

SUMMER 2017

**Vision Correction For the Ages:**

A four-part series of generational insights

# Part 1: Millennials & LASIK

INSIGHTS INTO HOW TO ATTRACT AND CREATE  
MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES FOR THE NEXT  
GENERATION OF LASIK PATIENTS



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# The Millennial-LASIK Connection

THIS LARGE DEMOGRAPHIC IS FINDING  
THAT LASIK IS A GREAT FIT

**M**illennials are now America's largest generation. Born 1981 to 1997, the group is 75.4 million strong, surpassing 74.9 million baby boomers (born 1946-1964) and about 66 million members of gen X (born 1965-1980).<sup>1</sup> No longer the nation's "kids" (a title now claimed by a group demographers not-so-originally referred to as the "post-millennial" generation), millennials are now 20 to 36 years old. It is a diverse group, encompassing those still in college or just joining the workforce and still dependent, at least in part, on their parents, as well as 30-somethings with established careers and homes. Interestingly, nearly 30% of millennials are parents.<sup>2</sup>

With such a wide disparity in age and lifestyle, why do we so often see the millennial generation referred to not merely as an age group, but instead as a unified demographic? What exactly unites them?

These questions have been the subject of endless research and analysis. Most importantly for today's ophthalmic practices, research into millennial values, consumer habits, and healthcare preferences can lay out a clear path to acquiring a new millennial LASIK customer base — and a source of long-term, organic growth. The following are key insights that reveal how this group views health and finances.

» **Choosing LASIK already:** In 2014 and 2015, about 62.9% of refractive surgery patients were aged 18 to 34, compared with about 19.65% being aged 35 to 44, 9.15% 45 to 54, and 8.35% 55 to 64.<sup>3</sup>

» **Lamenting their eyeglasses and contact lenses:** In an international study, 80% of millennials said wearing glasses or contact lenses impeded their lifestyle. Vision correction was inconvenient to interests and hobbies for 76%; inconvenient to work and study for 73%; a travel inconvenience for 75%; and a love life woe for 46%. Of those who had undergone LASIK, 62% did so for convenience, followed by 23% for appearance.<sup>4</sup>

» **Seeking a healthy lifestyle:** One study showed that millennials look at health not as the absence of disease or injury, but rather as a more holistic lifestyle that includes healthy habits and relationships with

family and friends. And, while all age groups place longevity high on their lists of reasons to get and stay healthy, millennials far exceed other groups — 64% compared with a 53% average of other generations — in their desire to be healthy as a way to benefit/preserve their youthful appearance.<sup>5</sup>

» **Building credit:** Although many patients may not be willing to use cash on hand for procedures not covered by insurance, they may be open to financing. Millennials, the source of 40% of Facebook's money talk, worry about debt and credit scores, and say they need financial guidance. Some 46% are using credit cards to build credit, while 36% say they enjoy the flexibility that credit affords them.<sup>6</sup>

» **Recommending their doctors through social media:** A study showed that among young millennials aged 18 to 24, 80% would share health information on social media, and almost 90% would use social media for health activities or to find health information they perceive as reliable (much higher numbers than patients aged 45 and older).<sup>7</sup> Patients ages 18 to 24 trust doctor recommendations from friends and family almost twice as much as other age groups, and 42% use published online reviews to find a doctor.<sup>8</sup>

» **Translation:** Millennials share many of their experiences through social media, including what they consider to be exciting health information, such as a successful LASIK procedure that frees them from their eyeglasses. These posts can quickly be seen by hundreds of people and drive new patients into your practice.

## A Promising Outlook

The numbers look promising for LASIK. The procedure fits nicely into millennials' goals for vision and health. They may be able to afford LASIK outright or some may be very willing to finance it. They are already choosing LASIK, and those numbers will increase with the right information. With help from millennial LASIK experts Shanda P. Ross, OD, and Keisha M. Reedus, Clinical Director and Practice Administrator at Clarity Refractive Services, a TLC Laser Eye Center affiliate in

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# Model Millennial Practices

## NOT A MILLENNIAL EXPERT? FOLLOW THE STRATEGIES OF PRACTICES ALREADY GROWING THEIR LASIK PATIENT BASE

**W**ith the oldest millennials reaching age 36, some practices have been at work capturing patients of this generation for some time. However, many practices have not actively pursued potential LASIK patients in this demographic ... yet. Here, experts provide tips on how to turn this influential generation's spending power and vision goals into long-term practice growth.

### The Millennial Patient Base

Clarity Refractive Services, a full-service eyecare practice and TLC Laser Eye Center location in West Orange, N.J., is a popular choice for millennials who want LASIK. Knowing that the impact of millennials is being felt across the healthcare and retail worlds, Clarity's Clinical Director Shanda P. Ross, OD, and Practice Administrator Keisha M. Reedus did in-depth research on this demographic. By putting their knowledge into strategic action, they have molded clarity into a model for attracting new millennial patients.

"The millennial generation is expected to spend more than \$200 billion annually in 2017, and close to \$10 trillion in their lifetime. Therefore, millennials are critical to the future success of our business," says Dr. Ross. "The more we understand what attracts millennials to a practice, the better equipped we are to engage and capture them. Today, about 75% of our patients fall into the millennial generation, in part because of our successful efforts to learn about these patients and get them into the practice."

Another model millennial practice is Gordon Schanzlin New Vision Institute, a TLC Laser Eye Center in San Diego. Administrator Cathi Lyons assures her peers that the steps required to attract millennials often come naturally.

"We have employees and doctors of various ages, so we don't have any problem relating or appealing to all ages. We talk as a group about how millennials and individuals in other generations like to be listened to and addressed," Lyons says. "Millennials are a lot of fun to work with, and we enjoy having them in the office."

Janelle Hartmann, a public relations and marketing

director at Filutowski Cataract & LASIK Institute in Lake Mary, FL, say her practice is seeing more millennials getting LASIK now compared with just a few years ago. Hartmann has been struck by how they find their way to the procedure.

"They're not compulsive buyers; online research and communication with friends carry a lot of weight in

### CARECREDIT RESOURCES

The majority (81%) of Millennial consumers say they use web searches for healthcare information. CareCredit offers an Advertising Toolkit with a wealth of resources to help you attract and interact with patients online.

#### The CareCredit Social Media Toolkit helps you quickly engage in the online conversation.



- **Click and share.** Choose from a reserve of prewritten posts and tweets about LASIK and financing can help you give key info patients want. With the touch of a button, instantly "share" these posts on your practice Facebook page and Twitter feed. It's almost effortless.

#### The CareCredit Advertising Toolkit has web resources to help remove the cost barrier during online search.



- **Banners and Buttons.** Available in a variety of colors and sizes to complement any website, these can easily be added to your website to let patients know financing is available.
- **Easy access.** Patients can apply for CareCredit directly from your website, and come with a way to fit LASIK into their budget.\*\*

#### The CareCredit Payment Calculator lets patients instantly see how budget-friendly LASIK can be.



- **Share online.** Add the calculator to your practice website to make it easy for potential patients to estimate monthly payments.
- **Share in-office.** Use in your fee discussions to quickly show how CareCredit financing options can make LASIK affordable.

Source: Generational Health and Well Being Research, 2016, Conducted by Chadwick Martin Bailey on behalf of CareCredit.

\*\*Subject to credit approval

**“Roughly 47% of cardholders surveyed said they would have postponed or not moved forward with the complete recommendation if CareCredit had not been available.”**

*Source: CareCredit Cardholder Engagement Study, Q4, 2016*

their decision-making process,” says Hartmann. “More than our other patients, a millennial’s choice to have LASIK is strongly influenced by both online reviews and the experiences of friends and peers. The decision process has altered our approach to both physician review sites and social media.”

### **The Younger LASIK Demographic**

Currently, most refractive surgery patients are millennials.<sup>1</sup> Lyons has watched the transition to younger LASIK patients with interest.

“A lot of millennials grew up seeing their parents have laser vision correction,” says Lyons. “Some millennial patients come in for a consult as if they’re checking it off a list of things to do as an adult. It seems almost like a rite of passage to find out if they are candidates. Once we have their attention, we educate them about the benefits of moving forward with the procedure.”

Lyons says that unlike previous generations who wanted LASIK primarily to get rid of their glasses, millennials feel they’re taking this step to improve themselves as people. Her practice appeals to millennials in these terms, emphasizing how LASIK can free them from contacts and glasses that get in the way of active lifestyles. Lyons and her colleagues also find that millennials have reasonable expectations for LASIK because they’ve heard about the procedure from friends through social media channels.

Dr. Ross points out that because most millennials are young, healthy individuals free of preexisting

ocular conditions, a high percentage of them are good candidates for laser vision correction.

“Millennials are also open to newer technologies, so the idea of laser vision correction doesn’t scare them off,” she says. “And, because they’re the ‘experience generation,’ sharing experiences through social media, they learn from other people’s LASIK procedures and share their own LASIK experiences after surgery.”

Clarity’s Reedus and Dr. Ross recently presented on the subject of LASIK for millennials (See “Millennials & LASIK” sidebar for more details). According to these knowledgeable sources, LASIK is a lifestyle makeover for millennials who crave flexibility in their daily lives and activities, and want to look good in a selfie. They believe new technology makes life easier, including medical technology, such as laser vision correction. Reedus and Dr. Ross deftly appeal to these values with images that highlight the post-LASIK experience — not just shedding eyeglasses, but “experiencing life after LASIK.”

### **A Practice for the “Experience Generation”**

To create the kind of experience that millennials value, it helps to know more about their healthcare preferences. Millennials have a very participatory approach to care, researching their symptoms, health problems, and options before they see a doctor, so they’re well educated about their own health.<sup>2</sup> They have been raised to feel comfortable taking charge of their own health and engaging new people as equals, so they’re more open to a collaborative discussion versus a one-sided lecture from the doctor. However, millennials may have a hard time turning information into a decision, so they seek guidance and advice.<sup>3</sup>

“Millennials are looking for genuine connections, not salesmanship. They want to be educated, walked through the process, and spoken to as individuals. They also want us to learn about their activities, work, and visual needs, so we can discuss how LASIK will improve these activities without glasses,” says Cathi Lyons.

## **MILLENNIALS & LASIK**



**Want to learn more about how to grow your LASIK business? Shanda P. Ross, OD, and Keisha M. Reedus of Clarity Refractive Services, a full-service eyecare practice and TLC Laser Eye Center location in West Orange, NJ, provide tips for attracting this key demographic in the webinar, “Part 1: Millennials & LASIK,” available on-demand at [www.opthalmologymanagement.com/webinars/part-1-millennials-lasik](http://www.opthalmologymanagement.com/webinars/part-1-millennials-lasik).**

At Clarity Refractive Services, Reedus and her colleagues strive to create a “memorable patient journey” with the knowledge that millennials enjoy building memorable experiences, which they consider to be financially worthwhile.

“We focus on developing a relationship based on authenticity, reliability, and transparency. Patients can watch behind-the-scenes videos on our Facebook page. Our staff begins establishing a rapport via email or text before the patient’s first visit to the practice. In the practice, the experience highlights LASIK as a lifestyle makeover, with staff and physicians committed to creating a welcoming, positive atmosphere,” Reedus explains. “Past patients rave about their experiences at our practice on social media, creating what is called ‘social proof.’ The best type of social proof is the testimonial.”

When planning a memorable experience for millennial patients, one smart step is to move them swiftly from check-in to the doctor or technician. Waiting is a big turnoff for millennials, and they’re much more likely than other age groups to switch doctors when dissatisfied. In fact, about one-third of millennials say doctors make them wait too long.<sup>4</sup> Some experts recommend online check-in and history and other tools to streamline the office visit and ensure millennials have a positive experience.<sup>2</sup>

### Easy, Attractive Financing Options

Many patients may be unwilling to put cash on hand toward an elective procedure, such as LASIK. Millennials comparison shop for good healthcare prices, and 41% surveyed put off care they need because of cost. Some 60% of millennials surveyed who are dissatisfied with their health care say cost is a major reason, and it is the most common reason millennials change doctors.<sup>4</sup> In addition, according to the CareCredit’s Path to Purchase Research, 50% of cardholders surveyed found affordability an important consideration when choosing a provider.<sup>5</sup>

“In my experience, if we weren’t offering [financing options], we would be losing patients who may be comfortable with monthly payments. Most of our millennial patients opt to finance LASIK instead of paying with cash or a credit card. LASIK is retail, and it makes sense to

## BUILDING A MILLENNIAL PATIENT EXPERIENCE

The healthcare environment that millennials want is not dramatically different from the one most ophthalmic practices already have — it just takes a little tweaking. Here are a few tips to help, from start to finish.

- **BE TRANSPARENT.** Millennials like to research online before they visit a practice, and they value testimonials. Share testimonials, as well as a view inside your practice, on your website and social media outlets. Or, simply use the prewritten posts and tweets from the CareCredit Social Media Toolkit.
- **HELP GET THEM TO THE PRACTICE.** Millennials don’t expect a disconnect between their online and offline experiences. Make their move from online research to in-office visit a quick and smooth one by linking to online scheduling. If you prefer that they call you, show a picture of the front desk and the staff who will answer. Keep appointment-setting quick and easy.
- **SKIP THE WAIT.** Use tools, such as the CareCredit online calculator, and virtual check-in and patient history, to limit paperwork and wait time in the office. Use any downtime to share information about the patient’s specific desire — in this case, improving their lifestyle with LASIK.
- **GET TO KNOW THEM.** Talk about their lives and help them understand how the procedure will help them specifically. For example, if someone spends hours on a computer, hits the clubs on the weekends, and goes to the beach whenever possible, you have several conversation starters about the advantages of LASIK. These conversations also show that you care and are listening.
- **DISCUSS FINANCES.** Present all payment options, including cash, general purpose credit cards, and financing options, such as the CareCredit credit card. Whichever option they choose, your practice will implement it with ease. Have literature on hand and be ready to talk dollars in a way that fits your patients’ experience and individual needs.
- **BE CARING AND JOYFUL.** When a millennial chooses surgery, continue those personalized conversations throughout the process. A few quick notes on a chart, and you’ll be ready to talk more about those important lifestyle changes that LASIK will bring about. Also, celebrate the fact that the patient is getting LASIK. This is exciting for the patient, and you can help reinforce that thought.
- **HELP THEM BRAG.** Happy LASIK patients are going to tell their friends in person and via social media. Let them offer their friends a discount. Ask if you can share their experience online with a video or photo. Create a selfie spot or frame for follow-up visits, so patients can take a fun, LASIK-inspired photo.

## COMPARING LASIK COSTS

Your patient's LASIK financing comes out to \$89 per month. An active lifestyle free of glasses or contact lenses cost about the same as:

- A pair of mid-priced running sneakers
- Drinking venti café mochas on the way to work
- A gym membership
- One good dinner for two



take CareCredit's retail approach to payment," says Hartmann. "Millennials have so much student debt, which they have incorporated into a monthly budget. If a patient can fit the cost of LASIK into their monthly budget, then they typically will move forward with the procedure."

Hartmann adds that it helps to give patients who have other financial responsibilities an off-the-shelf solution that clearly lays out a path to repayment.

Lyons also finds that many patients are interested in a monthly breakdown of financing options, but she breaks down the cost of LASIK into even smaller, more digestible pieces.

"We compare the cost to a fancy dinner," Lyons explains. "When patients weigh that relatable cost to the improvements to their active everyday lives, the value of LASIK is clear."

## Multiply Your Investment

A funny thing always happens when we start analyzing what people want. At some point, we have to ask, "Don't we all want that?" The answer is "Yes, we do."

"Millennial Strategies" have broad appeal. A patient of any age would prefer to find you easily online, have a short wait time, feel understood and listened to, and have easy financial options presented clearly. So, while you're spending time chasing one generation, you're actually increasing your appeal to all of them.

**Perhaps one more reason to embrace the millennial generation is that in catering to their preferences, businesses are moving everyone toward a better experience. ●**

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### Millennial-LASIK Connection continued from page 2

West Orange, N.J., the articles within this supplement break down what millennial LASIK candidates want from you and what other practices are already doing to connect with this important demographic. ●

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# Digital Success Basics

GET THE MOST FROM YOUR WEBSITE, SOCIAL MEDIA,  
AND OTHER ONLINE MARKETING EFFORTS

Whether you're a social media expert or think Facebook is a scourge, there's no denying the power of an online presence to grow a practice. Asked what kind of results practices can hope to see from their efforts to reach out to millennials online, Shanda P. Ross, OD, Clinical Director at Clarity Refractive Services, a TLC Laser Eye Center location in West Orange, N.J., replied, "You can cut through the loud noise of the internet to attract millennials to LASIK. Stop them in their tracks and command their attention."

Dr. Ross and other leaders in this effort have established some basic must-haves for a successful digital strategy. If you're a non-millennial who loves your smartphone and connects with friends and family on social media, you'll likely recognize that these steps would attract your peers, too.

## Mobile-friendly Website

According to CareCredit's Path to Purchase Report, 60% of cardholders surveyed said they always research healthcare providers online before selecting a provider.<sup>1</sup>

"As long as you have a great website that's fully responsive on all devices, people will find you," assures Janelle Hartmann, public relations and marketing director at Filutowski Cataract & LASIK Institute in Lake Mary, FL. "In my experience, mobile devices are the platform often used in searches for LASIK, so a mobile-friendly site that delivers short, relevant answers is best. No one wants to read dense articles on a phone. Provide that quick information to pique their interest, and they'll call and come in."

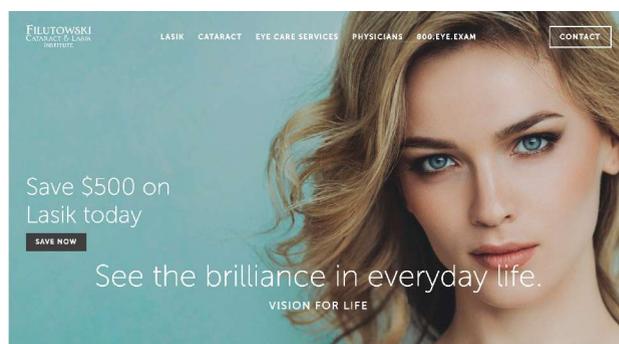
If you can interact with millennials via their smartphones, that's even better. A survey of millennials showed 71% would like to manage their healthcare, book appointments, and get health data via apps.<sup>2</sup>

## A Transparent Online Practice

A typical website or Facebook page tells potential patients what a practice does. To attract millennials, show them who you are.

"In a medical practice, interacting with millennials in a fun way about medical advice or questions is hard, so

our current strategy is to expand those areas through Facebook," Hartmann says. "On Facebook, patients can meet the doctor and staff, tour the practice, and see whom they will talk to when they call. It makes the practice and the experience more transparent. Patients know what they to expect. We post biweekly to make it easy for them to find us."



The Website of Filutowski Cataract & LASIK Institute in Lake Mary, FL, emphasizes the lifestyle and cost advantages of LASIK.

Administrator Cathi Lyons from Gordon Schanzlin New Vision Institute, a TLC Laser Eye Center in San Diego, agrees. "Before they come in, they look at our website and Facebook page to see if the practice is authentic. They verify those impressions with their peer group, asking if anyone else has been here and what the experience was like."

## From Smartphone to Office

A potential patient who views your website and social media channels isn't a LASIK patient until they begin engaging directly with the practice. This transition needs to be smooth, according to Janelle Hartmann.

"Millennial marketing is a very integrated system," says Hartmann. "Not only do you need to have a good mobile-friendly online and social media presence and provide easy-to-access information through those outlets, but you also have to create the link to your office. Guide patients to the final step where they call and visit. At that point, trained staff will answer questions. The positive interaction continues inside the practice. The whole process needs to take place seamlessly."

## Frequent Posts, Fresh Content

A website can be updated every few months, but social media is inherently dynamic. A Facebook page or Twitter feed with a last post from June 2016 looks abandoned, making visitors question whether the practice's doors are still open. You don't have to spend endless hours developing content — just post something regularly. "Keep content fresh," advises Lyons. "We are very active on Facebook and Twitter, with frequent posts and some 30-second animated videos. We also post to Instagram and maintain Pinterest boards about healthy lifestyles and LASIK."

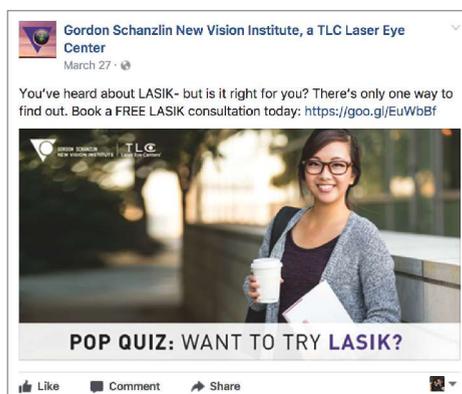
## "Social proof" (Testimonials)

How do you encourage word-of-mouth (or "word-of-social media") reviews from millennials? At Clarity Refractive Services, Practice Administrator Keisha M. Reedus and her colleagues ask past patients to share their stories both online and offline. "This allows us to build social proof. If you use social proof correctly, millennials feel that if they don't choose your practice, they might be going to the wrong place, and they won't be part of the 'in' crowd. If they come to you, they won't have FOMO (fear of missing out)."

This free social media marketing has a flip side: When millennials "tell their friends" about a negative experience, that can mean instantly telling hundreds of people. More than 60% of millennials aged 18 to 24 who don't like their healthcare provider tell their friends, but they don't tell the doctor or staff that they're dissatisfied.<sup>3</sup> Inquire about satisfaction throughout the experience to get positive exposure.

## The New Patient Education

In a model where online research is fundamental and testimonials are shared peer to peer, what form does patient education take for millennials? "We've found printed materials to be ineffective. They're often lost or forgotten," Dr. Ross explains. "Most millennials prefer digital forms of communication. We like to email videos to patients about their upcoming surgery, telling them more about who we are and what to expect pre- and



A Facebook post by Gordon Schanzlin New Vision Institute invites young people to get a free consultation.

postoperatively. We also utilize infographics on social media platforms to educate millennials."

## Written in the Stars

Peer-to-peer reviews are one thing; online review aggregators are another. CareCredit's Path to Purchase Report revealed that only 22% of cardholders surveyed were satisfied with finding reviews online they could trust.<sup>1</sup> How many stars does your

practice have on Facebook, Healthgrades, WebMD, Yellowpages, Yahoo, Yelp, and other social sites?

Experts agree: It pays to encourage happy patients to post positive reviews. As Cathi Lyons explains, "We keep our reviews fresh by continually letting patients know that the best compliment they can give us is to get a review out there on Facebook, Yelp, Google+, and the region's Better Business Bureau. Angie's List is big in some places, but Yelp is very big here in San Diego. When people search our practice online, those stars are visible right in the search results. We want potential patients to see 4 or 5 stars, and click on us."

## Getting it Done

Clarity Refractive Services utilizes a very robust social media plan. While some practices might use a public relations firm, allowing the staff to focus on the day-to-day operations of the practice, Reedus thinks that most practices already have one or two people who can excel at updating social media. "Having a millennial in the practice manage social media platforms can work very well, and that approach is more cost effective than hiring a contractor. Look for people in your practice who have their own active, positive presence on social media and who understand the norms of various platforms. Their posts and tweets will speak directly to millennials — and get them to learn more." ●

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