**Selling to Different Generations: What You Need To Know**

Customers shopping for eyewear come in all shapes and sizes—as well as all generations. Everyone knows the best way to get the patient’s needs met is by listening to what they are looking for and offering them solutions that match. But are you able to truly understand what customers of different generations want? Most of us communicate the way we like to be communicated with—and much of that preference has to do with our generational affiliation. Here are five tips on how to sell more effectively to a customer who is not your age:

1. **Recognize that different generations exist.** You are currently serving approximately five generations according to sociological experts. Today’s kids through those in their early twenties are Generation Z. Early twenties through mid-thirties patients are identified as Millennials. Generation X are your middle-aged customers. Baby Boomers—who are actually the only generation officially recognized by the United States Census Bureau-- are those born between 1946-1964. Those born 1945 or earlier are your oldest patients: the Traditionalists.
2. **Expect generational commonalities but don’t stereotype.** Overall, Traditionalists tend to defer to experts, particularly in healthcare. They also tend to be loyal to long-time providers. Further, when serving new Traditionalist customers, it will probably be important to invest some time a building rapport with them. But not every Traditionalist will be loyal, defer to you, or care about you getting to know him or her personally.

Millennials and Generation Z tend to shop around ahead of time and are going to want information about your products and services online.Be sure your digital footprint is up-to-date, and you are actively seeking positive reviews that will impress them. Generation Z customers also often have much shorter attention spans than the other generations. That said, some of your younger patients may not research ahead, will rely more on your recommendations and expertise, and have plenty of patience for considering several product and service options.

1. **Make scheduling with you easy for each generation.** Generally speaking, the younger a customer is, the more likely he or she will want to schedule online through e-mail, text, an app, or a website. But most Traditionalists and many Baby Boomers still want to talk to a human being when making an appointment. What can you do to ensure you are accommodating the scheduling preferences of as many generations as possible?
2. **Be aware of generational references you make that may not make sense to a patient of a different age.** For example, let’s say you are an optician and a patient says he wants glasses exactly like Superman. What do you show him first? Are we talking about Henry Cavill, Christopher Reeve, or Dean Cain? Or possibly even George Reeves?

Know that you can make mistakes with understanding references and giving good examples whether you are older—or younger—than your customer. For example, if you are older than most of your colleagues, vendors, or customers, be cautious about references that may seem “dated.” But at the same time, be aware that responses like “that must have been before my time” to an older customer may be insulting. It’s more sensitive to mention that you simply don’t understand a comment.

1. **Read body language and facial expressions**. If you aren’t sure if a question or remark made sense to a customer of a different generation, just look at your patient. Sometimes people don’t overtly tell you that they don’t understand a remark for fear of seeming ignorant. However you will usually observe confusion expressed in body language and/or facial expressions.

The more we understand what makes our customers different, the better we can meet their needs. Just as we want to be sensitive to patients of different socioeconomic groups, culture, religions and sexual orientations, we also want to build awareness of how generational affiliation impacts communication preferences and needs.

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