are outweighing the cons for most consumers and the scale continues to tip in their favour. Independent retailers need to get their *angle*, their reason to be chosen – their reason to entice someone to get off the couch and drive in to purchase their new set of glasses rather than have them delivered right to their door. So... what is *your angle*?

Please don't reply by saying the words "My angle is great customer service." No it's not. Great service is a necessity for any business to survive right now, not a value proposition. Without great service, your business wouldn't exist. So what else do you offer that makes your business *special*? Do you carry exclusive brands, utilize state of the art technology, carry a wide selection of products or do you offer lower prices

than anyone else? Your competitive advantage must extend beyond just the businesses around you – you also need to be aware of what online retailers are offering.

Rule #3 – Promote your Angle

Once you find your angle, you need to effectively promote it to your audience. Carrying a highly sought after fashion frame line will only help you if your patients know you carry it. Investing in a new piece of technology that detects eye disease earlier is a great tool for your business, but provides limited value unless people are coming in specifically for

that technology. Promotion can include advertising through digital channels, like social media or video marketing. It can also include a great word of mouth campaign. It absolutely involves educating your internal team on how to position your value proposition to every single person that walks through your doors.

In order to compete with online retailers in this busy digital world, concentrate on providing an experience they can't get online by finding your angle and making sure the world knows about it.



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