

# MARKETING PLAN

## KEEP, DROP, ADD— HOW PRACTICES ARE SHIFTING MARKETING PRACTICES DURING THE PANDEMIC

*Brandi Musgrave and Keri Layne-Tarman*

**W**hen faced with the prospect of having to close your practice doors temporarily, as many practices did at the start of the pandemic, the first inclination is to stop spending money—especially when it comes to marketing or practice-building initiatives. After all, if patients aren't able to come into your office, why would you continue trying to generate leads?

The answer is that marketing is not always about generating leads. Marketing is about establishing your practice as a solid institution

in your community, being a trusted resource, and continuing to care for the eye health of people in your area.

During the quarantines of 2020, people were confined at home, researching as much information as possible about how COVID-19 was affecting the normalcy of their lives. They wanted updates from their doctors, workplaces, churches, restaurants—localities that took on new significance because these could no longer be taken for granted. Practices that completely stopped marketing and communicating to their patients and communities are the ones that struggled initially and still continue to struggle.

Alternatively, practices that realized the importance of marketing saw an almost immediate return to full, yet modified, patient schedules. Why? We suspect the pandemic may have intensified the realization that potential patients:

- Had more time on their hands to learn about vision-improving procedures
- Were more in tune to their vision problems
- Had time to recuperate from eye surgeries
- Wanted to have control over something positive in their lives (clear vision)

- Canceled travel plans and spent less on entertainment, freeing up money to spend on their quality of life

With these viewpoints in mind, your marketing during a pandemic should look different from your normal strategies—but what should you keep, drop, or add?

### KEEP

Use periods of downtime to keep updating your patient education materials or creating new resources (online or printed) for people to learn about eyecare problems and your solutions.

In addition, keep your lines of communication open. People in your community want to know their options for eyecare and how you will keep them safe when they visit your office. Alert them about your options for telemedicine/virtual visits, phone consultations, in-office safety protocols, modified clinic hours, etc. Take advantage of email marketing, social media, and local business listings (LBLs) to reinforce how you are there for your patients. Things change rapidly, so daily updates may be necessary.

### DROP

Drop your panic, old ways of thinking, and inability to change. Unprecedented times require you to think outside the box and get creative with your messaging and service offerings. Realize that the situation will improve and your patients will be ready to return to your office when it is safe to do so, but some may take longer than others to feel comfortable face-to-face. Offer virtual options for routine appointments as well as elective procedure consultations.

## *Some practices have flourished during these uncertain times and have emerged stronger than ever.*

### ADD

Add new methods of information dissemination such as:

- E-newsletters
- Emails
- Daily social media activity
- Live chat on your website
- Videos to highlight your services and changes in your office

These mediums will allow you to communicate regularly, even daily if needed. You can also keep your services top-of-mind by hosting virtual events such as webinars, giving your in-house experts platforms to discuss common vision conditions, explain treatment methods, and answer direct patient questions. When patients are comfortable returning to your office, your practice will be their obvious choice for treatment.

### MAINTAIN YOUR REPUTATION

It's important to maintain a strong online reputation with an influx of positive patient reviews. As your patients return to your office, ask them to post their experiences online. Organic, honest reviews can do more for your practice than you might think.

Be prepared for patients to become frustrated with limited appointment availabilities, office closures, and safety protocols. They may post negative reviews online about their experiences; it's important to respond to every negative review quickly, attempt to defuse the situation, and

potentially motivate the patient to remove the review.

### BOTTOM LINE

Marketing your practice is always important, but it's even more important during a pandemic. In a time of uncertainty, you have the power to remain a stable, supportive presence for your community. **AE**



*Brandi Musgrave (brandi@fast-trackmarketing.com;*

*303-731-2634) is the director of business development at Fast Track Marketing in Broomfield, Colo. Keri Layne-Tarman (keri@fast-trackmarketing.com; 303-447-9192) is a copywriter at Fast Track Marketing.*

## IN A BLINK

- Keep: open lines of communication
- Drop: panic, old ways of thinking, and inability to change
- Add: new methods of disseminating communications