



Vision Source
SIGNATURE EYE CARE

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Joseph Fife, OD

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The timing could not have been worse. Just as Joseph Fife, OD, opened a new Vision Source® practice in December 2008 in St. George, Utah, seven years after his graduation from Southern California College of Optometry, the economy began its downhill slide. “Just about all of the companies that helped us get started went out of business,” Dr. Fife recalls.

For the first six months, though, Dr. Fife was cautiously optimistic. “The community that we’re in happens to be a large snow bird community. But many of these people left in May and wouldn’t return until October. So we started running through our cash flow,” he says. Recovery has been steady, but not quite at the pace that Dr. Fife wishes. It’s been more of an incline than a rebound. “That’s one reason I’m so grateful that we were Vision Source® from the start. That helped us acquire products and equipment at a lower cost and helped keep the overhead in check,” he says.

Even so, there were some very tough times. He says one of the low points was sitting with his banker, asking him to renegotiate the loan to extend the payments and lower the interest rate. The banker did, ultimately, recognizing that Dr. Fife was at his last option.

It sure isn’t for lack of trying to make his business successful in a tough environment, Dr. Fife says. Over the years that he’s been open, he has hired three different consultants. The first two didn’t produce the results he needed, but in 2013, he saw a postcard in his mailbox that caught his attention. It was from the Scheduling Institute, a consultant that works primarily with dental offices. “The company promised a money-back guarantee on results,” he says.

The first order of business was changing the way the office staff answered the phones and scheduled appointments. It’s a more streamlined system, with a lot less conversation and a more efficient way to get patients scheduled quickly. “Our slowest month historically is July. In July 2012, we had only 15 new patients for the whole month,” he says. Just by changing the way the staff answered the phones, the office gained 44 new patients in July 2013 and 82 new patients in July 2014. Annual revenue has more than doubled, almost tripled, since those lean years. In fact, Dr. Fife’s goal is to grow the practice by a factor of five by the year 2020.

There have been other changes, too, to move them toward this goal. Now, all members of his office team wear uniforms. They provide office tours for new patients, which raises the comfort level and confidence for new patients. “It’s all about the new patient experience, making sure that every patient has a wow experience,” he says.

Periodic giveaways, such as a big screen TV, have raised awareness about the practice, as has Vision Source® branding. “We have the signage out front, and there’s one Vision Source® office about 30 minutes to the south and another 30 minutes to the east. We’ve had people who have moved into the area and called us because we’re Vision Source®,” Dr. Fife says.

In addition, Dr. Fife took advantage of the Vision Source® offer to pursue board certification at a reduced fee. “My staff lets patients know that I’ve passed the certification test,” he says. Passing the boards also served as a little bit of a confidence-booster for him, he says, noting that an early struggle to keep a practice afloat rattles your confidence in your abilities. “In the first year, there was a two-week period when we saw just one patient. I’m not out of the woods yet, but I’ve found ideas that are working,” he says.

Again, he credits his Vision Source® membership with supplying some of those ideas. “My Vision Source® colleagues provide tremendous psychological support. I appreciate their willingness to give ideas and suggestions,” he says. He also says that programs like The Optical DreamSM are helpful because the goals reinforce what we’re working on.” He acknowledges that the practice isn’t as far along as he would have hoped a nearly 7-year-old practice would be, but he says that he finally feels there’s a way forward.

