Full Appointment Books

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Like any thriving business most optometric practices have a strong desire to see more patients pass through the door. In the typical practice the average dollar-per-patient is in access of $200, so even one or two more patients a day can add significant amounts to the practice's gross income. More importantly, because these "extra" patients can be seen with little increase in expenses these dollars are even more valuable as more of it falls to net income.

How can we get these patients? Some will try external marketing to make the phones ring, but this can be a very expensive option and the results are never clear. I suggest that you look to a program that will cost you little, and is geared to your existing patient base, people that already know you and are appreciative of what you can do for them. Following are a few of these methods that can help fill your appointment book.

RECALL. Many practices don't have a recall system, or when they do it is ineffective. The best results come from using the telephone, reminding patients that they are due for an exam and asking for the appointment while you have them on the phone.

Often practices let patients slip out of their recall system when a patient fails to make an appointment - find a way to keep them in your system. If your standard recall is two years and a patient has missed this recall, most offices will wait until the next anniversary date to contact them; however, why not try them again at the 2.5 year mark? You have to be careful and not annoy your patients with these calls, but simply remind them they are due and give them the opportunity to make an appointment.

FAMILY VISITS. When a patient is being seen, have your staff pull the charts for the whole family and see when they were in last. Armed with this information in the exam room, you can let them know that their family members need care and often appointments will be made before they leave.

FOLLOW-UP VISITS. Doctors often prescribe a treatment regime and then let the patient decide if they should come back for follow-up. It's better to book these patients back to make sure the treatment is working and decide if a change in course is needed.

ASK FOR THE APPOINTMENT. When I consult with a practice I will call the office (*and competing practices*) asking questions about the cost of eye exams. Many times I am provided with the basic information in a professional manner without ever asking if I want to make an appointment.

This is such a missed opportunity to turn a caller into a patient. Also, adding information that makes your practice stand out from the next office they are going to call can greatly increase the likelihood that these callers will book with you.

MEMBERS' WEB PORTAL

Part One of a two part article focusing on the revitalization project of the Members' Web portal.
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Earlier this spring, CAO decided it was time to review the status of the Members' web portal, and do a full discovery of market solutions that would increase the effectiveness of publishing information to its member base and to its constituents. After detailed analysis, the decision was made to integrate a full Content Management System (CMS), which is, for lack of better words, state of the art. The new infrastructure has been in development & integration for a few months now and is set to launch in early August.

In this first part article, we will highlight the details of the project and describe the benefits of the new environment. The second part of the article, which will be published in the next CJO, will be a "*How-to*" training based article, intended to help members instantly leverage this newly accessible web environment.

We live in a society where information overload is increasingly becoming a problem. With the advent of the web and e-mail, the amount of information exploded, and filtering relevant bits of useful content can become a time consuming task.

After an extensive review of the current member website, it became clear that the CAO needed to integrate a web solution that would enable them look beyond the next generation of Eye Health professionals. This was the perfect time to make the move and render a membership web portal that does more than simply post content pages.

The goal of this initiative is to provide a platform for authors and content managers to effectively transmit information to the target audience of the portal, and more importantly, to provide its readers with an easy and helpful experience which allows them to find relevant content in a flash. The portal will be instrumental in bringing you key industry information.

The environment is truly intelligent as is fully User aware; it will post all new updates from the

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ASK FOR REFERRALS. It is a little awkward for some doctors to ask for referrals but patients take to this very well. They are pleased with your service and are more than happy to recommend you to their family and friends.

A simple phrase you can add to the end of your exam is: "We are now taking new patients so if a co-worker, a friend or someone in your family needs care, please ask them to contact us". This is a great opportunity to give your business card as well so they can take home or to their workplace.

OFFICE ANNOUNCEMENTS. When you get new technology into your practice, send an announcement to your patients. Often companies will help you offset the cost of generating and mailing these. If you collect e-mail, you can use this as a quick and inexpensive way to get news out to your patients.

Using these techniques you should be able to add several new patients to your appointment schedule each week, providing a great return for the small investment you make. 👁

REVITALIZATION

member's last login session… and even tailor to your membership profile.

With a type-ahead LIVE search feature that returns relevant content before even hitting the Search button, members will spend less wasted time online.

The magic is in the back-end… by enabling CAO staff to easily post and control the environment in a multilingual CMS solution. Allowing members to vote on polls, and actively participate in blog like discussions on any posted article or news item. Imagine, any article you read from within the site can have an active thread discussion below it. This will create a true sense of community, and will be a great asset for stimulating conversations of various industry topics.

The site will be also be bilingual ready and RSS-based (Really Simply Syndication), RSS is a broadcast technology standard which allows web users who user who use RSS readers to easily subscribe to any active web area of their choice. We will include more details on RSS in the next part of this article.
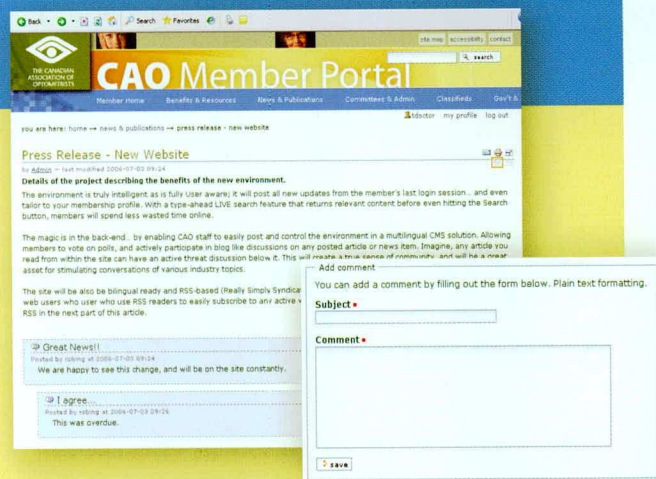
There will be a revamped "Classified Ads" area, which allows for members to manage their own posts, and all responses. Selling equipment or even a practice has never been easier. There will also be a "Careers section" by type and location.

CAO's *In Touch* Newsletter will also be revised and will be managed by this new platform. It will allow for easy access to searching new and old issues, and has a significant productivity gain for distributing the electronic version.

We are confident this new web CMS solution will significantly improve optometric communication regarding developments in the eye care community, and that it will be one of the most advanced Doctors' portals in the world.