

Six Steps to Ophthalmic Practice

SUCCESS

The white-glove treatment begins before the patient enters your office.



BY ROD SOLAR

Success in a high-end ophthalmic practice depends on providing a world-class experience at every point in the patient's journey to and through your practice. It is therefore essential to deliver white-glove service at every stage of the patient journey. This article offers six indispensable steps toward beginning to achieve that level of service in your own practice.

1

STEP NO. 1: MAKE YOUR MARKETING PATIENT-CENTRIC

Start with your website.

From the homepage onward, focus on at least three types of patients that you'd like to see in your practice. Describe and show what they feel before and after treatment by you. What's their daily life like before surgery? What about afterward?

For every page on your website, ask yourself: To which ideal patients does this speak? Will the images, words, and format of the messaging appeal to them? What value does the content provide to them? Can I go beyond text and use graphics, audio, or video to make it experiential?

Provide prospective patients with tools to make good decisions. What makes you different, and why should they care? What questions should they be asking? What priorities should they

be looking for? What steps should they be taking? How will they know when they've found the one?

Create opportunities for patients to take small steps and make micro-commitments before making a significant commitment—that first appointment. Offer opportunities to chat online or ask questions on social media (eg, on Facebook Live or in webinars). Direct prospective patients to objective third-party reviews. Help them assess their own suitability before booking their first appointment.

When you follow up with an email, offer valuable content for free, and don't waste the patient's time. Always give prospective patients an opportunity to freely opt in or out. Offer free consultation appointments. Don't make patients pay to find out whether you can help them.

Tell stories on your social media accounts. With their permission, of course, make your actual patients the stars of your content. Show them immediately after surgery, and show them weeks, months, and years later. Celebrate their postoperative successes: the activities they now do, the trips they take, the photos they share, and the other fears they've overcome. Be open about yourself as well. Share details about yourself and your staff that patients can relate to before and after surgery.

2

STEP NO. 2: UNDERSTAND PATIENT NEEDS FROM THE FIRST PHONE CALL

Staff must be empowered to go beyond pushing the first appointment. Those who answer the phones should aim to create trust and conduct a needs analysis instead. They should ask not just about patients' prescriptions or eye conditions but also about how their problems affect their lives.

Patients should be asked about their expectations. What would they like to be, to have, and to feel after surgery? What is their daily life like now, and how would they like their daily life to be? They should also be asked about their priorities. What do they want from someone to help them with their vision?

If and when an appointment is booked, invite supportive friends and family members to come along. Patients often feel safer in groups.

3

STEP NO. 3: MAKE A STUNNING FIRST IMPRESSION AT THE FIRST APPOINTMENT

Be sure to remind patients about their first appointments. Give them directions on how to find you and what to expect from their first visit. Send them a Google virtual tour of the interior of your clinic. With these steps, they can become familiar with your

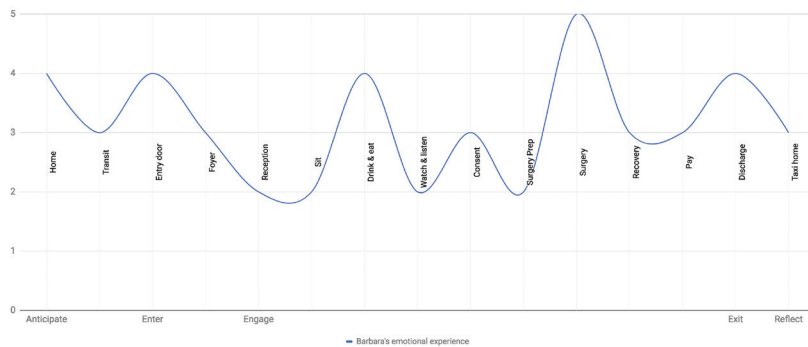


Figure. This customer journey map charts a customer's self-assessment as she attends a treatment appointment.

location and premises even before they arrive.

Have distinctive signage that guides patients into your clinic. Ensure that the space outside and at the point of entry is spotlessly clean. Ensure that your lighting is not too bright but also not too dim. Have fresh flowers and plants that enliven your space. Ensure that your staff members enjoy their jobs and that they greet and treat patients as though their jobs depend on them. Facilitate an efficient and friendly check-in process.

Smile and use patients' names when you welcome them to your clinic. Thank them for coming and arriving on time. Provide ample room for seating, and provide diversions for people to pass the time comfortably while they wait. Check your air conditioning daily: Is it too cold?

Play light music and offer visual diversions such as nature programs on the waiting room screen. Don't advertise at patients while they're waiting to see you; they already know who you are and have chosen to be there. Align the quality of furnishings, refreshments, reading material, and toiletries with the quality you want them to perceive about your surgery.

Ensure that patient waiting times are short. If they are longer than expected, inform patients every 15 minutes about what to expect. Wait and walk with your patients when you lead them from room to room. Introduce patients to other team members with whom they'll interact. Ensure that your consultation rooms are clean, tidy, and spacious.

Ask patients if you can get them a taxi home, and pay for it. Lead patients to the door and help them into the car if they need assistance.



STEP NO. 4: BE SENSITIVE WHEN DISCUSSING PRICES; PRICE YOUR SERVICES FAIRLY

Price your services to match your market's financial capabilities. Offer clear, transparent, no-surprises pricing. Adhere to local and professional regulations when offering price incentives. Share your prices on your website, in the patient's first phone call, and in your appointment confirmation letters.

At appointments, discuss payment in private. Share your financing options, and give patients as many ways to pay as you can.



STEP NO. 5: HELP PATIENTS RELAX AT TREATMENT APPOINTMENTS

Take the time to thoroughly answer patients' questions, and check with them to make sure they understand what you've said. Keep consent forms short and understandable. Write instructions in a large font. Don't make it hard for patients to read essential instructions before and especially after surgery.

Give your patients a treat that helps to relax them before surgery. Examples include a massage, chocolate, and water.

Have a nurse or attendant hold your patient's hand during surgery. One can't overestimate the value of

another human's touch when one is anxious.

Make your recovery room quiet, dark, and private. Have soft reclining chairs and blankets. Play soft music and ensure that the room smells pleasant and calming.



STEP NO. 6: INCORPORATE A CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE JOURNEY MAP

A storytelling tool can be very helpful. Many clinics ask patients to complete customer surveys, and these are useful tools to help ascertain your patient's perceptions about your service. Surveys, however, often fail to communicate the frustrations and experiences of customers. A story can do that, and one of the best storytelling tools is a customer experience journey map. To create a customer journey map, you can invite a small sample of customers to rate their emotional experiences during an important customer touchpoint, such as the treatment appointment. The map in the Figure tracks one patient's customer experience, reflected by her emotional appraisals through every stage of the treatment appointment (anticipation, enter, engage, exit, and reflect). A rating of 5 is outstanding, 4 is good, 3 is baseline, 2 needs improvement, and 1 is poor.

CONCLUSION

Patients' first impressions of your practice start long before their first appointment. Keep this in mind as you build additional tactics to enhance the patient experience and provide award-winning, white-glove service. Following the six points outlined here is a good place to start, but implementing other unique touches will also boost patients' overall impressions of your practice. ■

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