

HOW TO BOOST YOUR PRACTICE'S CONVERSION RATE



Interactions with patients online and over the phone are more important now than ever before.

BY ROD SOLAR AND LAURA LIVESEY

Due to social distancing measures, cataract and refractive surgery clinics have had to reconfigure their practice operations. In this new landscape, they must adjust to new government standards that significantly reduce their capacity while acquiring volume to make up for depleted revenues resulting from the shutdowns.

Once the lockdowns are eased and initial demand settles, patient inquiries are likely to diminish. This is because fewer people will have the financial resources to undergo vision correction procedures, and many will be reluctant to travel or enter environments where they risk exposure to the virus.

To get around this, cataract and refractive surgery clinics must adapt their business plans while avoiding high costs. When funds are tight, the last thing you want to do is overspend on costly marketing campaigns or new business ventures. The best thing you can do is look at what you already have in place and optimize it. For cataract and refractive surgery clinics, this means reflecting on your marketing funnel and optimizing your existing systems to make them more efficient.

OPTIMIZE EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

Clinical space is extremely expensive right now, especially considering that the number of people permitted in a clinic at any one time is limited. Because of this, you need to ensure

that prospective patients coming into your clinic are serious about pursuing treatment. The best way to guarantee this is to front-load a portion of the patient's investment and some of your work much earlier in the patient journey, during the patient's first contact with your clinic.

FIRST CONTACT IS CRUCIAL

It's safe to say that almost every person who has ever had private-pay surgery either called the clinic or had an online appointment before their consultation. Your team's mastery of the telephone and online appointments as tools for booking face-to-face consults and ensuring that the patient is truly invested is therefore crucial to your practice's growth and survival.

You could have the best clinicians, the best technology, a beautiful clinic, and the best outcomes, but if those initial conversations are weak, none of those other things will matter.

Conduct initial phone call or video appointment. These are your opportunities to put your best foot forward and address any concerns the patient may have. They enable you to establish a rapport with patients so that they feel comfortable opening up about their problems. These encounters also help you determine whether treatment is an option for the patient, allowing you to make an informed recommendation.

Finally, the initial phone call and/or video appointment offers you the opportunity to give the potential patient a call to action, hopefully close on a face-to-face consultation, and capitalize on the time you have spent with him or her.

It's worth mentioning that not everyone possesses the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to navigate conversations of this nature effectively.

Measure appointment conversion rate. To better understand how your staff members perform in this area, you must measure your clinic's telephone and video appointment conversion rate.

The telephone or video appointment conversion rate can be expressed as the number of first appointments arising from new leads divided by the number of new leads contacting your clinic. For example, if you book 25 first appointments from 100 leads, your telephone and video appointment conversion rate would be 25%.

A low conversion rate typically results from having ineffective or untrained staff handle inquiries from prospective patients. Another reason you might have low conversion rates at first contact is that you are not following up with potential patients who do not convert on the first call. Many patients convert after someone has followed up with them.

What is a reasonable telephone and video appointment conversion rate? The answer to this question depends on the following things (at least):

- lead sources;
- lead channels;
- price;
- experience; and
- training.

A weak conversion rate can significantly negatively impact your practice, primarily concerning the amount of money spent (and wasted) on marketing. Let's say you spend €10,000 in marketing to generate leads and find that 100 leads were generated from this spend. That's €100 per lead—an optimistic cost per lead. If your team converted 25 of those 100 leads into first appointments, you would have spent €400 in marketing per first appointment scheduled.

What if your conversion rate was 50% instead of 25%? It doesn't take much work to figure that your cost per lead would be €200, 50% less than converting at 25%. This is the power of a good conversion rate.

INCREASE YOUR CONVERSION RATE

Your customer service and sales effectiveness should be similar to that of the primary service you provide. Only then will you increase your conversions to a maximal level and attract patients who are genuinely invested in your service.

The two most cost-effective tactics to increase your conversion rates at the point of first contact are (1) to implement telephone and online video appointment training to help your staff better convert leads to first appointments, and (2) to use email and text/SMS marketing to follow up with leads that do not initially convert.

Online tools aimed at helping practitioners convert more leads to face-to-face appointments are also available. For interested parties, we can provide more information about "Ready to Convert," a training course that we developed to assist with telephone and online video appointment training. ■

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