

Contact Lens *Success*



A TYPICAL OPTOMETRIC PRACTICE has less than a 25% contact lens penetration rate (less than 1 in 4 patients wear contact lenses). With today's contact lens materials and technologies, it is estimated that 80% to 90% of the vision-corrected population could successfully wear contact lenses (either full-time or as a part-time substitute for glasses) to improve their quality of vision and enhance quality of life (particularly for those with an active lifestyle).

This presents opportunities for eye care practitioners to meet the unmet needs of their patients and grow practice revenue (both in terms of professional fees and product sales). Yet many practitioners still shy away from proactively recommending contacts unless they are directly asked by patients to give them a try. With all the contact lens manufacturer sponsored direct-to-consumer advertising, consumer awareness is on the rise. Yet many patients still hesitate to come right out and ask their ECP about wearing them. Some are afraid they may offend their ECP; others may believe that if contacts were an option, their ECP would have already told them.

There remains a large group of patients who are simply "sitting on the fence" because they feel there is too much financial risk at stake. Some consumers believe that if they pay for professional fitting fees and buy contact lenses, they are out a couple of hundred dollars if they don't adapt to them. Instituting a "Contact Lens Success Guarantee" can remove that potential barrier by removing the financial risk for the patient and help them make the decision to give contacts a try.

It is generally about this time in my conversations with ECPs when I mention the word guarantee that I start to get resistance. "I can't guarantee contact lens success. It could put me out of business," is a typical response. Historical data suggests otherwise. Think about your existing contact lens patient base. How many patients have tried contact lenses and could not adapt within 90 days? My conversations with ECPs lead me to believe this number is pretty low (between 5% and 10%).

Now, before we go any further with this, let me outline the basics of a workable contact lens success guarantee. Professional fees are not at stake here. This fact must be clearly communicated to potential new contact lens wearers. However, it is a good idea to include one or two refits and follow-up visits in your fitting fee (let's face it, if a patient can't adapt in 90 days after trying three different lenses, they probably weren't a good candidate to start off with or whoever is doing the fitting should get some refresher training on fitting).

The money back guarantee comes into play with the cost of the lenses. My experience tells me that most first-time new fits are

typically sent home with a 3-month supply of lenses (the minimum amount they can purchase) so the patient isn't stuck with too many lenses in the case they can't adapt. This puts the burden on the patient. And I don't know about you, but if I were the patient, I wouldn't be too comfortable with this arrangement (if my ECP isn't that confident I can succeed, maybe I should just pass).

What exudes confidence in an ECP's contact lens fitting professional skills is when he/she tells me, "I'm so confident this will be successful, that I'm going send you home with a year's supply (there are both financial and compliance reasons to have the full-year supply on hand – but that's a story for another article). If for any reason you cannot adapt in 90 days (or 60 days if that makes you more comfortable), you will get a full refund on the purchase price of your lenses, including up to two (if the Rx is different for each eye) opened and partially used boxes."


And yes, that means the practice may get stuck with a couple opened boxes of lenses. But this will be a small expense compared to the number of new patients who take you up on this offer and are successful. And getting stuck for the cost of two boxes of contact lenses is the worst case. Most manufacturers and distributors will give you a full credit for unopened boxes returned, and some will even give you a full credit for opened and partially used boxes if you have a contact lens success guarantee program.

So, still not a believer? Test it out. Send a direct mail letter to a select group of eyeglass wearing patients (non-astigmatic with Rx between -1.00D and -6.00D) who have not been in for their annual check-up (it has been 18-24 months since their last office visit). In a letter, tell them that after reviewing your patient records, you notice they have not been in for a check-up in some time. Because of this, you have not had the opportunity to let them know about the new contact lens materials and technologies currently available that makes wearing contact lenses easier and more comfortable, convenient and economical. To that end, you can let them know that if they are not successful, they will get a full refund on the cost of all their lenses; virtually removing the financial risk.

Direct mail 100 patients (this should not cost more than \$100 when all is said and done) and track the response. Typical response to direct mail is 2% to 3% conversion. As these patients have not been active in some time, response rates may be low, but any response is positive (as this group is on the fringe of "active" patients) and represents business you would not likely have captured without the offer. If you would like help creating a direct marketing letter to use for this purpose,

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contact Responsible Marketing Consulting Services at info@resmarkconsulting.com or call 877-RESMARK to get a free sample letter template.

At the same time, mention the contact lens success guarantee to in-office patients who appear to be good contact lens candidates (do this on a trial basis for 2-3 weeks). Keep track of the number of those who respond favorably to the offer, and of course, the number who do not adapt (that you have to take back lenses from). If you feel this exercise proved to have little or no impact, then pass on the whole concept. However, if you see positive results, then by all means, deploy it on a full scale level (notify all your patients of your new policy and send out a press release to the media). In the end, if you just wait for your patients to ask you for contact lenses or for them to tell you they want to give you more money, you're missing out on huge market potential. 

David M. Pearce
President of Responsible Marketing Consulting Services
www.resmarkconsulting.com
dpearce@resmarkconsulting.com