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## 10 tips for effective advertising

by Vanessa Caceres EyeWorld Contributing Writer

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Ready to get the best bang for your buck with your practice advertising in 2019? Then plan, be patient, and invest some time and money into the right message. The good news, for starters, is that eye practices traditionally are open to cutting-edge advertising and marketing ideas. "Ophthalmologists have historically been one of the most progressive groups regarding marketing," said Chad Erickson, vice president of marketing and business development, Advice Media, Park City, Utah. This includes cutting-edge websites, YouTube channels with educational videos, and engaging social media, Mr. Erickson said. However, there's always room for improvement. Here are 10 ways to maximize your traditional and digital ad dollars in the new year. 1. Focus your traditional ads on patient benefits. "While doctors have gone to years of school and are experts in their field, they make a huge mistake when they make their message all about themselves. Unfortunately, I see this a lot," Mr. Erickson said. Instead, craft your advertising to focus on patients' goals and needs. Once you focus on patients, they will feel confident enough to listen to the rest of your message, he explained. 2. Share what makes you unique, but also add the benefit. Use your advertising to share what makes your practice unique and how that meets a patient need. However, make sure to also explicitly say how that is a benefit, recommended healthcare publicist Karen Dennis, KSD Public & Media Relations, Hollywood, Florida. An example she gave is if you have extra weekend hours, your ad may say, "Tired of spending

Saturday in the ER? We are open weekends.” Another example she gave is if the ophthalmologists in the practice have special training, state why that’s important. Here’s another example from Ms. Dennis: “Staffed by Bascom Palmer Eye Institute/University of Miami-trained ophthalmologists to ensure the highest level of medical care.” This allows you to tout something unique about your practice and state the benefit. At the same time, don’t overstate what your practice can offer. Focus on what you do best versus wanting to be everything for everyone, suggested Ming Wang, MD, PhD, Wang Vision 3D Cataract & LASIK Center, Nashville, Tennessee.

3. Educate. Again, focus on what patients want or need. Dr. Wang said that most of his practice’s traditional advertising has focused on education, be it on eye conditions, eye health, or new technologies and treatments. He considers this his practice branding. “Using education as a branding tool, we seek to establish that we not only provide the best technology and latest treatments but also the best service and education,” Dr. Wang said.

4. Think long term. If you feel rushed, you’ll want to do some deep breathing to boost your patience—especially when you do traditional advertising. “It takes months, if not years, to see the effect of long-term branding, so stay on it,” Dr. Wang said. Samantha Parrish, marketing manager, ReVision LASIK and Cataract Surgery, Columbus, Ohio, echoed that sentiment. “Think of it as a marathon, not a sprint,” she said. “Running a 1- or 2-month campaign on radio or television alone will not likely yield immediate results unless you are promoting a sizable discount to products or services.” With proper expectation setting and strategic planning, traditional venues like radio, TV, billboards, and direct mail can still be worthwhile investments, she said.

5. Set slightly different expectations for social media advertising. Although any ad campaign needs to be strategic in the long term, the immediacy of social media calls for a call to action. Dr. Wang contrasts how his practice advertises traditionally—with the emphasis on brand awareness and education—with their social media advertising, which focuses on encouraging potential patients to come in for a consultation or an educational seminar. One way to create an ad buzz on social media is with giveaways, said Andrew Whitley, Amplify Online, Bradenton, Florida. A short guide to eye care, a product or service with a discount, or a newsletter are all easy items to create that are potentially meaningful to someone interested in eye care, Mr. Whitley said. However, much like traditional advertising, you’ll also want to think long-term with social media ads.

6. Use online and social media pros for your digital advertising. Keeping up with advertising through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Google Ads, a

website, and any other social media platform can take a lot of effort and time—more than an ophthalmologist or practice manager squeezing in a post in their “free time.” When you focus on social media advertising, use a professional who has dedicated time to keep up with best ad and marketing practices in those venues, Mr. Whitley advised. This person will help you identify the right social media venues for you and create enough content to boost search engine optimization. Additionally, traditional advertising is best done with ad professionals who can tailor your message for your audience, Ms. Dennis said.

7. Track everything. One mistake that Ms. Dennis has observed is practices that do advertising but don’t track it appropriately. For example, they may use their main practice phone number for patients to call versus a dedicated phone number to see exactly what return on investment an ad has generated. “If you don’t track the results, you are losing the benefit of knowing the ad’s effect and you may be wasting your money,” she said.

8. Keep your website top-notch. Although your website may not be an ad per se, it’s what many patients will use as an initial step to research you before ever reaching out to the practice, Ms. Parrish said. Her practice also optimizes their website for search engines to help achieve a higher ranking position in the search results and make it easier for consumers to find them. Beyond your website, plan to have an active email and text strategy to communicate with current and prospective patients, said Mr. Erickson, noting that these are inexpensive forms of advertising that help to maintain top-of-mind awareness.

9. Consider word of mouth a gold standard form of advertising. “Although it appears to be ‘free’ advertising, it requires a substantial investment and commitment from our entire team,” Ms. Parrish said. “ReVision is constantly evaluating creative ways to ‘wow,’ connect, and provide added value to current and prospective referral sources.” In today’s digital age, practice staff members at ReVision will also remind satisfied patients to share their experience with others on social media or on online reviews.

10. Mind the budget. Obviously, your advertising budget will vary by your location. However, Mr. Erickson thinks that new practices should spend 25% to 30% of their annual revenue on marketing the first several years. “Once they are established and have achieved a consistent flow of patients, they can look at dialing it back to 15% to 20%,” he said.

Editors’ note: The sources have no financial interests related to their comments. Contact information Dennis: [karensuedennis@gmail.com](mailto:karensuedennis@gmail.com) Erickson: [chad.erickson@advicemedia.com](mailto:chad.erickson@advicemedia.com) Parrish: [samanthap@revisioneyes.com](mailto:samanthap@revisioneyes.com) Wang: [drwang@visioninstitute.com](mailto:drwang@visioninstitute.com) Whitley: [andrew@amplifyonline.com](mailto:andrew@amplifyonline.com)

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