



Rethinking the YP in Marketing Plans

Practices need to move ad spend beyond the Yellow Pages

By **David Evans, PhD**, Ceatus Media, L.L.C.

There existed a time when prospective eye-care patients spent little of it to find an ophthalmologist. A potential patient would receive a word-of-mouth referral or see a promotion, look the practice up in the Yellow Pages (YP) and then call. Even if, more recently, the patient looked at the practice's website, the patient would still turn to the YP before contacting the practice.

But in today's often exhausting digital environment, the dynamic is much different. These patients are using online resources to make their buying decisions. While online, they rely almost exclusively on word or phrase searches via search engines like Google. Because online searches take patients directly to a website that delivers the information they seek, the YP have become far less valuable as a marketing tool for ophthalmologists.

“ *The question now is not whether to cut investment in YP, but how to best distribute these funds among other marketing platforms.*

In Care Credit's recent "Path to Purchase" survey regarding how people bought health-care services, the 209 people asked about

choosing elective eye-care services said the average decision time it took to investigate a procedure and choose an eye surgeon was more than five months.

Survey respondents indicated that during this time period they reviewed various online sources, including the practice's website, surgeon reviews, social media, medical advice websites and search engines.

These responses suggest that advertising dollars should be distributed judiciously across these online resources.

What follows are the pieces of a comprehensive online marketing strategy.

Website



The practice website is the hub of the online strategy. Most practices that advertise in YP should already have a website, so any YP ad budget does not have to be redistributed for that purpose. However, it could be beneficial to invest resources in a more effective website.



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The website must have several key attributes to be successful. It should have one or more significant marketing messages to promote the primary revenue-generating services.

Many practices mistakenly include high-end services, such as laser cataract surgery or LASIK, in the section of their site dedicated to comprehensive eye care. Whichever procedures the practice considers to be its “money” services should be prominently displayed on the home page and promoted throughout the website.

It is now also imperative that the site be mobile-friendly, with the mobile version prominently displaying location, open hours and an easy-contact form.

The cost to design a customized website is typically between \$8,000 to \$15,000, depending on its size, breadth of the practice’s services and any additional features such as a video library or a before-and-after photo gallery, to feature the cosmetic side of the practice.

Search engine optimization (SEO)



Both the Care Credit survey and data from the Pew Research Center’s Health Face Sheet show that 77% of online health-care information seekers start their investigation on a search engine. This means that to be successful, SEO is a must for your website. With SEO, your website appears high in the rankings when local consumers search for information about eye-care procedures and the surgeons who provide them.

SEO is no longer strictly formulaic; in today’s world, it is as much an art as a skill. Therefore, you must select a company with considerable SEO experience and knowledge of eye care technology and procedures. To check a company’s skills, review the online rankings of four or five of its other eye-care clients working in different markets. Be sure to check clients in larger markets, because larger markets are more competitive and require better SEO skills. (For a little help in the online ranking field, type “online rankings” into Google.)



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Expect to pay between \$500 and \$1500 per month depending on the size of your market, number of locations and range of services you provide. For example, a cataract surgery practice in a small market should expect to pay less than a multispecialty practice, including LASIK, cataract surgery and oculoplastic surgeons, in a larger market.

Of course, this same cost difference holds true for the YP, whereby promotion of numerous procedures in a larger market is more expensive than one procedure in a smaller market. Beware of companies that charge a flat rate for everyone — obviously, such a program cannot be tailored to your practice or market.

Reviews



Online reviews are the new “advertising.” The great part: These patient-generated comments are published on various websites without any payment from you.

You can use these reviews to drive patients to contact your practice and to create a positive perception on your own site. However, online

reviews are unrestricted, so they must be managed to ensure the correct message is sent.

To be most effective, a reviews management program should have three pieces:

- An easy way to solicit positive reviews on the most important third-party reviews sites like Yelp, Google, RateMDS and Vitals
- A reporting system to alert the practice about new reviews
- A way to automatically publish recent positive reviews on the website
- Expect to pay \$200 between \$300 a month, per doctor, for an effective reviews platform.

Social Media



Many patients want to connect with the practice in a more personal way, and social media is the means to do so.

Facebook should be at the heart of any social media strategy. To be effective, the strategy should have a combination of engaging posts



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of general interest and posts related to eye care, some of which are personalized posts about the practice.

According to Facebook executives, the general rule of thumb should be 80% to 20%, with only 20% specifically tied to information related to the specialty or practice. Many practices make the mistake of too few posts overall or an excessive number of posts specific to eye care. Consumers will only tolerate so many announcements about a LASIK special or the need for regular eye exams before they disconnect your feed.

Basic social media programs can range from \$250 to \$500 per month.

Conclusion

The cost of a comprehensive strategy should range from \$950 to \$2,300 per month (\$11,400 to \$27,600 per year). For the practices still investing \$40,000 or \$50,000 per year in Yellow Pages, that leaves plenty of room for a new mobile-friendly website or to continue to invest in YP ads.

David Evans, PhD, MBA, is founder and CEO of Ceatus Media Group, a strategic-level digital marketing agency specializing in elective health care. Ceatus oversees the online marketing strategies of more than 75 premium eye-care practices in five countries. Contact him at dwevans@ceatus.com.