

Article Two of a Five-Part Series

How Consumers Research Providers

By ROB Editors

Patients, who also are consumers who make buying decisions for themselves and their families, pass through six steps in making a purchasing decision. In health care, this is commonly called “the patient path to purchase.”

This is the second in a five-part series of articles that examines each of these six steps. Examined here: how consumers research health care providers.

Once ECPs and practice staff understand consumer preferences and behavior in this path to purchase, they can construct a plan to engineer an enhanced patient experience and implement strategies that can provide clinical excellence and can ensure financial success for the practice.



The Patient Path to Purchase

Source: CareCredit
Path to Purchase Research, 2018.
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How consumers research and select eyecare providers.

The Survey Finds:

Online research is key in finding an eyecare provider. Some 59 percent of respondents say they research a provider online. The following chart shows where they look to find vital information.

Consumer Online Sources For Provider Research

44% Health insurance website

19% Search engine

16% Doctor rating website

Source: CareCredit Path to Purchase Research, 2018

When researching providers online, the top resource tends to be health insurance websites in all cases. This makes sense, given that the vast majority of optometry/optical consumers report only choosing providers, regardless of specialty, who accept their insurance. Only a minority of optometry/optical consumers look for provider information using search engines or doctor rating sites.

The Survey Finds:

Consumers use a wide variety of resources to learn about potential optometry/optical providers. A primary care physician is the top offline resource for optometry/optical purchases, although input from family members and friends is also common.

Sources of Offline Research

Some 73 percent of respondents ask for overall input. They tend to ask:

53% Primary care physician or vet

36% Family member or friend

22% Someone who needed same treatment

11% Co-worker

Source: CareCredit Path to Purchase Research, 2018



Patient Path to Purchase *Factor #2*

Consumers use both online and offline resources to find an ECP—but the influencers of their decisions differ.

Sources of Offline Research

40%

Family & friends

13%

Optometrist/ophthalmologist

Source: CareCredit Path to Purchase Research, 2018

Sources of Research, Non-Healthcare Professional

35%

Spouse

7%

Other family member or friend

51%

No one else

Source: CareCredit Path to Purchase Research, 2018

Putting Knowledge to Work

ECP on The Path to Purchase



Crystal Dortch,
*Certified Optometric
Vision Therapist and
Care Coordinator,
Wow Vision Therapy,
St. Joseph and Grand
Rapids, Michigan*

Patients, who are consumers, after all, are proactive researchers of eyecare providers of all sorts. Wow Vision Therapy, which has two locations in Southwestern Michigan, is an eyecare provider of a particular sort: The practice is entirely dedicated to vision therapy.

As a specialty practice, patients come largely from referrals and not annual exams. Enabling prospective patients to learn about the practice and how it provides vision therapy is an essential component of the practice's sustained success over the past 22 years. Offering financing for vision therapy services is another key component.

As a specialty care provider with four ODs and a staff of more than a dozen certified vision therapists, the practice places a huge emphasis on public and professional awareness. An in-house team continually updates the practice's social media, especially its Facebook page and Instagram account. Video content on its website and YouTube channel is used extensively to explain how services work, which serves a critical informational need.

"We need to communicate a lot about how vision therapy works," explains Cheryl Dortch, Certified Optometric Vision Therapist and Care Coordinator for the practice. "People will Google VT to find out what it is, but we need to connect on an emotional level, and our videos serve to touch people."

Prospective patients and their families have three basic questions that the practice needs to answer succinctly and effectively, explains Dortch: "Patients want to know, 'Will this work for me?' then 'Can I commit the time that's required?' and finally, 'How will I pay for this?'"

The fee presentation is made after the initial consultation. "We present a global fee and four payment options," Dortch explains. These options include patient financing through the CareCredit credit card. "I'll go through CareCredit brochures, and a lot of people say, 'I already have CareCredit,' which they opened at their dentist or vet."

Patient financing is presented to every patient, not just select ones, Dortch explains, and financing in some form is selected by about 20-40 percent of patients. About half of the patients in the practice are kids, but patients range in age from toddlers to octogenarians, including stroke victims in rehabilitation.

Notably, the practice does not accept direct payment from third-party plans, though it works to help patients get reimbursed whenever possible. Scholarships are offered in hardship cases, and every attempt is made to help patients and families to receive needed services.

On occasion, a patient or parent brings up concerns with cost at intake. "We say, 'We have an option through Care Credit,'" Dortch explains. A CareCredit banner also is posted on the practice website.

Maintaining continual referrals and effective billing are essential in a specialty practice that does not provide primary care. "We see our patients for 6-12 months, then send them back to their primary eyecare provider," Dortch explains. "So we need to be good at generating referrals, and we need to be focused on it."

Staff Discussions and Action Points

Communicating with patient financing is a team effort. The following are discussion points for staff meetings, along with actions to be assigned and implemented.

DISCUSSION

Patients are online researchers. How well positioned are we for consumers to reach us online when they explore providers? How well do we tell our story?

ACTION

Analyze. What does our digital presence say about our services? How well do we express our full mission? Do our reviews reinforce our story? What can we do to improve our messaging and generate more referrals?

DISCUSSION

Patients are offline researchers, too. How easily can consumers learn about us offline? Where and what would they find and hear about how great our services are? Our payment options?

ACTION

Plan. Make a plan to improve networking and personal connections to other medical specialists, schools and community organizations. Plan school visits and "Thank You, Community!" fun days that includes staff and their families.

DISCUSSION

Know how consumers make decisions. Consumers want to know about our reputation, access to care, and cost and payment options.

ACTION

Establish protocols. Determine the best presentations and language to let patients know that we offer patient financing. Present financing to all, but individualize options.

The Patient Path to Purchase

Examining the Patient Journey Through Patient Financing

RESOURCES

Free “Patient Path to Purchase” Resources

The following resources, all available at no cost from CareCredit, are designed to enable ECPs and staff to build their practices as they apply the findings from the “Patient Path to Purchase” research. For all the resources CareCredit has available to help you optimize opportunity along the patient journey, call 800.859.9975 (press 1, then 6). Ready to add CareCredit? Call 866-853-8432.

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