

CONSUMERS POISED TO SPEND SURPLUS SAVINGS ON CATARACT AND REFRACTIVE SURGERY



Five key messages to work into your marketing to ensure your practice gets a piece of the pie.

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Recent news headlines like the examples in the sidebar suggest an interesting potential repercussion of the COVID-19 lockdowns: increased spending. Past economic recessions were associated with a decrease in disposable income. The COVID-19 lockdowns, however, are associated with a surge in personal savings for many.

Since this pandemic began, official statistics have shown that many households have saved record amounts. Lockdowns combined with financial uncertainty generally caused people—particularly those working from home—to spend less on nonessential items, travel, and dining out. The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) estimates that households in the Eurozone and the United Kingdom saved €470 billion (3.9% of the gross domestic product) and £170 billion (7.7% of the gross domestic product) more in 2020 than in 2019.²

HOW LONG WILL THIS SAVINGS SURPLUS LAST?

History suggests that savings rates quickly fall back to precrisis levels. The speed of recovery after the current pandemic depends on how soon governments can suppress the virus, the extent of economic scarring, and how it affects consumer confidence.

HSBC expects the Eurozone's savings rate to return to 13.8% by the end of 2022, which is still higher than the 2019 average of 12.8%. HSBC expects the United Kingdom's savings rate to wind down to 7.2% (the average in 2019 was 6.5%).² It's also important to note that increased household taxation is possible.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR CATARACT AND REFRACTIVE SURGEONS?

This year will probably be too soon, but if COVID-19 is tamed by 2022, there will likely be an exceptional rise in expenditure on the things we can't spend on today. The chief economist at the Bank of England, Andy Haldane, says this means families are poised "like a coiled spring" to fuel a rapid return to economic growth with a multibillion-pound spending spree once the virus is suppressed.⁴

But what will people spend their money on, and will cataract and refractive surgery get a piece of the pie? We think so—but only if you update your approach to your marketing messaging now.

HEADLINES IN THE NEWS

- ▶ How the Pandemic Altered Financial Behaviors for Many—and Some May Change for Good¹
- ▶ Consumers to Unleash Trillions of Dollars in Excess Savings When Pandemic Ends²
- ▶ Lower-Income COVID-19 Aid Recipients Seen Boosting Consumer Spending³

HOW TO APPROACH MESSAGING IN MARKETING

Make your marketing emotional. Emotion drives purchasing behavior. Good marketers use this concept all the time, and examples of emotion-based campaigns are widespread. Luxury goods target people's feelings of self-worth and acceptance, athletic brands target people's desires for adventure and competition, and products such as fragrances and lingerie target people's feelings of love and sexual desire.

Context is important because emotions and consequent buying decisions are often directly influenced by current reality. For example, before this pandemic, people bought cars and went on holidays. The focus has turned to buying fitness subscriptions, home entertainment, and toilet rolls during this pandemic. In our assessment, people are looking for distractions, escapism, and ways to feel better both now and in the future.

Successful practices must adjust their marketing messages to suit the public's emotions and the context for their feelings.

Back up the emotion with logic. Once consumers have invested emotionally in a product or service, they seek to justify these emotions. Their logic doesn't have to be particularly convincing. For example, many people justify making a purchase because there's only one left, it's on sale, or it may be useful in the future.

Offering a more deeply grounded reason may convince people more quickly. This is especially important when a product or service is expensive, it involves an element of fear or risk (eg, surgery), or consumer confidence is low because of economic uncertainty.

Leverage the desire for transformation. Whereas demand in the hospitality sector has plummeted during this pandemic,

the health care and fitness sectors have experienced growth because consumers are reevaluating their lifestyle choices and future well-being.

Cataract surgery has historically fallen into the category of health care. Refractive surgery, however, has been deemed a cosmetic procedure by health insurance companies because it is not medically necessary. COVID-19 could change this. One of the most important things people can do to prevent the transmission of SARS-CoV-2 is to avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth. For contact lens wearers, this is nearly impossible. Refractive surgery offers a potential solution.

Health insurers may not adopt this view, but it could resonate with people seeking an alternative to contact lenses. The desire is there, so prospective patients simply need to find a reason to spend the money.

Refractive clinics can tailor their marketing efforts to provide this reason by encouraging eye health and vision prioritization. What better time to leverage this idea than while prospective patients have a surplus of disposable income and few meaningful ways to spend it?

From a psychological perspective, this argument is compelling. It combines a desire for transformation and self-improvement with the logic of prioritizing health and available resources.

FIVE KEY MARKETING MESSAGES TO USE IN A COVID-19 WORLD

1 Vision correction is a gateway to freedom. Website messaging should touch on freedom and fun. While people are bored at home, they're dreaming about sunnier times when they could do what they wanted when they wanted. Many pundits project that as soon as air travel opens back up, a lot of the pent-up demand to spend will go there (eg, holidays abroad). Before this becomes a reality, you should communicate to prospective patients that they want to

prepare for their long-deferred holidays by ditching their glasses and contact lenses. This way, they'll be able to enjoy themselves uninhibited by visual aids.

2 Vision correction is a form of self-improvement. People can consider laser eye surgery for the same reasons they are joining fitness programs and straightening their teeth: They are anticipating a time when social gatherings will resume in person. When this happens, they want to feel good about themselves.

This is an opportunity to communicate how natural, unaided vision can make their fitness journey easier and improve their self-image.

3 Vision correction makes health and safety sense. This is where the logic comes in. People may struggle to base their decision to have refractive surgery solely on their desire to travel without glasses or look more attractive. Effective marketing highlights the health and safety implications of touching your eyes daily to place and remove contact lenses and how wearing glasses and a face mask can cause or exacerbate dry eye disease.

4 Vision correction is easy for millennials. Many millennials now work from home, which often means they have flexible schedules that allow them to jump on a virtual consultation or pop into the clinic without officially taking time off from work. Compared to older individuals, they are also likely to spend more time on social media (consuming advertisements) and use their savings on luxury and premium goods and services because they tend to have fewer financial responsibilities and are typically more impulsive buyers.⁵

5 Vision correction is a wise investment. The final message to communicate to prospective patients is that refractive

surgery is a worthwhile investment—so worthwhile that they should consider parting with their savings during an uncertain and turbulent time. Why shouldn't people spend their surplus income on something that will enhance every day of the rest of their lives? A refractive surgery center's marketing messaging should tastefully promote the YOLO (you only live once) perspective. After all, if the pandemic has taught people anything, it's to appreciate the here and now.

THE TIME IS NOW

When COVID-19 hit, people came to regret certain choices—not traveling enough, not visiting friends and family as often as possible, and not going after opportunities and experiences that might have improved their lives. Now is the time to encourage people not to miss an excellent opportunity to transform their lives by improving their vision with refractive surgery. ■

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