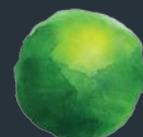




8 WAYS TO SAFEGUARD YOUR OPTOMETRY PRACTICE DURING COVID-19

It's easy to get caught up in the wave of panic and uncertainty right now with the world coming to what seems like a standstill... but for creative entrepreneurs, there is always opportunity.

Here are 8 ideas to support you through these uncertain times.



CooperVision™



1. Handling Cancellations & Office Shutdown

As I'm writing this, many practices are still open but that is changing daily. Some Optometric associations are suggesting or mandating all non-essential appointments be canceled and only ocular emergencies are to be seen. All are suggesting social distancing and it may only be a matter of time before all offices are closed until further notice.

Communication here is key. Cancellations are inevitable at times like these... how you handle them is crucial to retaining that business for the future. Start by preparing a script for your team when calling to reschedule.

Here is an example:

Employee: "Good Morning, Mrs. Smith. It is ABC Optometry calling. We are calling to reschedule your appointment this week as our office is following the directive from the Optometric association asking us to cancel all non-essential services. Therefore, we would like to rebook your eye exam for mid-April. If there is an opportunity to get you in sooner, we will definitely call to see if you would like to change your appointment. We thank you for your understanding during this time."

Office Shutdown requires a few additional communication strategies and tasks.

1. Website banner or pop up on home page announcing you are closed but taking emergency cases.
2. Social media posts announcing you are closed and all appointments are canceled
3. Email blast to all patients
4. Change the on-hold messaging on your phone system
5. Change the voicemail message to indicate you are closed but monitoring voicemail
6. Stop or change your online appointment scheduler so it no longer takes appointments
7. Prepare a sign for your front door or window

Shutting down the office is not easy. You have patients that may need emergency eye care and some that run out of supplies like contact lenses. Find ways to support your patients in these tough times while still keeping you and your staff safe.



2. Tele-eyecare

Tele-medicine has been a trending topic for some time now. This is that perfect opportunity to look at what you can offer as far as tele-eyecare.

There is a great article here on the CAO (Canadian Association of Optometrists) website: www.opto.ca/sites/default/files/resources/documents/cao_position_statement_-_telemedicine_revised_and_approved_by_council_2019.pdf as well you can visit this network of optometrists & ophthalmologists working on a shared tele-medicine platform: www.care1.ca

Another interesting portal for the advancement of tele-health in eye care is www.e-eyecare.com. What is e-eyecare? It is an online platform that enhances the consultant process between optometrists/ general practitioners and ophthalmologists.

For US practices, here is an article with links to additional information on telemedicine in optometry in the US from the AOA (American Optometrists Association): www.aoa.org/about-the-aoa/ethics-and-values/ethics-forum/telehealth-care/telemedicine

Also, check out eyecarelive: www.eyecarelive.com A Telemedicine platform built by doctors or doctors. Not only are they offering webinars and demos, but they are also waiving set up fees during this crisis.

If someone cannot get into your office due to self-isolation or illness, what can you offer them as far as remote consultation or assistance with their eyecare needs. Offer an “Optometry Hotline” to answer questions for patients needing assistance.



3. Offer Virtual Support

At times like this where patients may not be able to venture to your office but are in the need of supplies like contact lenses, eye drops, replacement eyewear, etc... is a time to think creatively about how you can still capture this business.

Create an email blast to all patients letting them know that you are there to support them. Give them options to order replacement supplies such as calling in orders, email or texting. Make it as easy as possible, even offering a discount or free shipping to help subsidize their purchases in tough economic times.

Have your staff go through all patient files and call all contact lens patients asking if they would like a 3 - 6-month supply shipped to their home. Same with dry eye patients. Keep them stocked up by reaching out and asking them to repurchase via telephone.

Maybe it's time to set up your e-commerce store! There are quite a few options out there but if you want a quick online shop to sell contact lenses, eye drops, dry eye therapies, etc... look at "Get Sightly". At \$129 a month, this e-store is an attachment to your current website and is up and running quickly while customized to the products that you want to sell: www.getstightly.com



4. Stay In Front of Your Patients & Community

They predict that as people self-isolate and stay at home, they will be online more than they ever have been. It's a great time to advertise to remind patients of your business and services so that when this pandemic passes you are in the forefront of their minds as an eye care provider.

“Show you care” marketing works well in times like these:

Example: ABC Optometry Cares!

We may be closed but we're still here. We are just a phone call or email away if you have an ocular emergency. Keep the hospitals open for those who need it by contacting us first for your eye health needs.

Example: Broke Your Glasses & No One Open?

We're closed but we also want to help! Call our office hotline and one of our team will get back to you about options to assist in fixing your eyeglasses.

Not sure of your social media messaging? Check out our free posts.



In response to the government's address to the nation to control the spread of COVID-19 virus, and for the health and safety of the public and our staff, our Optometry practice will be closed until further notice.

Phone lines, voicemail and email are being monitored. We will be taking ocular emergency appointments only. We also offer to ship eyeglasses, contact lenses, and eye drops at no charge during this time.

We're still here for our patients! If you have questions please reach out and our staff will be as responsive as possible.

MAINTAIN
SOCIAL
DISTANCING



SOURCE: WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

WE'RE BACK OPEN!



...TAKE THAT, COVID-19!



In response to the government's address to the nation to control the spread of COVID-19 virus, and for the health and safety of the public and our staff, our Optometry practice will be closed until further notice.

Phone lines, voicemail and email are being monitored. We will be taking ocular emergency appointments only. We also offer to ship eyeglasses, contact lenses, and eye drops at no charge during this time.

We're still here for our patients! If you have questions please reach out and our staff will be as responsive as possible.

Offering Curbside Service

Our Optometry is only taking ocular emergency appointments at this time, however if you need to pick up your glasses or contact lenses, we'd be glad to run them out to you as you pull up to our business.

To make these arrangements call or email our office.



Dear: Patients



We have been advised by our association to cancel all non-essential visits until further notice. We will be offering only urgent or emergency eye care by appointment only.

Please call or email if you require immediate assistance. We are monitoring phone and email lines.

WE'RE CLOSED... BUT WE'RE STILL HERE.

If you need us we are only a phone call or email away.

Visit our website for contact information.



COVID-19 UPDATE



OUR OFFICE IS CURRENTLY CLOSED

CORONAVIRUS SYMPTOMS

THE FOLLOWING SYMPTOMS MAY APPEAR 2-14 DAYS AFTER EXPOSURE.

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath and fatigue
- These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually.
- Seek medical advice if you develop symptoms, have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or live in an area with an on-going spread.

SOURCE: WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, CENTRE FOR DISEASE CONTROL

IF YOU NEED TO STAY AT HOME,
MAINTAIN A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE.
INCLUDING PROPER DIET, SLEEP, AND EXERCISE.



DISEASE PREVENTION



WASH YOUR HANDS OFTEN WITH SOAP AND WATER FOR AT LEAST 20 SECONDS

SOURCE: WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

5. Get Ready to Rumble

Get ready to propel your business to new heights by spending this down-time proactively getting ready to come out swinging when the crisis subsides. This means taking the time to create a marketing plan that lets your community know that you exist and are back open for business.

People will be looking to get back to a normal way of life and pick up where they left off. Be prepared for this by building out that plan now. Patients will be looking online for eye care and eyewear services. Showing up is the first step... showing up well is the crucial step.

Here are a few items you should work on to be ready to crush it:

- Updated, engaging & modern website with SEO optimized, unique content that makes your website rank on first page of Google for eye care search terms.
- SEO – Search Engine Optimization – if you're not showing up on Google get some expert help as you are losing patients everyday to competitors who are showing up.
- Claim and monetize your Google My Business listing – many businesses make the mistake of just claiming the listing but don't realize that activity within the listing is what can make it show up ahead of the competition. Activity can be uploading photos, adding content and getting Google reviews.
- Invest in Google Ads. Google Ads done right hands down can equal booked patients in the door. Why? Because they actively go after the patient who is currently in the market for an eyecare provider or service. They are actively searching the keywords indicating they are looking for services and are ready to book or buy.
- Stay active on social media. From posting to advertising keep your activity up so patients see you are there, supportive and open for business.

6. Use Time to Create

We always say we are too busy. Well now you can say I have the time to create. Get ahead of the curve by putting this time to great use.

Here are ideas of things you put off that would be great to get a huge jump on so you are ready to rock and roll when business gets back to normal.

- Marketing Plan – build out a full-year marketing plan. Break it down quarter by quarter, then month to month. Detail out quarterly promotions, monthly tasks, weekly initiatives, daily items and who is completing them.
- Write blog posts – content is king in today's digital world and blog writing for your practice website is a great tool in helping it rank higher. But writing can be time consuming so take advantage of this time by writing as many blog posts as you can muster. Topics can be varied from “Why Get an Annual Eye Exam” to “What's New in Dry Eye Treatment”.
- Social media posts. Everyone tells us the issue with posting consistently and well on social media is finding and developing the content. Use this opportunity to create a ton of great social posts. Look at competitors, chains and other practices for inspiration. Either hire a graphic designer or utilize online tools such as Canva to make social posts. Build a plan of what and when you will post. There are tools you can use to build Instagram grids, plan out and schedule all posts as well as upload content and hashtags.
- E-book...ok this is a bigger task but could be very useful and worthwhile. Create an e-book (10 – 20 pages) on a specific topic, for example, could be about dry eye. Something like, “The 10 Things You Need to Know About Dry Eye & Treatment”. You can send this out to your patient base, have a download on your website, market on your social channels and have copies in your waiting rooms.
- Clean up lists and databases that you are able to market to. Research and join community forums in your geography like mom groups, senior chat lines and local business groups.
- Build a spreadsheet of canceled appointments so if you have not already rescheduled these patients that your team can jump on the phone quickly to get everyone rebooked.

7. Keep Staff Busy, Calm & Occupied

Now that you have done a lot to mitigate damage from cancellations and are still prospecting for new patients, what else can you do to utilize time to your best advantage. Think about all the things you would like to get done around the office and set about a plan to get everyone busy.

Keeping staff occupied is a great way to keep their minds off the negativity of the situation and focused on the good times ahead (because there are good times ahead soon). Even if you're social distancing, you and your staff can go into the office and get things done. Just keep away from others and each other. Plan different times to go in.

- Spring clean the office. Well it is almost spring so get a jump on a full office scrub down. Make a list from walls, to floors to drawers. Not only will your office be sterile... it will give it a spring feeling which we all need right now.
- Stock up the office. Go through all of the office supplies and replace low supplies and items needing full replacement. You might have to search a bit if replacing the toilet paper. Add items like Lysol wipes, Lysol spray, hand sanitizer, soap dispensers and Kleenex.
- Declutter... along with the spring cleaning get rid of stuff that can be tossed like old POP (posters, counter cards, etc.). Clean out closets, cupboards and storage units to be organized for a new season.
- Returns. If returns are piling up or you have not had the time to reconcile if you have received credit for returns, do it now. This also goes for accounting to dos like receivables and invoicing.
- Staff training... let's face it, this is always needed. If you've got the time then take staff training to the next level. Train on everything from customer service, basic optics, eye disease, selling and more.

8. Build Personal & Business Expertise

Whenever I have extra time I like to learn. Learn about business, nutrition, personal goals and motivation. Stuff that we literally never have time for.

Well here you are:

1. Online CE. Since you can't get to provincial or international events right now take advantage of online continuing education portals. Whether optometry or opticianry CE there are lots of choices. In Canada, OAC (Opticians Association of Canada) www.opticians.ca, AOE (Academy of Ophthalmic Education) www.aoece.com, CRO Journal www.crojourn.com and United States, ODs on FB (& Quantum Learning) www.quantumoptical.com and CE Wire www.cewire2020.com
2. Business reading... books & magazines. Here are the top-rated business books & magazines to read for business owners in 2020:
 - What It Takes: Lessons in the Pursuit of Excellence – Stephen Schwarzman
 - The Non-Obvious Guide to Emotional Intelligence – Kerry Goyette
 - The Bezos Letters: 14 Principles to Grow Your Business-Like Amazon – Steve Anderson
 - The Surprising Science of Meetings: How You Can Lead Your Team to Peak Performance – Steven Rogelberg
 - Click: Transform Your Business Through Digital Marketing – Kevin Wilhelm
 - Forbes
 - Harvard Business Review
 - INC
 - Bloomberg Business Week
 - Entrepreneur

3. Catch up on the current trends and be a part of a supportive network. Here are links to Facebook & LinkedIn groups to follow:

- ODs on FB: www.facebook.com/groups/122070001227892
- EYETREPRENEUR: www.facebook.com/groups/2019102771713229
- Optometry & Eyecare Marketing: www.facebook.com/groups/1640398212669814
- Canadian Eyecare Professionals: www.facebook.com/groups/1664584940495773
- Luxury Eyewear Forum: www.facebook.com/groups/luxuryeyewear
- Opticians on FB: www.facebook.com/groups/frigginopticians
- Eyecare Marketing Forum: www.facebook.com/groups/EyecareMarketingForum
- Corporate Optometry: www.facebook.com/groups/1440570076213962
- Spex Addicts Anonymous: www.facebook.com/groups/192073948054913
- Optical Independence: www.facebook.com/groups/875050035875697
- Frame Reps on FB: www.facebook.com/groups/879493572089003
- Optician Owners on FB: www.facebook.com/groups/585580271530963
- Optical Divas: www.facebook.com/groups/1981987272039311
- Young ODs on FB: www.facebook.com/groups/1674228429517448
- Eye Docs: www.facebook.com/groups/1703995936556167
- Eye Nerds: www.facebook.com/groups/1034914886596993
- Independent Opticians: www.facebook.com/groups/567983976872983
- Finance for Optometrists: www.facebook.com/groups/2062663880675135
- Opticianry & Optometry Managers: www.facebook.com/groups/597263443675485
- Optometry & Technology: www.facebook.com/groups/432535570161312
- Ophthalmic Market Network: www.linkedin.com/groups/1491707/?msgConversationId=6569271252941357056&msgOverlay=true
- Optometry Professionals Network: www.linkedin.com/groups/3356168/?msgConversationId=6569271252941357056&msgOverlay=true
- Global Eyecare Network: www.linkedin.com/groups/2812520/?msgConversationId=6569271252941357056&msgOverlay=true

- Ophthalmology & Optometry Network: www.linkedin.com/groups/2975085/?msgConversationId=6569271252941357056&msgOverlay=true
- The Optometry Blog: www.linkedin.com/groups/162219/?msgConversationId=6569271252941357056&msgOverlay=true
- American Academy of Optometry: www.linkedin.com/groups/90580/?msgConversationId=6569271252941357056&msgOverlay=true
- Eyecare Professionals: www.linkedin.com/groups/1953386/?msgConversationId=6569271252941357056&msgOverlay=true
- Eyecare Executives: www.linkedin.com/groups/2034130/?msgConversationId=6569271252941357056&msgOverlay=true

THERE'S A SAYING... THIS TOO SHALL PASS...

That keeps coming to my mind when I hear the news and the daily changes to this pandemic.

As a business owner I know that what we do in the next few weeks will also determine how strong our business comes out on the other end of this crisis. Staying calm, thinking things through and preparing for better times is what I am doing to take advantage of a bad situation.

Last words. Smile... it could be worse. Help others where you can. Support local businesses. Keep spending money. Stay calm. Don't hoard the toilet paper.

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