



Serving patients well in 'experience economy'

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In oral and maxillofacial surgery, much attention is given to clinical excellence, surgical precision and technological advancements. Yet, a vital component of serving patients well is customer service – the patient-facing aspect that significantly impacts outcomes, reputation and long-term success.

This experience economy, which continues to evolve in 2025, refers to a market where businesses create memorable events and experiences for their customers, often leveraging technology and personalization. This shift applies to healthcare in that patients today want efficiency, affordability and a positive and memorable experience. Affordability is subjective because it depends on each person's financial situation, priorities and values. The experience economy is about engaging patients (customers) emotionally and creating value through experiences rather than just selling services.

While oral and maxillofacial surgery involves procedures ranging from third molar removal to corrective jaw surgery and facial trauma treatment, the patient journey begins well before the first incision and extends long after the final suture and surgical postoperative visit. In today's market, exceptional customer service is no longer just a nicety; it is a necessity. The connection between patient and practice should be focused on relationships rather than transactions.

The frontline experience

A patient's journey typically begins with a referral or phone call. The tone, warmth and efficiency of the reception team sets the foundation for the patient's first impression. Whether patients are in acute pain, anxious about a procedure or confused about insurance logistics, the initial contact can either alleviate or amplify those feelings.

Highly trained administrative and patient care receptionists are equipped with more than scheduling software knowledge and practice protocols training. They also have soft skills such as empathy, clear communication

and active listening. These front desk team members must translate complex medical information into understandable language while conveying confidence and compassion. They know how to avoid sounding "officious" or policy-driven by using the right tone and words. They know how to transform a potentially ominous environment into a welcoming one, which is essential for practices where patients may already feel vulnerable.

Once the appointment is set, preoperative communication becomes crucial. Customer service during this phase revolves around education and reassurance. The clinical team and treatment coordinators need to work together to ensure patients are well-informed about what to expect, how to prepare and what the recovery process will look like. It also is the time when the team endorses the doctor(s) – their care and compassion and exceptional abilities.

Effective customer service means:

- Answering questions clearly and thoughtfully – even if the same question is asked multiple times. Remember, this is the patient's first time asking these questions.
- Providing written and digital resources that are easy to access and understand.
- Offering above-and-beyond service in preoperative calls and consults to review instructions and address last-minute concerns. Extra reassurance is always welcome.

This phase is where trust is solidified. A practice that is proactive in reaching out, responsive to concerns and considerate of patient emotions will instill a sense of confidence and calm – key ingredients for surgical success. Most patients don't judge their care by the clinical skills of the surgeon but rather how they feel while they are in an OMS's care.

The compassion factor

Unlike routine dental care, oral and maxillofacial surgery procedures often involve sedation or general anesthesia, invasive techniques and recovery periods. Naturally, these factors bring anxiety, fear and uncertainty to the surface for many patients. The OMS team needs to recognize the emotional side of patient treatment. The team should be trained to spot signs of anxiety and know how to

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respond in a way that is both compassionate and professional. This might include giving patients time and space to express fears without feeling rushed or embarrassed.

Providing outstanding comfort amenities can help patients experience thoughtful care. Warm blankets or music-guided relaxation during procedures may add to positive impressions. An environment for the patient's escort to work or relax with refreshments might be an added feature.

Sharing positive outcomes and testimonials from past patients also can be helpful in validating the exceptional care and customer service of the practice.

Every point of contact becomes an opportunity to reduce stress. Collaboration from the entire team to make the environment soothing and supportive can lead to more positive experiences and ultimately better health outcomes and increased patient satisfaction.

Applying technology

Today's offices are embracing technology not just for surgical innovation, but also to improve the customer service experience. Through online scheduling to digital patient portals and simplified payment options like text-to-pay, technology allows for greater convenience, transparency and efficiency.

Key tech-driven enhancements include:

- Automated appointment reminders sent via text or email.
- Preregistration forms completed online to save time in the office.
- Secure messaging systems that let patients ask follow-up questions or request medication refills.
- Virtual consultations, which are especially helpful for postoperative check-ins or for patients in rural areas.

By leveraging these tools, practices can reduce administrative burdens while empowering patients with greater control over their care. The real magic happens when technology is combined with the human touch, such as a personalized follow-up text from a team member (or OMS) checking in after surgery.



Financial considerations

Few things can erode trust faster than unexpected costs. In oral and maxillofacial surgery, where procedures can be expensive and insurance coverage can be complex, clear and compassionate financial communication is one of the most important pillars of customer service.

Treatment coordinators and billing specialists should approach financial discussions with clarity, honesty and empathy. This includes:

- Having a clear and thoughtful conversation about insurance, breaking down estimated insurance allowances and the patient's financial responsibility.
- Offering payment plans or financing options when possible.
- Being available and responsive to billing questions.

When patients feel supported in understanding and managing costs, they are more likely to complete treatment plans and recommend the practice to others as well as feel better about their treatment outcomes.

Importance of training

Excellent customer service doesn't happen by accident. It is the result of intentional hiring, training and culture-building. Practices that prioritize patient experience invest in ongoing staff development around:

- Communication skills and bedside manner.
- Conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques.
- Cultural competency and inclusive language.
- Team-based care and cross-functional coordination.



Leadership plays a key role in modeling service excellence – how surgeons communicate with the team and build their practice culture. A positive internal culture translates directly into better patient interactions. When team members feel respected, empowered and valued, they are far more likely to extend the same to patients.

Turning negative feedback into opportunities

No practice is immune to mistakes or misunderstandings. What sets the best offices apart is how they handle complaints and turn negative experiences into positive ones.

Handling feedback positively involves:

- Listening without defensiveness.
- Apologizing sincerely when appropriate.
- Offering solutions or accommodations quickly. Avoid answering with, “I’m sorry, but that’s our policy.” This is not helpful or thoughtful.
- Using feedback to improve systems and training.

When patients feel their concerns are taken seriously and acted upon, their trust in the practice can increase. In many cases, how a practice responds to a challenge leaves a more lasting impression than the challenge itself.

Continuing the service journey

Customer service doesn’t end when the surgery is over. Postoperative care is a crucial stage where follow-up, accessibility and responsiveness can dramatically impact patient recovery and satisfaction.

Best practices include:

- Providing personalized follow-up calls or texts from the surgical team.
- Supplying 24/7 emergency contact availability for urgent postop concerns.

- Giving easy-to-understand recovery instructions with visual guides and/or videos.
- Scheduling follow-up appointments before the patient leaves the office.
- Sending a follow-up thank-you note expressing appreciation for the opportunity to serve the patient.

Patients who feel forgotten after their procedure are more likely to become somewhat dissatisfied. Those who feel supported and monitored often report higher levels of trust, lower anxiety and smoother recoveries.

Oral and maxillofacial surgery sits at the intersection of medicine and dentistry, but at its heart, it is a human service. Surgical expertise may bring patients to an OMS’s website and into the practice, but it’s the customer service side of care that helps them choose an OMS’s care – and inspires them to refer friends, leave glowing reviews and become advocates for the practice.

From the first phone call to the final postop check, every interaction is an opportunity to build trust, alleviate fear and create a seamless patient experience. In a field where technical skill is a given, customer service becomes a true differentiator.

Although increasingly driven by patient reviews, online reputations and word-of-mouth referrals, OMS practices that embrace the full spectrum of the patient journey – clinical and emotional – will thrive. Making the patient experience relational, rather than transactional, will ensure continued practice success. ■

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