

DIGITAL MARKETING FOR YOUR PRACTICE



The most effective communication tool to promote refractive surgery to patients.

BY ANDREA RUSSO, MD

Although I am a relatively young refractive surgeon—I have already performed thousands of procedures. I also am the inventor of the D-Eye smartphone ophthalmoscope, which allows surgeons to record and transmit high-definition photos and videos of the fundus oculi for clinical assessment. Not too long into my career, about 2 years at best, I decided to incorporate the EVO Visian ICL (STAAR Surgical) because I thought it was the perfect addition to my already growing LASIK, PRK, and small-incision lenticule extraction patient base. I now prefer the ICL in myopic eyes because this lens-based technology combined with the biocompatible nature of the Collamer material hands down produces the best quality of vision for these patients in my practice.

MARKETING IN TODAY'S CLIMATE

Born in the early 80s to the late 90s, millennials are the first generation to embrace social media in all aspects of their life—from personal, to professional, to product research, and even to health care needs. As a millennial myself, I can confirm that social media, for us, is the new and preferred form of communication. Through my own personal preferences and use of social media, I saw the need to move the communications that our practice produces from television and radio to social media. The three main platforms that we decided to focus on are Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube—because they have some of the biggest population bases (Figure 1) to reach potential consumers seeking vision correction.

So why is social media the best place to market to your patients today? Below I review five main reasons.

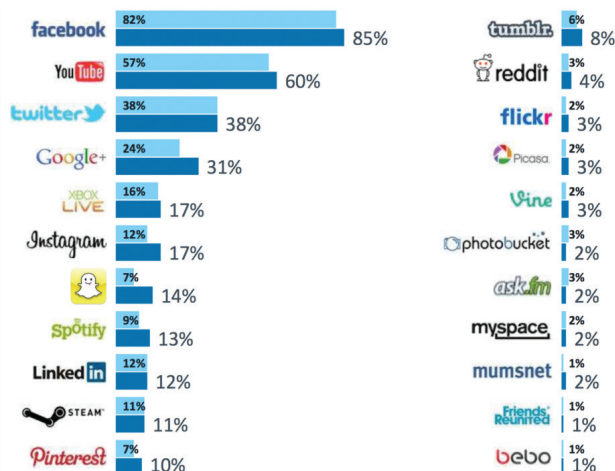


Figure 1. The percentage of social media users who are members of these online communities.

Reason No. 1: It is reliable and effective. Social media is a very reliable and effective environment for marketing efforts because ratings and reviews are created and posted directly by your patients. There is additional credibility with any social network because the patient who underwent the surgery can record his or her experiences freely—positive or negative. This creates a marketplace of ideas, rather than a one-way form of communication such as radio or television.

It is advisable to prompt your patients to leave reviews on your social media pages. For instance, we send our patients surveys after their surgery is completed and ask them to rate their happiness with the clinic, the doctor, the nurses, and their results. We provide a website link that connects directly to the Facebook reviews page.

Reason No. 2: With social media, you don't have to find the right patients; they find you. In the beginning, when you first get started with social media, it is important to build your community by publishing useful content, such as eye care tips, allergy tips, or other health-related notices, at a minimum of weekly but more likely daily. The bigger your community, the bigger the number of patients coming to your clinic (Figure 2).

Building that community takes a lot of time and effort, of course, and it could be 1 to 2 years before you gain real momentum. But once the momentum is established, you will no longer have to focus on finding the right patients, because they will find you.

Reason No. 3: It is the perfect platform to engage with your patients. Another important reason that social media is such a great marketing tool is that it allows you to engage regularly with your community—your patients. When content is appropriately produced and posted by your practice, it promotes a network

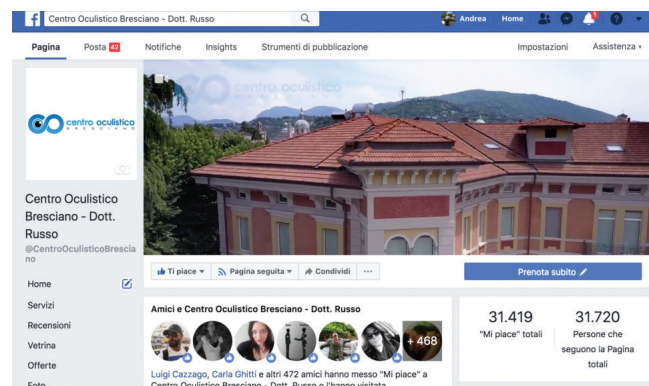


Figure 2. Dr. Russo's Facebook community now includes more than 30,000 individuals.

effect, and patients feel more inclined to post positive feedback (Figure 3). This can have an extraordinary reach.

In addition to providing useful content to your community, another way to create engagement is to reply to the questions they ask on your social media sites. Remember to be as kind as possible with them, as this strategy should help to increase engagement. I answer questions on social media platforms as a free service because I know that it will, sooner or later, help me.

Reason No. 4: Marketing on social media is economical.

Simply put, social media marketing efforts are inexpensive. You will reach a bigger community, with greater potential for widespread engagement, at a much lower cost compared with television and radio promotional campaigns. So not only is social media marketing affordable, but the results you get are much more effective compared to other media options.

Reason No. 5: You can give patients what they want, rather than what they are trying to avoid. Today, young patients don't want to feel that they are being marketed to. They also don't have time for lengthy messaging about your practice or a particular procedure. For these reasons, I put a lot of emphasis on creating and posting videos on social media (Figure 4). I try to do the majority of my communication with patients through videos because nowadays people are busy and they don't have the time to read more than a few lines.

A better way to explain procedural concepts, in my experience, is to record a 1- or 2-minute video. The video should not include any parts of an actual surgery, as some patients could be turned off by the sight of surgery. I also find it is helpful for me as the surgeon to be on camera, as it increases my notability with patients. But the surgeon should not be the main focus—the patient should, as he or she is the “hero.” For instance, let's take the example of a patient with myopia: The patient is the main character, the hero. And this hero has a problem, which is myopia. The doctor is only the guide, trying to give the patient a solution. Most of the time, I record videos with a happy patient next to me.

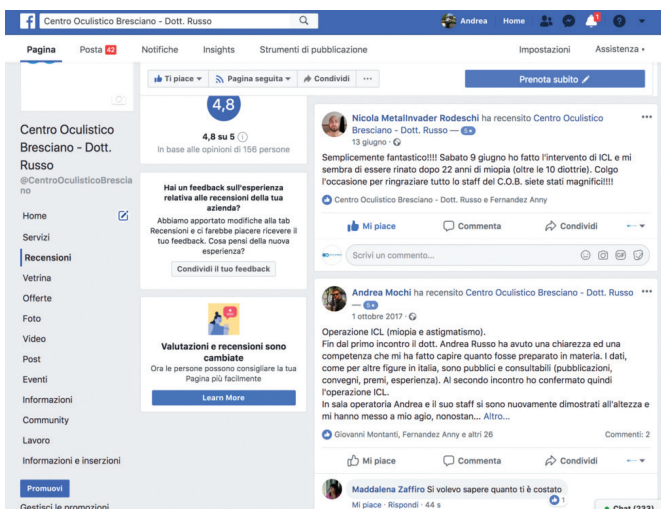


Figure 3. Engaging with your practice's online community can help to boost your practice's reach.

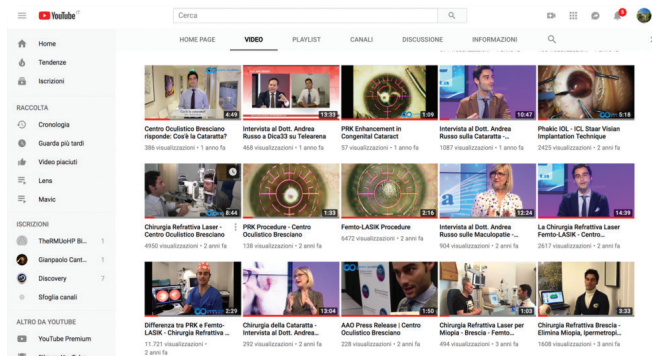


Figure 4. Some of the videos available on Dr. Russo's YouTube channel.

For instance, the patient was a -9.00 or -12.00 D myope, and thanks to the EVO Visian ICL, now he can see 20/20.

NOT JUST FOR MILLENNIALS

Even though Facebook, Instagram, and other social media channels are mainly used by millennials, other patients also can be found in this medium. For instance, many cataract surgery-aged patients are on Facebook. They might sign up to follow their children, but they also end up connecting with other people their age as well.

Whether a millennial or baby boomer, once that patient is in your office, you know that social media did its job. Social media brought that patient into your practice, and now you need to do your job and provide relevant, appropriate information to help create a happy, well-informed patient (ie, transition “lead” into a “sale,” so to speak).

The first fundamental is to ensure that you, as the surgeon, as well as your staff, are convinced about the procedure you offer. Make sure patients know that you believe in the procedure. The second fundamental is to be very clear and honest with patients about the results. I typically use animated videos like the ones created to explain the EVO Visian ICL procedure, showing it to patients on an iPad, and I also use an eye model to point to certain areas or answer specific questions they might have. In this same sitting I also spend time explaining the advantages and risks of the ICL versus LASIK, for instance, which is part of my consultation for any procedure. I also provide patients with educational brochures that they can take home and read over at a later time.

CONCLUSION

Social media is an essential marketing tool in today's world. Patients are drawn to social media for much more than personal information, and they will easily accept seeing and engaging with posts that your practice posts. Although most of my social media posts are targeted at millennials, other age groups such as baby boomers also use social media, and it is important to post content that appeals to more than one audience. ■

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