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Sixteen Weeks to Launch!

How to build a thriving ophthalmology private practice

Rod Solar | 07/15/2024 | 7 min read | Opinion

At 2024's inaugural Ophthalpreneurs event in Stresa, Italy, Rod Solar shared his tips for starting a successful practice. Here, he draws on his skills in advertising, content creation, and patient engagement to take a deeper dive into the process.

Headshot supplied by Rod Solar

Launching a private ophthalmology practice is a significant undertaking but, with careful planning and execution, you can succeed. The plan outlined below leverages my skills in advertising, outreach, content creation, and patient engagement to have patients finance your acquisition costs after the first week of advertising. If you lack these skills, consider outsourcing them. Focus solely on this for the next 16 weeks full-time. If you cannot commit full-time, you'll need external help. Doing this part-time without external help will delay your success and reduce its likelihood.

Weeks 1–4: Planning and preparation

Week 1: First, identify your ideal patients and the problem you want to solve. Understand their demographics, needs, preferences, fears, frustrations, wants, and aspirations. Choose one avatar and one problem to solve. Avoid trying to solve many problems for different people. Select a digital platform (Google, Facebook, Instagram) to acquire leads. Google provides leads that are more ready to buy but fewer in number. Meta (Facebook and Instagram) offers more leads, but they are less likely to be ready to buy. Older demographics are on Facebook, while younger audiences are on Instagram. Remember, one product, one avatar, and one channel. That's it.

Week 2: Identify your core offer (the treatment you wish to perform) and the entry-point offer (how you want people to take the first step, like booking a consultation). Offer your consultation for free. You have more time than money right now; this is part of your patient acquisition cost.

Week 3: Use your name as the business entity to start. You only need three things: i) a business bank account, ii) a way to process money, and iii) a private practice registered with the appropriate bodies. Create an ad account on your chosen platform (Google Ads or Meta Business Suite) using your business name, and connect your business credit card to pay for clicks.

Week 4: You'll feel compelled to create a brand name and logo. Resist this impulse; that time will come. Use your face for now. If necessary, create a logo with a free logo maker (for example, Canva, Wix). Don't pay for this. Create a one-page website using a free builder (for example, Wix, Squarespace, WordPress). Choose a plan as close to free as possible. Spend no more than four hours on this. It is temporary. You can hire someone to rebuild it in 16 weeks. People who click your ads will visit your website, so design it to drive action toward your entry-point offer (for example, booking an appointment).

Weeks 5–8: Increase visibility and engagement

Week 5: Clear your schedule. Availability is the biggest lever of opportunity in private practice. Rent a small office for consultations and offer as much availability as possible to avoid being a bottleneck to growth. You will be under capacity for a while, so keep busy with advertising, posting free content, or doing warm reach-outs. Plan to do this for the next 100 days straight. Be ready to take calls from inquiries, do follow-ups, write emails, and book consultations. Expect to spend at least four hours a day on these tasks. Doing everything yourself will increase your chances of success and help you understand what's needed when you make your first two hires (an admin and a patient liaison) or hire a marketing agency. Document everything as you do it to leverage what you learn and quickly onboard your first hires.

Week 6: When you have an entry-point offer (for example, a free consultation) and availability, increase your visibility with paid traffic. If you're offering lens replacement (including cataracts), start with a Google Ads budget of $100/day and commit for 100 days. After spending $10,000, you should get at least 100 leads (assuming $100/lead). Respond and follow up diligently; 100 leads should result in 20 free appointments. Aim to close 50%, which should give you ten patients. Assuming you charge around $3,000 each, you should expect sales of $30,000. That's a Return on Ad Spend (ROAS) of three (for every dollar spent, aim to earn three). If you're offering laser eye surgery, plan for a significantly higher ad budget.

Week 7: Spend four hours a day on marketing. What are you doing? Collect other people's ads for inspiration. Review how your ads are working for you. Write alternatives, and split-test them against each other. Test everything from the headline, images, copy, and calls to action. Tweak your website landing page (where you're sending the ad clicks) to maximize the conversion rate from visitors to leads. If you're using Meta, engage actively with your followers by promptly responding to comments and messages and participating in local community groups and forums.

Week 8. Keep running and testing ads. Answer calls. Follow up with every lead you get. Add them to a mailing list (even if it's on a spreadsheet) and start writing emails to send to them.

Note: Whether you run ads or make free content, never publicly sell anything. Only provide free value. Your calls to action should solely be to calls and free appointments. I promise that if you run ads or post value for 100 days straight, interested people will reach out to you.

Weeks 9–12: Start recruiting helpers

Week 9: Keep doing what I suggested in week 7 or 8. Start writing down everything you're doing right now. You'll need these instructions to make process documents so others can do this on your behalf when you're busy with patients.

Week 10: Draft a job description for an admin. Run targeted ads on Linkedin, Facebook, Instagram and job sites to reach your ideal candidate. Begin sorting through applications and invite shortlisted candidates to send you a video of why they think they're most qualified for the job. Further, shortlist and invite five to an interview, offer the job to one or two and begin onboarding. Give them all the playbooks you've written. They can work remotely for now.

Week 11: As you approach the launch (or relaunch), plan to host a grand opening event. Invite the community to visit your practice, offering free eye screenings and educational talks. This event will help build local awareness and generate buzz.

Week 12: If you started advertising in week 6, you'll be spending more time seeing free consultations by now. After the first 30 days of paid traffic, expect around 30 leads. As you see people for free consultations, playbook what you do and how you do it to prepare for your next hire (a patient liaison).

Weeks 13-16: Final push and launch

Week 13: If your paid traffic model goes according to plan (Cost per lead is £100), increase your ad spending to maximize reach.

Week 14: Gather and share testimonials from your early patients. Highlight these testimonials on your website and social media channels to build credibility and trust.

Week 15: Hold your launch event. Invite all the patients, co-managing optometrists, and other doctors you know. Invite a happy patient to speak about their experiences on your behalf.

Week 16: By now, you'll have generated 70 leads, treated seven patients, and generated $21,000. Congratulations, your cumulative earnings surpass your costs ($17,000, more than a ROAS of three (for every pound/dollar spent, you earned three).

Post-launch: maintain momentum

Continue with paid ads. Track key indicators like ad spend, lead conversion rates, appointment close rates, and ROI on marketing efforts. Use these insights to refine your approach and ensure continuous improvement.

After your launch, you'll have enough capital to hire a marketing coordinator (at 17 eyes/m), a practice manager (at 26 eyes/m), and continue to fund your advertising campaigns. You can reinvest your profits from this launch phase into a professional marketing strategy, website, a CRM system, and outsourced paid traffic management. You might choose to redesign your logo, but by now you'll realize you likely won't need to. Instead, focus on doing higher-return work: surgery. The last thing you'll outsource is your pre- and post-op. Plan to hire an optometrist to work in your practice at 42 eyes per month.

Rod Solar is a co-founder of LiveseySolar and a Scalable Business Advisor. He mentors and coaches eye surgery business CEOs/founders and their leadership teams to increase sales and profits, and achieve their "ideal exit." To get started on the right path, take his free **practice marketing assessment** *to see which areas you should focus on first.*

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