

Is Customer Loyalty an Issue in Eye Care?

**Zoey Duncan**

Zoey Duncan is a Content Strategist at Marketing4ECPs where she crafts custom content imbued with each client's particular voice. Zoey has been writing and editing for more than a decade as a journalist, author, and ghostwriter. When she's away from the keyboard, Zoey can be found sewing her own clothes or playing outdoors with her daughter. You can find out more about Zoey and Marketing4ECPs at www.marketing4ecps.com.

How many of your patients would drive across town to see you for their eye exam? How many of them rave about you to their friends?

Loyal customers aren't merely satisfied with their experience in your practice—they're the ones you'll see years from now. The ones whose children you watch grow up.

It costs 5 times as much to get a new patient than it does to retain an existing one. But building loyal patients takes some work and attention to detail. Here's how you can get started.

WHY YOU SHOULD CARE ABOUT LOYALTY

Loyalty makes sense from a financial standpoint. Existing patients are more likely to spend their money with you. Across industries, returning customers spend an average of 67% more than new ones.

You're well aware that consumers are heading online to purchase their glasses. Research from the Vision Council found that 22% of glasses-wearing adults shopped for prescription glasses online in 2017—by 2020, that number had doubled to 44%. A loyal patient who trusts you is more likely to understand the quality they'll find shopping in your optical department instead.

HOW LOYAL ARE YOUR PATIENTS?

You can get a sense of how loyal your patient base is by asking a couple of simple questions in an automated follow-up email after each appointment. It can be as concise as 2 questions:

1. How likely are you to recommend us to a friend?
2. What did you love/What can we do better?

Use the information you get from this survey to shore up areas of weakness and build on your strengths.

6 STRATEGIES FOR CREATING A LOYAL PATIENT FANBASE

Look for opportunities within and beyond your current marketing and customer service approach to build more loyalty. Here are some strategies to try.

1. Treat Patients Like Individuals

When your patient is in for an appointment, are they treated like they're the most important person you're seeing that day? Look for opportunities to make memorable moments, like greeting patients by name, asking how their child is doing in school, or following up on their last glasses purchase.

Ensure they know you're there for their every eye care need in the years to come.

2. Easy Appointment Booking

A loyal patient may be okay with calling to book an appointment. However, a new patient needs appointment booking to be easy, and it should be simple to confirm your hours and find your location.

Ensure booking is easy through your website and that your Google Business Profile is up to date with hours and contact information.

3. Referral Programs

Referral programs are most effective when they give instant rewards.

If you don't have one yet, consider offering a gift card for use on frames or contacts when their referral comes in for their eye exam. You can also offer a gift card for a local business as an alternative incentive for patients who don't need vision correction.

4. Hyper-Relevant Email Marketing

Provide relevant information—not inbox clutter—by using segmentation in your email strategy.

Your email marketing will be more effective if you send myopia management emails to parents and dry eye information to patients who bought eye drops at their last appointment.

5. Branded Services

Services that are branded as something special can offer patients a more elevated experience.

Look for opportunities to play to the strengths you already have. Do they just “buy glasses” at the end of their appointment, or do they “receive a personal style consultation with our expert optician”? It's the kind of thing they'll tell their friends about.

6. Build a Strong Team

Ultimately, your patients return because they had a positive experience during every interaction with your team. Every email, phone call, and face-to-face connection is a win.

For that to happen, you need a team that understands customer service and cares about getting it right.

PLAY THE LOYALTY LONG GAME

Earning patient loyalty doesn't happen overnight. It's about making lots of small, impactful changes in your practice that build on each other over time.

There are lots of pieces to bring together. Get eye care marketing experts on your side so you can take care of everything in the clinic while your marketing team tackles your website, email, and social media strategies. ●