

The story of Optometry News Network

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In the spring of 2006, Dr. Hari Amarnath and Dr. John Peacock sat down to review the independent consultant's report that they had commissioned to help them analyze the business opportunities and strengths of their Alliston, Ontario optometry clinic. The two doctors, who operate the New Tecumseth Optometry Clinic (NTOC), had recently invested nearly two hundred thousand dollars renovating their main street heritage building and were looking for an outside opinion on ways that they could improve the overall patient experience and at the same time support the business objective of growing the clinic dispensing revenues.

The recommendations of that report led the two ODs to embark on a search for a customizable waiting room display product that could highlight the value of their clinic's products and services and deliver positive impacts to their clinic's bottom line.

Dr. Amarnath: "Before starting up NTOC, John and I were practicing at two of the more progressive clinics in Canada. We knew about existing waiting room display products for optometrists, but they were either too narrowly focused on eye conditions, or they suffered from stale content where the information hadn't been updated in months or even years. We liked the idea of educating patients on eye health, but that alone wasn't enough. To keep the patient's attention over the span of their waiting time the content would have to be entertaining, informative and visually appealing."

After a lengthy and exhaustive product search, the two doctors came away with two key learnings: one, that the product that they envisioned did not currently exist in the market place; and two, if they wanted such a product in their clinic, they would have to build it themselves. So, after months of planning and product development, drawing upon an array of technology consultants and service providers, the two doctors announced the launch of Optometry News Network.

A new marketing channel

Dr. Amarnath says that while ONN may be viewed as "high-tech", he sees the product as a solution to what can be a delicate business problem. "As doctors we need to be careful how we present to patients the full range of product and services available at our clinic. We don't want to come across like we're selling anything, but at the same time we know that if we're not educating our patients on the value we can offer them, then there's a good chance they will leave our clinic to make an uninformed buying decision."

"One area for improvement that stood out to us in the report was the opportunity to promote the array of products and services we offer within our own reception and waiting areas. You only have the patient in your office for a short amount of time, and our selection of Maclean's and Time magazines weren't doing anything to help us meet our business objectives.

Dr. John Peacock

"Most large corporate retailers don't provide anywhere close to the level of post-purchase service we offer, and many patients don't know the true apples-to-apples value comparison. Now, ONN lets us communicate directly to our patients and there's no worry about it coming across as a sales pitch."

With the ever-growing threat posed by large corporate entrants in the optometric retail market, Dr. Peacock feels ONN can be a powerful tool for the independent optometrists. "The big box stores and corporate chains have the resources to broadcast their marketing campaigns to the general public over traditional media channels. However, those broadcast commercials typically only reach a tiny fraction of the overall target market. In contrast, ONN is a 'narrow-casting' marketing tool that speaks directly to

patients faced with imminent optometric buying decisions."

Doctor Peacock says ONN works complementary with existing external marketing efforts. Where external advertising helps to grow the clinic patient list, ONN is focused on delivering business benefit in the form of revenue per patient. "The value that ONN delivers is pretty straightforward - it highlights the specific products and services of that very clinic to a captive audience that is already sitting there because they have an eye care need."

The basic ONN package is comprised of a media player and a high resolution 32" LCD display screen that can be wall or ceiling mounted. The ONN channel itself consists of headline news as well as entertainment and sports news provided by Canadian Press, while local weather forecasts are from The Weather Network. Clinic specific information and promotional material can be selected from a catalogue of pre-designed messages or you can ask for your own customized material to suit the needs of your individual practice.

The two doctors have come a long way in only eighteen months and are looking optimistically to the next eighteen months as word continues to spread about ONN.

"Ideally, we'd like to see this become a staple product in the Canadian independent optometry clinic. Clearly we think there's an obvious and very real value proposition with ONN, and it feels good to be able to offer a service that strengthens the position of the independent optometrist in today's fiercely competitive environment," says Dr. Peacock.

ONN is now available to Canadian Optometrists for \$149 per month for a single screen package. For additional pricing and product demonstration, you can find ONN on the web at: www.clinicalnetworks.ca. ♦