Our patients are faced with more options for their eye care than ever before. The competition has become an anonymous opponent; it is located universally, available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week; and seen if patients choose to view them or not. It is social media. Some social media sights claims, “two for one,” or offer prices that are outlandishly low, prices that seem impossible for us to compete with.

Another frequently seen advertisement promotes a free eye exam. These ads constantly inundate our patients! Still other sights suggest that any one is capable of, and provide instructions to our patients to self-measure segment heights, and pupillary distance! It seems to publicly broadcast a devaluation of our optical competence.

Is it possible to remain a skilled and valued expert in our patient’s view when social media advertisements clearly do not advocate our expertise? Are we able to create and maintain patient loyalty amidst all the healthcare changes and added competition?

The answer is yes, providing we maintain our focus on what we unmistakably do best, provide our patients with the very best personal, hands-on quality eye care.

When we liken building patient loyalty to assembling a puzzle, it becomes clear multiple pieces are required. Building a puzzle with a strong foundation insures the puzzle strength. Likewise, starting with a strong foundation is essential when we begin to build patient loyalty.

The first piece of our foundation to our loyalty puzzle is trust. We begin to build trust with a reliance on the integrity we demonstrate when providing our patients’ with improved eye health and vision. Allowing our patients to understand as their eye care providers, our goal is to enrich and enhance their lives with better-quality vision and improved eye health.

Value is the next piece to our loyalty puzzle foundation. When a recommendation is made for a specific eye care product, it becomes our responsibility to interpret their
benefits. Allowing our patients to understand the importance and usefulness. They will then comprehend the value each product is for their continued eye care.

Our professional skills are an important piece to the loyalty foundation. By understanding the significance of our optical skills, we understand the need to continue to hone them. When we discover new product available to offer our patients, we must continue to become educated on their use and benefits for our patient’s individual needs.

Confidence and skill go hand-in-hand. Skill is the last piece to our loyalty puzzle foundation. When we are confident in our own skills, our patients then become confident in us. It is important our patient’s have confidence that we are capable of providing them with the most advanced eye care, and eye care products available. With continued supervision, we will promote our patients’ individual eye health. When we are established as their eye care providers, we then become an important instrument for maintaining their overall medical health.

As we build on our loyalty puzzle we understand that referrals are a valuable piece. Only the very unhappy and the very happy patients will have something to talk about to family and friends. It is up to us if they become our largest critics or greatest advocates. We strive daily to ensure the very happy patients continue to be predominating in our practice, continuing to refer family and friends is a guarantee for continued practice growth.

Familiarity is an important piece to the loyalty puzzle and begins before our patients become our patients, when they view us as recognizable members of the community.
Volunteering or speaking in a public, or a community event will help us to become familiar to our potential patients.
With familiarity comes comfort. A patient will appreciate the comfort and return, becoming a loyal patient.

Utilization of social media is a valuable tool for our practice, and now also becomes a piece of the patient loyalty puzzle. Permitting patients to observe our practice day to day. Email, blogs, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram allow us the ability to announce a new frame line, a frame event, or new instrumentation. Advise can be offered for maintaining healthy eyes; a subject that will serve both as communication, and public service. We are able to announce all commendations and awards earned by our doctors and team members. It will continually encourage interaction with patients, and prospective loyal patients. It permits continued communication between routine office visits.
Partnering with communication companies that use social media as a marketing tool with healthcare providers; creating surveys, progress checks, birthday, and appointment confirmation calls, texts, or emails save countless staff hours, but should never eliminate the necessity for personal calls to be made.
Some loyalty puzzles pieces do not fit; and are pieces that block patient loyalty:
One of the most important pieces of the puzzle to avoid is extended wait time for
appointments to begin. Delays are sometimes inevitable, but communication
concerning possible delays will offer the security that they have not been forgotten,
and we value their time. Providing the knowledge the appointment will begin as
soon as possible.

Accounting errors are a puzzle piece to avoid. It leads to angry emotions, combined
with a feeling that we have taken advantage of our patients’ financially. Should an
accounting error arise, it is always best to remember the old adage “The Customer is
Always Right.” Make certain all the facts are known, and then handle it with
compassion. If a patient is unable to pay the account in full at that time, suggesting
an alternate financial institution can accommodate their current financial situation.

If our patients’ request a specific day and time for their appointment, that is not
available, it is important to use tact when scheduling, or allow some flexibility, it can
be a helpful piece to our puzzle.
When a patient is forced to wait for an appointment, it is advantageous to offer a
wait or re-schedule list (it is essential to avoid a negative term such as “cancelation
list”). It is a great tool that help our patient understand they’re appointment is not
scheduled at a date distant enough for them to be forgotten, but we provide them
with the confidence they are on a wait list that is constantly being monitored and
maintained.

Working together each team member plays an important role when assembling the
patient loyalty puzzle. Proper telephone etiquette is important; as it is almost
always the first communication patients have with our practice. Speaking with a
smile will change the tone of voice, making it sound happy and sunny. Receiving
patient comments that our happy voice is a great way to begin a conversation.

The greeting made by the front desk team can dictate the atmosphere of our
patient’s visit. It is vital for a positive patient experience that the first impression is
upbeat. When the entire office team is held accountable for beginning every visit
with a positive greeting, we eliminate the chance of creating a negative atmosphere
for our patient.

When assembling the patient loyalty puzzle we must remember our patients are
acutely aware of their surroundings. Make sure the reception area is clean and
clutter free. It should feel comfortable with an easy understandable movement.
Each examination room should be made comfortable. Counter tops clean and clutter
free, instruments always in their place.
Frame rooms hold a little drama and color; it will encourage some excitement from
our patients as they view it for the first time, or after countless times.

This is where the pieces come together, and complete the loyalty puzzle.
We gain loyal patients when patients’ understand their lives have been enriched and enhanced by improved or perfect vision. Together with trust, and confidence they have received the best quality eyewear and eye care. Encouraging them to refer family and friends, inspiring them, as they become our loyal patient, while helping our practice to grow.