

# REBRANDING REFRACTIVE SURGERY IS A MUST-DO



All over the world, refractive surgeons are wondering why surgical volume is way below what it was from 2002 to 2007. The quality of the services we provide, the postoperative outcomes we can attain, and the satisfaction patients express postoperatively have never been so high. Yet, perversely, our numbers have never been so low.

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Several factors related to the eroding reputation of refractive surgery, however, cannot be underestimated.

**Refractive surgery has gotten a bum rap.** First and foremost, over the years, laser refractive surgery has gotten a bad name on social media specifically and on the Internet in general. This negative attention has trickled down to other media outlets, too. For instance, recently on a Dutch television program, two—only two!—unhappy patients complaining about longlasting pain and dry eyes after LASIK surgery were interviewed. Although the Dutch ophthalmologist who performed both procedures was asked for an explanation, he could not properly defend himself. The peer-reviewed articles he referenced were doubted by the reporter and even questioned for their truthworthiness. A Google search will show you thousands of other stories just like this.

Attacks on LASIK are everywhere, and, unfortunately, it is too easy for the general public to find negative, incomplete information on this excellent surgical procedure. Consequently, the whole refractive surgery industry is suffering.

**Bargain-basement prices.** Second, in the past 10 years, we have witnessed LASIK prices dropping to ridiculously low levels. How can one expect to build a high-tech image with excellent results by offering extremely low pricing? The benefits of refractive surgery are plentiful, including boosting patients' self esteem and allowing them to perform sports in absolute freedom, get out of bed with good eyesight, and have the luxury of swimming without contacts. But such life-enhancing benefits are underestimated by many patients, most of whom are interested in pricing, not in quality or complication-free outcomes.

**A new generation of patients.** The population most interested in refractive surgery has now shifted to the millennials (born early 1980s to early 2000s). This generation grew up in an electronics-filled, socially networked era. Although marketing is everywhere, millennials frequently are not in good shape financially and are often looking for jobs that are more attractive than their current ones. As a result, millennials are likely to postpone refractive surgery until they are burnt out on contact lens wear. Our practices must be prepared for this when it happens.

We must also not forget that millennials were raised under

the slogan, "Follow your dreams." Therefore, for them, refractive surgery should be an experiential offering. Because they search for information most likely on their mobile phones, our practices' websites must be responsive so that they can be viewed easily on screens of varying sizes. This is equally true for our practices' Facebook pages and Instagram and Twitter accounts.

**One size does NOT fit all.** Last but not least, refractive surgery urgently needs rebranding, with only proper indications applied to the various surgical techniques available today. The one-LASIK-size-fits-all mentality has become obsolete. Introducing newer messaging such as *life vision* and *freedom of vision* and using buzzwords such as *happiness* and *beauty* will be much more appealing to the new generation of refractive surgery patients. We must, therefore, lean more heavily toward our objective of enhancing the image of refractive surgery through customization of care to each individual patient.

Abbott, Bausch + Lomb, Carl Zeiss Meditec, and Alcon have started to work together with the American-European Congress of Ophthalmic Surgery (AECOS) and the Refractive Surgery Alliance (RSA) to inform the public with one voice, instead of marketing only their own equipment. This is a positive evolution that I strongly encourage all to follow. In this way, the general public will finally get unbiased information on vision correction solutions.

Things are moving forward, and my message to each of you is this: Love everything you do, and embrace your private and professional life wholeheartedly. ■

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