

# **A Survey of Michigan Optometrists' Marketing Techniques for Promotion of Their Practice**

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## **Abstract:**

*Background:* This study provides useful information about the various forms of advertising Michigan optometrists are utilizing to promote their practices, and which of these forms have been most successful for them. This project analyzed many different modes of advertising including yellow pages, websites, recall systems etc. and the percent of the gross revenue spent on each individual strategy. Another addition to the information analyzed in this study was the specific promotion strategies used by optometrists who have recently taken a partner into their practice.

*Methods:* A survey was mailed out to 120 Michigan optometrists found through the Michigan Optometric Association website. The survey consisted of 13 multiple choice questions and one essay question specifically to be answered by those who have taken a partner into their practice.

*Results:* Based on the results of this study, it was determined that the vast majority of optometrists administer a recall system as their primary source of internal marketing and use the newspaper as their dominant external promotion mode. Most optometrists have a small advertisement in the yellow pages. However, over half of those who do not currently have an advertisement, used to have an advertisement but terminated it because it was either too expensive or they were not getting the desired results. The vast majority of optometrists report that word of mouth is by far the most effective promotion their practice has received.

*Conclusions:* Michigan optometrists utilize a wide variety of different practice promotion strategies. However, this study proves that certain strategies are used more frequently and with more success by the majority of optometrists.

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## **Introduction**

Practice promotion can be a very large factor in the success of your optometric business. The internal and external promotion strategies for optometric practices are very crucial in maintaining a strong relationship with their current patients, and also to entice new patients to come to their clinic. Considering the vast selection of options available today to promote your practice in your community, it can be difficult for optometrists to know which method of advertisement will be the most effective for their practice and which could potentially be wasting their dollar. For example, with the accessibility and speed of the internet, some optometrists feel that fewer patients will be using the yellow pages; therefore, making it more beneficial to divert their advertising dollars towards a website.

This survey was designed to obtain information regarding practice promotion among Michigan optometrists. The data gathered in this study reveals important information regarding the total money spent on practice promotion, which types of promotions are being used, and which modes are most effective. In addition, the survey also specifically focuses on optometrists that have taken a partner into their practice and the individual promotion strategies that were used to support their new addition. The survey responses have been statistically analyzed and presented in hopes to give new and established OD's a greater sense of how to successfully promote their practices.

## **Methods**

A fourteen question survey and cover letter was created and mailed out to 120

Michigan optometrists. The recipients were chosen from the Michigan Optometric Association website and were equally distributed throughout the state. Of the 120 total surveys mailed out, 20 were sent to each larger metropolitan “area” in the state including: Grand Rapids, Detroit, Saginaw/Bay City, and Flint. The remaining 60 surveys were reserved for smaller towns in mid-Michigan, the Upper Peninsula, and northern Michigan regions. The survey was sent to both male and female optometrists of all age ranges and from different practice settings. Once the optometrist completed the survey, they were able to return it to the Michigan College of Optometry in a pre-addressed envelope. There were no markings on the envelopes or any indicators revealing who had filled out the survey in order to keep the optometrists anonymous. The deadline for this survey to be completed and returned was November 1<sup>st</sup>, giving the recipients just over two months to finish the survey. A total of 60 surveys were completed and returned to be evaluated using a combination of statistical tools and descriptive analysis.

**Results:**

Out of the 120 surveys mailed out, 60 were completed and returned. The surveys came from a wide range of regions throughout the state including: Detroit, Grand Rapids, Saginaw/Bay City, Flint, mid-Michigan, Northern Michigan, the Upper Peninsula, and smaller towns in the surrounding areas. Of the 60 returned, four were discarded due to failure to provide pertinent information.



### *Advertising Budget*

When asked about the percent of their budget optometrists spend on advertising, the most common response was 1-2% (n=31). The next most common advertising budget was 3-4% (n=20), followed by 6-8% (n=5). No doctors spent 10% or above (n=0).

1-2%	55%
3-4%	36%
6-8%	9%
10%	0%

### *Internal Promotion*

54% of optometrists use recalls as their primary means of internal marketing (n=28), making it by far the most popular mode of internal promotion. Direct mailings were the second most common mode of internal marketing (n=18), followed by practice surveys (n=15), and lastly patient newsletters (n=11). Note some respondents chose multiple answers for this question indicating that more than one internal promotion strategy is used in their office. In addition to the four multiple choice options, some doctors included additional modes of internal promotion. These included:

Recalls	54%
Direct Mailing	19%
Practice Surveys	16%
Newsletters	11%

- Emails to patients
- Coupons
- Referral thank you's
- Website
- Letter to every patient after the exam

*Yellow Pages*

In assessing the effectiveness of yellow page ads, optometrists were asked whether or not they had an ad in the yellow pages. Of the respondents, 64% of optometrists had an ad in the yellow pages (n=36), leaving 36% of optometrists that just had their name in the general listings (n=20). Of the 64% who responded “yes” to having an ad in the yellow pages, those optometrists were then asked to specify the size of their ad. The most common size yellow page ad is 1/4<sup>th</sup> of a page (n=24), followed by 1/8<sup>th</sup> of a page (n=11), and the least popular ad space is 1/2 of a page (n=1). Note that two doctors added that they had just recently downsized their ad in the phone book.

<b>Table 3a: Percentage of Optometrists Who Have an Ad in the Yellow Pages and the Size of the Ad</b>	
Yes	64%
No	36%
<b>3b: Size of the Yellow Page Ad of the 64% who Responded Yes to the Previous Question</b>	
1/8 a page	67%
1/4 a page	30%
1/2 a page	3%

Of the 36% of optometrists who responded “no” to having an ad in the yellow pages, they were asked to clarify if they once had an ad in the phone book. 60% (n=12) of the 20 optometrists who do not have an ad in the yellow pages did have one in the past, while 40% (n=8) never had a business ad in the phone book. The 12 optometrists who responded that they used to have an ad in the yellow pages, but no longer do, then specified the reasons as to why they removed their business ad from the phone book. The most frequent response was that the yellow pages was not an effective form of promotion for their practice (n=7). Other

<b>Table 4a: Percentage of Optometrists Who Have Had an Ad in the Yellow Pages In the Past</b>	
Used to Have an Ad	60%
Have Never Had an Ad	40%
<b>4b: Reasons Why They No Longer Have an Ad in the Yellow Pages</b>	
Not An Effective form of Promotion	n=7
Expensive	n=5
Not Getting Results	n= 3
Other	n= 2

causes for the ineffectiveness of the yellow pages were: increased expense (n=5), lack of desired results (n=3), and other reasons not specified by the practitioner (n=2). Note some respondents chose multiple answers for this question indicating that there is more than one explanation as to why they are no longer utilizing the yellow pages as a form of promotion for their practice.

*Website*

Of the respondents, 48% (n=27) reported that they had a website for their practice, while the other 51% (n=29) did not. Of these 49% who utilize a website for the promotion of

Yes	48%
No	52%

their practice, 92.5% (n=25) did not know how many “hits” their website gets a week. Of the two optometrists who did know how many times their website was viewed per week, one stated he received 50 “hits”, while the other OD received 100 “hits”.

*External Promotion*

The most commonly used form of external marketing among optometrists is the local newspaper, 49% (n=41). Radio was the next most popular external marketing tool with 21% (n=18), followed by the internet which was selected by 12% (n=10) of respondents. Television and local magazines were the least recorded response, each was chosen by 9% (n=8) of optometrists.

Local Newspaper	49%
Radio	21%
Internet	12%
Television	9%
Local Magazines	9%

Note some respondents chose multiple answers for this question indicating that more than one external promotion strategy is used in their office. In addition to the choices that were provided, some doctors also supplemented their own responses in regards to alternative forms of external marketing that has been effective for their practice. These included:

- Sponsoring local golf outings/community events
- Getting involved in local school events
- Sponsoring local sports teams and 4H animals
- Placemats at local restaurants
- Door to door handouts
- Free vision screenings
- Church bulletins
- Advertisements at local movie theatres and hockey rinks

*Recalls*

Optometrists were surveyed as to which type of recall system is used in their practice. 54% (n=44) of respondents indicated that the direct mailing recall system is used most commonly in their office. Pre-appointments were the second most common response with 29% (n=24) of optometrists utilizing this recall method, followed by 17% (n=14) of respondents who prefer calling their patients to schedule their appointments. Optometrists were also given the opportunity to include additional recall systems used in their office; however, this option received 0 (n=0) responses. Note

Direct Mailing	54%
Pre-appoint	29%
Phone Calls	17%
Other	0%

some respondents chose multiple answers for this question indicating that more than one recall system is used in their office.

### *Most Effective Promotion Strategy*

The respondents were asked to identify which promotion strategy has been most effective for their practice. The responses are:

- Word of mouth (n=21)
- Pre-appointment recalls (n=5)
- Internal Marketing (n=4)
- Phone Book (n=3)
- TV (n=2)
- Newspaper (n=1)
- Location (n=1)
- Website (n=1)
- Insurance Provider/VSP Provider (n=1)

### *Partnership Practices*

34% (n=19) of optometrists surveyed have taken a partner into their practice, leaving a remaining 66% (n=37) who have not. The 34% of respondents who stated they have brought another optometrist into their practice were asked to identify what they did specifically to promote the new partner within their community. The responses were as follows:

- Newspaper article (n=11)
- Newsletter to patients (n=6)

- Established optometrists “bragged” about skills of new optometrist to patients (n=3)
- Got new optometrist involved in community activities (n=2)
- Introduced new optometrist to all the social clubs current optometrist belongs to (n=2)
- Ad playing during “hold” message at office (n=2)
- Website (n=2)
- Radio (n=2)
- Nothing (n=2)
- Personal introduction to referral docs and PCPs (n=1)
- Included new doc in school “in service” vision presentations (n=1)

## **Discussion**

This study provides valuable information regarding the promotion methods of optometry practices in Michigan with the data gathered from ODs throughout the state. Based on the results of the promotion portion of this survey, it was determined that the majority of optometrists in Michigan allocate 1-2% of their total budget towards practice promotion, while none spend over 8% on promotion. Of this 1-2% promotion budget, optometrists then need to divide their resources between internal and external promotion. According to the Williams Group, a company dedicated to productivity solutions for optometric practices, more of your advertising budget should be spent on internal marketing than external marketing.<sup>1</sup> The survey revealed that the respondents predominantly used recalls as their main form of internal promotion. Direct mailings, newsletters, and practice surveys were by far less commonly used by optometrists in comparison to recalls as a means of internal promotion.

Once optometrists specified how much of their budget they spent on promotion and selected what internal method they spend the majority of their promotion resources on, they were then asked to specify how they spent the rest of their funds on external promotion. Almost half of the respondents chose local newspaper as their main method of external practice promotion. Other modes not as commonly used were radio, internet, TV, and local magazines. Optometrists were also given the option of adding further forms of external promotion that were unique to their practice. There was a wide range of responses indicating that there are many additional methods to promote your practice within your community aside from the traditional forms that are predominately used. Some optometrists included promotion modes that were similar to the answers provided (newspaper, radio, TV, internet, and magazines) like advertisements at hockey rinks, restaurant menus, and movie theatres. However, other respondents included additional forms of external promotion that not only publicized their practice, but also got them involved in helping their community through sponsoring local sports teams, 4H animals and free vision screenings.

Aside from the forms of external promotion that had been investigated thus far, the respondents were also asked to the focus specifically on their yellow page usage. A greater percentage of the optometrists surveyed did have an ad in the yellow pages. The most popular size yellow page ad was  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a page. However, it is interesting to note that 60% of the optometrists who do not currently have an ad in the yellow pages did have an ad in the past. The most common reason why these optometrist no longer have a yellow page ad was that it was not an effective form of promotion and also that it got too

expensive. According to Phil Reifenberg, a partner with *Improved Results, LLC*, internet search engines are superior to yellow book ads for many different reasons. First of all, the internet is much more convenient and accessible to use from the privacy of your own home, office, or cell phone.<sup>2</sup> In addition, without the costs of printing, mailing/distributing and sales rep fees, the internet is a much cheaper alternative to yellow pages.<sup>2</sup> The internet also has no advertisement commitment level and more ad flexibility.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Reifenberg also states in his article yet another reason why the internet is more advanced than the phone book is because when a future patron is looking up optometrists in the yellow pages, they are indirectly getting a list of all your competitors, their addresses and phone numbers.<sup>2</sup> The internet offers a faster and easier alternative to do a quick specific search.<sup>2</sup> With the dramatically increasing use of the internet and the ease of the World Wide Web, this survey reveals some optometrists are not getting the expected results that the yellow pages once offered.

Due to the ever growing popularity and simplicity of the internet, many optometrists have created websites to promote their practice online. Almost half (49%) of the respondents have a website for their practice. A noteworthy observation however, is that only two of the 26 respondents knew how many hits a week their website receives. One optometrist receives 50 hits per week, while the other receives “hundreds”.

The survey asked optometrists to specify which type of recall system has been most effective for their practice. By far, direct mailings were the most frequent response amongst the optometrists, with pre-appointments and phone calls not receiving as many responses. However, some doctors did choose more than one answer for this particular



question. Of the 44 doctors who chose direct mailings as a form of recall, 13 of these doctors also selected pre-appointments as an additional method. Some of these optometrists further explained that they initially aim to pre-appoint 100% of their patients; however, they do send them a direct mailing reminding them of their upcoming appointment. In addition, six of the 44 optometrists who selected direct mailing as a recall system also chose phone calls. Some optometrists gave additional information specifying that they initially send a direct mailing to the patient to remind them to schedule their annual exam and if the patient does not call and schedule their exam, the office then calls their home.

After the survey asked optometrists to identify how much they spend on promotion and what specific types of internal and external marketing they use (including yellow pages and internet), they responded to which type of promotion method was most effective for their practice. Although the majority of respondents gave more than one answer, word of mouth was significantly the most repeated answer regarding the best form of promotion for optometrists. It appears that although internal and external promotion is important, the most crucial aspect to be considered in the success of an optometry practice is the impression you and your practice make on your patients. If patients are pleased with the services they have received at your optometry practice, their high praise can be more effective than any form of advertising money can buy.

Of the optometrists surveyed, 37% of them had taken an associate into their practice at one point in time. In order to promote the new associate in the community, a large number of these respondents put an ad in the newspaper and sent a letter out to their

patient population. Other doctors seemed more concerned with involving the associate in community activities and also having them joining service clubs in town.

## **Conclusion**

Internal and external practice promotions are crucial to the success of an optometric practice. This survey revealed that there are many different types of promotion and marketing approaches used amongst optometrists. However, when examining both internal and external promotion there was a specific response that predominated each category. Recalls were by far the most frequently used mode of internal promotion, while local newspaper ads received the most responses for external promotion. Yellow page ads have possibly started to fall out of favor with some optometrists due to their ineffectiveness and increasing expense, while optometry internet websites will most likely continue to be on the rise. Optometrists have found that one form of promotion may have been more effective than another for their particular office, community, patient base etc., which is why it is important to consider all of the promotion options mentioned in this survey in order to find which approach may be the most successful for you. However, according to a large majority of this survey's respondents, it is the experience the patient has at your office with you and your staff that will make that patient want to refer you to their friends and family.

## APPENDIX 1: Practice Promotion Survey

1. How many years has your practice been established?
2. What percent of your gross revenue do you spend on advertising?
  - a. 1-2%
  - b. 3-4%
  - c. 6-8%
  - d. 10%
3. What types of internal marketing do you use in your practice?
  - a. Direct mailing
  - b. Newsletters
  - c. Practice surveys
  - d. Recalls
  - e. Other:
4. Do you have an ad in the yellow pages?
  - a. yes
  - b. no
5. What size is your ad in the yellow pages?
  - a. quarter page
  - b. half page
  - c. full page
  - d. I don't have an add, I just have my practice name and number in the general listings
6. If you answered "no" in question number 4, did you previously have an ad in the yellow pages?
  - a. yes
  - b. no
7. If you answered "yes" to the previous question, why did you decide to stop using the yellow pages as a form of advertising? (circle all that apply)
  - a. got too expensive
  - b. not getting the desired results
  - c. was not an effective form of promotion for the practice
  - d. other:
8. Do you have a website?
  - a. yes
  - b. no

9. If you answered “yes” to the previous question, do you know how many “hits” you get on your website a week?
10. What other forms of advertising do you use? (circle all that apply)
- a. Internet
  - b. Radio
  - c. Television
  - d. Local Newspaper
  - e. Local Magazines
  - f. Other:
11. What type of recall system do you use?
- a. Pre-appoint
  - b. Direct mailing
  - c. Phone calls
  - d. Other:
12. Please indicate which form of advertising has been most effective for your practice:
13. Have you ever taken in a partner into your practice?
- a. yes
  - b. no
14. If you answered yes, please explain what did you do specifically to market your new partner entering your practice?

## **APPENDIX 2: Cover Letter Mailed with Promotion Survey**

Dear Dr.

Hello, my name is Bekah Noss and I am a fourth year optometry student at the Michigan College of Optometry. For my senior project, I am surveying Michigan optometrists about their approach to advertising and marketing. Graduation is right around the corner and I will soon be out on my own. I feel this project will be very valuable to me as a future optometrist as it will help me gather a broad prospective from practicing optometrists as to what works best for promoting your practice.

I am very aware how busy you are as a practicing optometrist, which is why I have tried to make my survey as short and simple to complete as possible. I really appreciate your efforts to assist me in gathering data to analyze for my senior project.

## References

1. "Career Advocate for the New Practitioner". The Williams Group.
2. [http://www.expertlaw.com/library/practice\\_management/website\\_roi.html](http://www.expertlaw.com/library/practice_management/website_roi.html)