



Your new practice front door.



By Jeff Landucci

During this 14 week lockdown, all I've heard through TV, social media, phone calls and Zoom meetings is the recurring question- 'Will things ever be the same?'. Now that the lockdown is being relaxed and the high street is beginning to reawaken from its hibernation, the new questions are 'How are we all going to adapt now that things will never be the same?'

On day one of shops reopening, Monday 15th June, stores in London already looked like the Boxing Day sales had arrived. The Golden Arches of McDonald's drive-throughs had miles of queues causing traffic mayhem. With all of us so desperate for some 'normality', starved of junk food and contact with our favourite brands, some have been risking their own health and that of others now that restrictions have been even slightly lifted. It seems sheer madness that the human race, the most intelligent species on our beautiful planet, is willing to risk their health for the inherent need for normality. Our grandparents and great-grandparents had 5

years of disruption and pain compared to our measly 14 weeks, yet we can't seem to manage to exercise some restraint when a Big Mac is at stake.

Some shops are open with barriers up to try to enforce some kind of segregation. My beautiful hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon now looks like an entrance to Glastonbury Festival, or a highly anticipated football match, with one-way systems to herd crowds in the right direction. Will this be our new normal?

I fully understand the commercial need for the country to jump-start its economy after this unprecedented and unfamiliar crisis, however, should we not be prioritising the reopening of health centres, Pharmacies and Optometrists above our favourite burger chains or fast-fashion retail shops? It is already a significant challenge for our industry friends to plan the opening up of their eyecare centres and practices. Surely they should have been given the priority to open safely and effectively. There are still some practices that haven't risked opening yet & are waiting until July. Some have already changed their procedures and have been forward-thinking, triaging patients remotely (some with the aid of

the Anterior imaging software) and bumping the sales of high-end frames off the priority list.

It's a strange year for our Industry. 2020 was meant to be special given that 20/20 vision is our measurement result for perfect eyesight, but the best laid plans and all that. Now we are looking at how we can rebuild, how we can think and work differently, bringing new ideas to the fore, and future proof our businesses.

Opticians will be asking 'How do I get new customers, and keep my loyal customers to replace the revenue I have lost over the last 10-12 weeks?'

This is truly difficult to answer when your business model relies on footfall. Over my 25 years within the Optical Industry, I have heard so many mention 'loyal customers'. How do you define loyal customers? Perhaps they come back every 2 years for an eye test? Does that cover it?

Why not introduce your customers to an eyecare plan with home shipping? Nearly everyone now pays into a monthly DD or subscription for Sky TV, Netflix, domestic bills, holidays, lease cars, mobile phones... Give your patients total peace of mind, convenience, as well as increasing your revenues. By providing delivery, you are ensuring that you are servicing customers who will continue to be vulnerable even after lockdown is lifted. For those who aren't vulnerable, you are offering convenience and freeing up time. But how can you do this entirely remotely?

Your new practice front door is the Smartphone. 90% of people now have a smartphone. It's often an extension of ourselves. Telemedicine can open your front door to new customers and business by removing the barrier of distance. Triage your patients from the comfort of their own home, safe, warm and shielded from the threat of Covid-19. They only need to be able to take an image of their eye using their smartphone.

How could you get started? Reach out to your customers letting them know you are offering Triage from home services. Not every enquiry requires an in-practice visit; using the Anterior app, you can triage and diagnose symptoms from afar, and then if needed can escalate to an in-practice visit if necessary; but the remote triage images will often show you what you need to know.

You can create a record of a patient's symptoms before they visit, saving time & money. Chair time is so important especially now if you can only see 8 patients a day when you used to see 18. Telemedicine will help you increase the number of patients you 'see' in one day, keeping revenue flowing.

We need to work smarter, not harder. Embrace new technology and new styles of working. Who knows if a second spike is going to happen? If it does, will you be ready?

Take care & be safe.

Jeff