

The Next Retail Evolution

VM LIVE Explores Ways to Enhance CX



LAS VEGAS—The retail business, or experience as it's often called today, is being reimagined as physical and digital influences merge to create new ideas of what a store, or a practice in the optical world, looks like and offers to engage consumers.

Two optical retail executives and a lead-

ing voice in retail-experience consulting provided their perspectives on this reimagination of the “store” and how digital technology is reshaping the shopping experience at VM LIVE’s “Minding the Store” session on Sept. 13 as Vision Expo West was getting under way.

“Creative retailers know that technology is an essential element today in connecting with consumers,” said Marge Axelrad, editorial director and SVP at Jobson’s *Vision Monday*, as she set the backdrop for the session. “It’s not a potential, it’s not a nice-to-have, rather it’s an absolute imperative.”



Retail consultant Ed King is a leading voice in the experiential shopping arena.



(L to R) Presenters onstage during the VM LIVE panel session included Vision Monday's Marge Axelrad; Doug Barnes, Jr., Eyemart Express; David Moore, OD, of Clear Eye Associates and Moore Eye Center; Ed King, co-founder of High Street, a Retail Experience Collective; and Vision Monday's Andrew Karp.

Retail consultant Ed King, a co-founder of High Street, a Retail Experience Collective, and leading voice in the experiential shopping arena, told attendees that the key to meeting and exceeding customer expectations in this new world of retail—and a feat that Amazon has achieved—is to “remove the friction” from the shopping process. “Amazon is crushing it from so many perspectives right now,” he noted, including giving rise to “conversational commerce” via Alexa.

“Amazon wants to remove as much friction as possible,” he added. “That’s great because it is a beacon for all of us to follow. This is going to be table stakes in about three or four years, and everybody will have done it.”

David Moore, OD, president and owner of two eyecare practices in Texas, Clear Eye Associates and Moore Eye Center, said when he started his optical business 10 years ago, he didn’t worry about having “shoppers” because people coming in for eye exams “most likely were going to

buy” vision care products. But today, everybody is a shopper and visits multiple stores or websites before making a purchase.

The reason he has undertaken an overhaul of his practice and its amenities is simple: “I felt like if I did not change and I continued doing what we’ve always done for the last 40 years, that the business would go away and I would eventually sell out. This wasn’t going to be a business that would go on.” So what Moore and his team have done to differentiate the practice is to focus on customer experience using integrated technology and move to a high-end boutique approach where “everything has a story.”

Doug Barnes Jr., president and CEO of Eyemart Express, noted how he is moving to rethink the Eyemart business model to more closely overlap with current global trends in retail by emphasizing convenience, personalization and the understanding of where value lies for each patient.

Over a two-year period of planning, the management team developed a new operating model that takes advantage of new technology to speed turnaround time on fulfilling eyeglass prescriptions to under one hour and to reinforce this message with customers. “We’ve really focused on how to ‘wow’ our customers.”

The company’s next step in its effort to exceed customer expectations is via the launch this week of its e-commerce channel, which Barnes said will enable existing Eyemart Express customers to choose the way in which they want to interact with Eyemart Express. “This will be phase one of a multi-phase project,” he said, noting that he believes the online channel will shorten the current purchase cycle. “We shouldn’t be afraid of online. We should embrace online and just make it another convenient avenue for our customers to shop.”

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OCTOBER 16, 2017

The Next Retail Evolution

VM LIVE's 'Minding the Store' Draws Leading Industry Executives



(L to R) Presenters at the VM LIVE Minding the Store included Doug Barnes, Jr., Eyemart Express; Ed King, co-founder of High Street, a Retail Experience Collective; Vision Monday's Marge Axelrad and Andrew Karp; and David Moore, OD, of Clear Eye Associates and Moore Eye Center.



(L to R) Jean-Philippe Sayag, ACEP/ABS, Jobson's Marc Ferrara and Kevin Hundert, Ditto Technologies, await the start of VM LIVE.



Scott Shapiro, Europa Eyewear and Jason Stanley, State Optical.



Attendees listened intently to the presentations.



(L to R) Doug Meeks, Meeks Consulting; Gary Tillman, Speqson; Seth McLaughlin, Springfield Advisors; Reade Fahs, National Vision; and Victoria Hallberg, Lahb, Inc.



New Look Vision Group's Antoine Amiel and Mario Pageau.



John Bonizio, Metro Optics Eyewear and Matthew Vulich, Luneau Technology USA.



Kris Caldwell, Eyecare Partners and Bob Rogers, Eyemart Express.



Leo MacCanna, Ocuco with Jean-Philippe Savag, ACEP/ABS.



Melody Healy, VSP Vision Care and Janet Moody, Vision Service Plan.



(L to R) Linda Chous, OD, UnitedHealthcare, Smart Vision Labs Bill Ryan and Jennifer Mele.



(L to R) CooperVision's Mark Lindsey and Shaun Schooley with Zeiss' David Buchanan.



CareCredit's Randy Baldwin and Becky Lawsen.



(L to R) Ditto's Michael Warga and Kate Doerksen with VSP Global's Eric Johannessen.



Grand Rapids Ophthalmology's Cassandra Barrett and Camille Tyler.



(L to R) Essilor's Jessica Mouly, Hajar Ksikes and Sheree Rajan.



John Bonizio, Metro Optics Eyewear participated in the Q&A portion of the program.