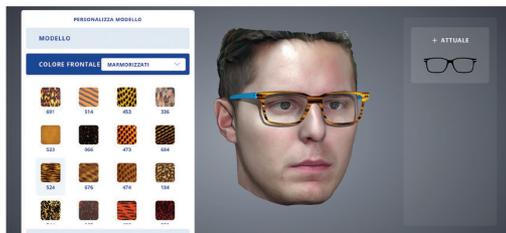


MEGATREND: PERSONALIZATION

Customized Options Entice Eyeglass Wearers With Unique Styling and Improved Comfort



VM STAFF

Let's get personal. That's what today's patients and consumers are telling the brands and health care professionals they do business with. This means they want convenient options, of course, but it also means going the extra mile with a special fit, customized communication tools and, perhaps, even a cu-

rated assortment of options that consider their preferences and past product choices.

New technologies that take a customer's biometric measurements and then "print" products on demand, together with other digital tools and capabilities are bringing these customization efforts to new levels, touching products that range from day-to-day indulgences like coffee concoctions to more traditional everyday needs like footwear and eyewear.

"The watchword is 'customization' of products and services," Luxottica executive chairman Leonardo Del Vecchio said late last month as the company introduced in Milan a range of new digital capability features for its stores and brands that are designed to provide customers a more personalized experience.

The Miami-based Edward Beiner Purveyor of Fine Eyewear practice has discovered that of-

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Personalization and Differentiation Go Hand in Hand at Retail

Differentiation is a key to retail success today, and having the ability to offer “personalized” products is a sure way for an optical retailer to stake a claim to the differentiation mantle. A few are moving quickly into the area of personalization, while many other optical businesses are investigating ways that they can address the growing consumer demand for unique products.

One of the optical businesses at the leading edge of this wave is Miami-based Edward Beiner Purveyor of Fine Eyewear, a practice that now offers customized 3D printed frames that Edward Beiner, founder of the 11-location practice, has designed and created himself. He told *Vision Monday* that his practice can personalize the 3D printed product and that the eyewear collection his stores offer is exclusive. The printing is done in a European factory and is shipped directly to his shop.

“Because of what you can do with 3D printing,” he said, “we are able to customize a shape and color [for the consumer].” Depending on the degree of customization, the price for a 3D printed customized frame is approximately \$1,000. He has been offering this 3D printed customization for a little more than a year.

Millennials (in the mid-30s to late 30s age group) are a market opportunity for the 3D printed, personalized frames, he noted. “They love technology, but they also like vintage and artisanal and they like a story that can connect the old with the new. And that was my goal. Marketing becomes as important as the product itself.”

Beiner said he has been “very much” pleased with the consumer response to his 3D printed collection. “We have always been at the high end, and you need to find an edge and you always need to [offer] new things to



Edward Beiner has launched an exclusive collection of 3D-printed eyewear that fuses the latest materials, technology and design to produce a unique product.



the consumer,” he added.

Another optical retail executive also on the lookout for products or services that provide more personalization or differentiation is Darren Horndasch, president and chief executive officer of 40-location Wisconsin Vision. Horndasch said he believes the effort to find ways to personalize the eyewear shopping experience is a sector-wide challenge today, and he

has his team working on new ideas around the concepts of customer experience, convenience and preference.

Already the company has completely changed the website experience of its Eye Boutique brand so that it is much more interactive and offers a virtual try-on feature, Horndasch said. “How we approach SEO and

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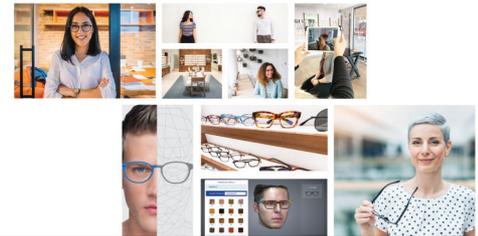
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SEM with the new site is completely different than how we approached this in the past,” he added. “The results, since last September, have proved to be more traffic. We are presently working to give the Wisconsin Vision site a complete overhaul, as well. We want the patient to be able to explore, research, purchase and find our locations easily and in a fun manner.”

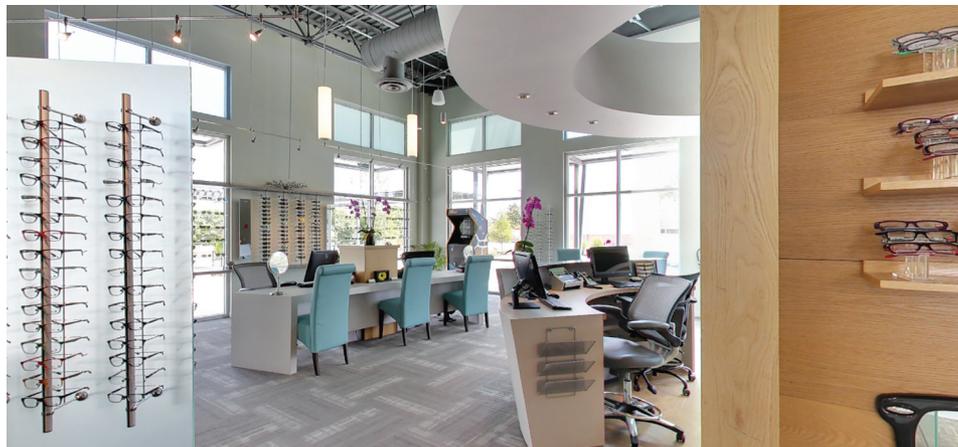
In terms of personalization, Horndasch said the company needs to do a better job informing all patients that their eyewear is indeed personalized. “Our industry has led consumers to believe that what we do is a simple commodity,” he said, noting that a virtual tour of how individual eyeglasses are made and the technology supporting the fabrication of the lenses is one way to dissuade them of the “commodity” notion.

Another practice working to improve the patient experience is Weaver Eye Associates of York, Pa., which continuously strives to use the latest technology in its tools and materials, while also trying to identify simple ways to improve communication with patients and build long-standing relationships, according to Luke Bankert, optical operations director. “Personalization of the patient experience is what separates private practices from online and even retail chains,” he noted. “There are tremendous benefits to having a patient know they are truly valued and are receiving a customized experience instead of being treated like just a number.”

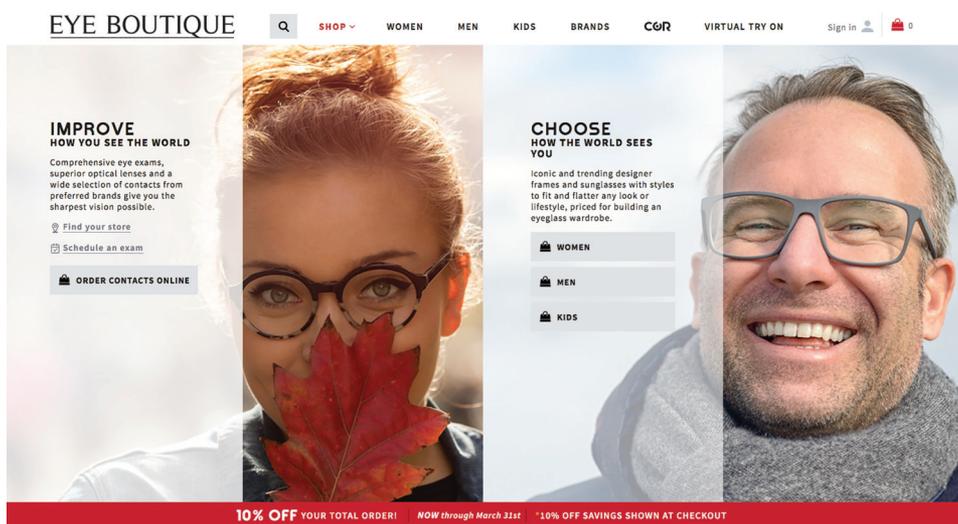
Some of the tools Weaver Eye Associates utilizes and which it has found produce the best changes for the patient experience are:

- Spark digital eyewear measuring devices, which allows measurement of eyewear to 0.1 of a millimeter.
- Using Position of Wear (P.O.W.) measurements for progressive lenses to tailor the doctor’s prescription to each individual patient with their frame.
- Fitting Box is available on its website.

Patients can use a virtual frame try-on option



At **Lakeline Vision Source**, the staff strives to provide patients a personalized experience that help the practice stand out from the competition.



Wisconsin Vision has revamped the website experience of its Eye Boutique business to make it more interactive and intuitive.

so they already have an idea of what frame style or color they like before they come into our office.

Eric Hammond, OD, of Lakeline Vision Source near Austin, Texas, said he believes personalization can play a more important role for optical retailers who operate their practices in markets with heavy competition from large retail groups. “Being in Austin or Dallas, you have a lot of competition [with retailers] offering cheaper stuff. So, our job is to make the experi-

ence better and to offer as good a product as I can to the patient.”

Personalization features the practice utilizes include a virtual try-on feature on its website and a digital program that improves the accuracy of progressive lens fabrication. He added, “If we can make the experience personalized and make the patient feel like it’s a family, and we offer the best technology and the best exams, then this is where we want to be.”

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Silhouette's Customized Frame and Fit

The concept of a consumer seeking out a unique product that has been tailored specifically to them isn't a new idea. However, the advent of new technologies and an emphasis on customer experience has reinforced the notion that customers enjoy creating products to suit their specific needs and styles.

Silhouette International first introduced its Titan Minimal Art collection 20 years ago, "ushering in a new era in lightness and customization." Since then, the company's design and rimless concept has only continued to evolve, allowing each pair of Silhouette frames to be customized to meet the fit and style of each wearer while still providing the most lightweight and comfortable frame experience.

"Customization is leading the way in all industries. Within fashion, technology and many other sectors, companies are providing each user with more customizable options to perfectly suit their individual needs and desires. Consumers rely on brands for customized options with a personalized experience," Silhouette International said.

The TMA – The Icon. Accent Rings collection elevates the customization process by introducing innovative rings to accentuate each lens shape. This development in customization redefines categories as The TMA – The Icon. Accent Rings occupies a unique category as it is neither a true rimless nor classic full-rim frame. With a choice of six lens shapes, six Accent Ring colors and six frame colors, more than 200 variations are possible for each individual wearer to showcase their unique style.

"The innovative TMA - The Icon. Accent Rings has received much acclaim from the industry and wearers—including a Red Dot Award for product design, in 2018," Silhouette International said.

In addition to this, Silhouette International has also released its new Pin-cision hinge which debuted in its Momentum collection. The hinge



Silhouette International's TMA – The Icon. Accent Rings collection elevates customization and gives wearers a choice of six lens shapes, six accent ring colors and six frame colors.

was inspired by the intricate design and details of a timepiece and this innovative screwless hinge allows for a customized fit.

"All of Silhouette's frames are designed, developed and produced in our headquarters in Linz, Austria. With over 50 years of expertise, 60 international design awards and 50 patents we continuously lead with new technological advancements," the company stated.



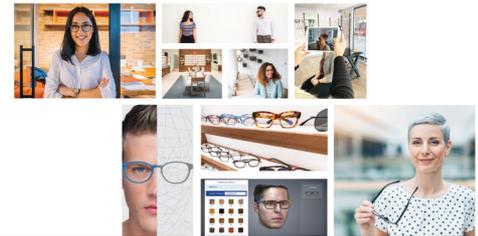
Ray-Ban Remix taps into personal style with its online customization service that features over 250,000 customization combinations by using different models, lens choices, color ways, case colors and engravings.

Freedom of Expression With Ray-Ban Remix

Luxottica first introduced customization in 2014 with the launch of Ray-Ban Remix. Since then, the company has expanded the scope of its customization offering to reach a new range of consumers who are seeking to engage with brands in a more meaningful and personalized way.

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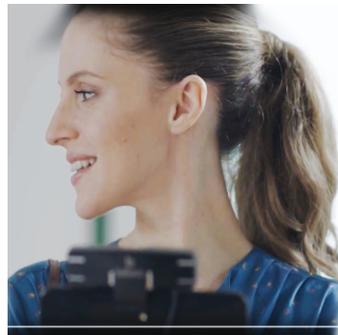
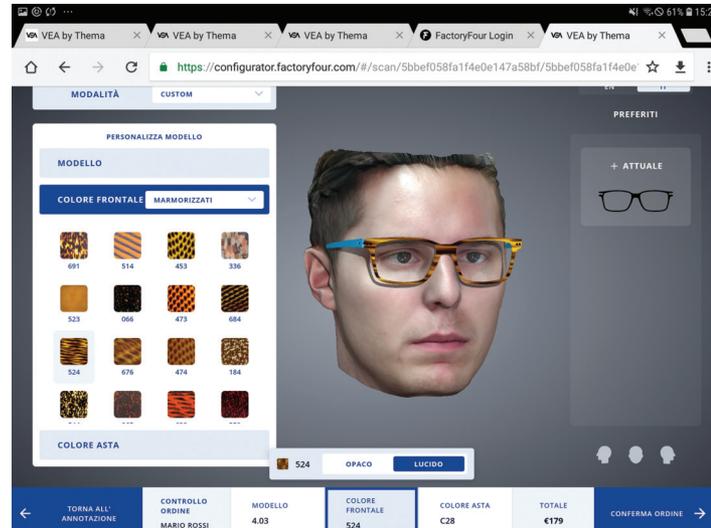
Tapping into freedom of expression and personal style, Ray-Ban Remix allows customers to create their own Ray-Ban frames with an efficient online customization service. “There are over 250,000 customization combinations by utilizing different model types, lens choices, color ways, case color and engraving. The styles are assembled 90 percent by hand at our facility in Italy and delivered just five days after the order is placed on Ray-Ban.com,” said Marie DiPalma, Ray-Ban senior brand director, North America.

Since its inception, the program has continued to grow and evolve to meet more consumers’ customization needs. Over the past few years, Ray-Ban Remix has been updated to incorporate more styles such as the new Meteor and Nina models and new symbols have been added to the engraving options. “The most exciting news though is that customers can now Remix frames with Ray-Ban Authentic Prescription lenses,” DiPalma said.

She said, “Millennials and younger Gen Z consumers look to engage with brands in a meaningful and personalized way. With the rise of self-expression on social media and customizable technology, this demographic is eager to create their own experiences and products personalized to their preferences and style.”

While the full Ray-Ban Remix technology has been exclusive to Ray-Ban.com with ECPs being able to offer a variety of lens and frame combinations through the Ray-Ban Authentic Prescription Lenses, Luxottica recently announced at Mido 2019 that for the first time in an optical context, consumers will be able to customize their Ray-Ban (and Oakley) models through an interactive screen technology.

They will be able to choose color, frames, lenses, temples, tips and cases as well as request engravings and decorations to make the eyewear selection more of a personalized experience.



Thema Optical's new Virtual Eyewear Assistant Kit (V.E.A) uses a tablet and cutting edge 3D camera to allow customers the ability to personalize frame options in real time.

Thema Optical's Virtual Eyewear Kit

After offering its signature brand, iGreen, with interchangeable temples and more than 1,000 color combinations back in 2013, Thema Optical quickly realized the love that customers have for personalization. “We realized immediately how much people love to be free from com-

mitment to a single color or design, and have the liberty to customize their eyewear based on what they are wearing or their mood without compromising their comfort and of course, a fashionable look,” said Giulia Valmassoi, at Thema Optical.

Thema Optical originally started by offer-

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ing interchangeable temples to its iGreen styles before moving onto adding three different eye-sizes and 1,000 colors for 1,152,000 unique designs (1 iGreen style X 1000 colors X 2 finishes X 3 eye-sizes X 32 temples X 3 temples length X w/ or w/o nose pads). The styles are made in the U.S. in three to five business days from the order to the very last level of customization, which is a biometric frame made specifically for each customer exactly like a tailor-made suit.

Now, the company has debuted its latest and most advanced technology custom program, V.E.A. – The Virtual Eyewear Assistant: a personal shopper assisting customers with the creation of biometric frames.

“Thema offers different solutions to ECPs or retailers to easily customize our brands with their customers in their stores, based on board space, target market and clientele,” Valmassoi said. “V.E.A. was created for opticians to facilitate the personalization process for Thema products in a fun and easy way. In this era, where the online market and low price chain’s expansions are making it hard for the retailers, we thought a new and modern way to sell eyewear, inspired by the lifestyle of modern consumers was the way to go.”

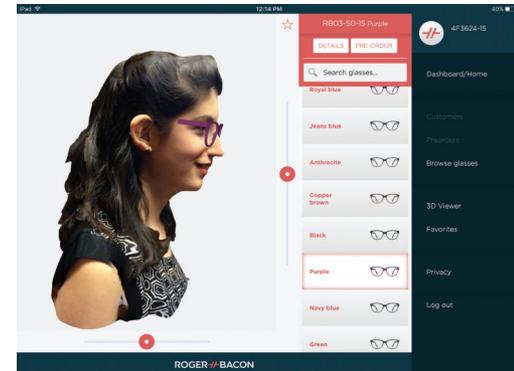
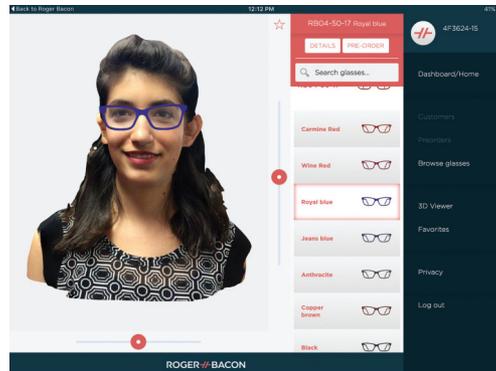
The V.E.A. Virtual Eyewear Assistant kit includes:

- A latest generation tablet to use the application to its maximum potential.
- A cutting edge 3D camera, that is able to capture high definition scans of a face with 500,000 landmarks, which is the best in 3D cameras available, granting high quality results.
- Thema’s software that is able to combine three different algorithms to work with frames on patients.

Additionally, using the technology is fairly simple. Through a quick scan of the face, the optician will be able to choose from the wide



Optician Lindsey Pulford of Insight Eyecare in Manhattan, Kan., captures a scan of co-worker Sarah Markley using the **Roger Bacon** system before discussing style options.



These scans show the patient how their Roger Bacon frame will look on them.

range of shapes from Thema’s product, finding the best fitting frame for each patient. Customers will then have the choice to personalize the frame by choosing the colors while seeing the frame change in real time on the screen. By using V.E.A. the customer will have the possibility to create a unique, biometric frame based on their face measurements. The result is a product that is not only unique in

shape and color, but is also a perfect fit.

Valmassoi said V.E.A. is off to a fast start. “Just two months ago, immediately after the release of V.E.A., Thema partnered with the largest independent optical group in Italy with over 100 active locations, and 100 more are scheduled to open in 2019.” Thema is planning to launch this new technology in the U.S. during Vision Expo East 2019 in March.



Lacey Mielcarek (l), and her mother, Eileen Mielcarek, with the Roger Bacon Eyewear display in their store, Media Eye Works, in Media, Pa.



A Roger Bacon Eyewear scan of Lacey Mielcarek.



A model wearing a Roger Bacon frame.

their own image as shown on the visualization unit's LCD display. Customers can choose from over 20 frame shapes, each available in 10 colors. New frame designs are being continuously added to the collection.

Individual frame orders are placed from the iPad using Roger Bacon's app and cloud-based ordering system. The frames are then custom printed and the parts are provided to Eyenavigation for final inspection and assembly. The completed frame is provided by Eyenavigation to the ECP.

Roger Bacon software is evolving into a platform that can support a variety of frame designs and materials. The company now offers over 40 basic designs that can be customized in the app, with more to come in 2019 as the company pursues additional collaborations with frame designers.

The system is proving to be popular with a growing number of opticians, both in the U.S. and internationally. Lindsey Pulford, an optician and optical manager at Insights Eyecare in Manhattan, Kansas, said both she and her customers are enthused about Roger Bacon Eyewear.

"My customers and I love that they can have perfectly fitted glasses. I have patients with narrow bridges who want the plastic look but have a hard time finding that fit, and Roger Bacon is my answer. I have people who have uneven ears, or they may have broken their nose—this system can take all of that into consideration for the perfect fitting pair of glasses."

Pulford, who has been using the Roger Bacon system since 2016, believes it offers independent practices a competitive advantage. "It helps me differentiate our office from others by keeping up with some of the most up-to-date technology, and offering a product that no one close to us offers," she said, adding that the system provides a good return on investment.

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Two Approaches to Customizing Frames

Netherlands-based Roger Bacon Eyewear has developed a made-to-measure 3D printed eyewear collection that it sells through independent optical retailers. The company uses a proprietary system consisting of a biometric scanner attached to an iPad. The scanning process provides the patient's precise facial dimensions that enable Roger Bacon to produce a pair of custom made frames using a 3D printer.

An important advantage of the process is the elimination of carrying costs. The ECP only carries frame samples and colors. Customers can choose from 27 different models in 10 colors each and new frame designs are automatically downloaded to the iPad and visualization unit.

ECPs that provide Roger Bacon Eyewear receive a scanner and visualization unit. Customers can preview any frame in the collection using

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Eileen and Lacey Mielcarek, a mother-daughter duo who own Media Eye Works, in Media, Pa., have become Roger Bacon fans since putting in the line last summer. “Our customers love the customized fit of 3D printed eyewear and how lightweight they are,” said Lacey Mielcarek, who is an optician and the daughter half of the pair. “We have had 100 percent patient satisfaction.”

Patients who have had trouble finding glasses that fit them well are especially appreciative of the customized fit they get with Roger Bacon. “We hear classic lines like, ‘no matter what the optician does, my glasses always slip down my nose,’ or ‘I have a difficult face to fit.’ We now have the ability to become their optical hero and fix a problem that no one else can,” said Lacey.

Eileen, who is also an optician and who has been an ophthalmic operating room nurse for three decades, thinks that surgeons would appreciate the custom fitted frames because, “it would eliminate the need to ‘put tape on their nose pieces to prevent slipping.’”

Lacey said she appreciates the user-friendliness of the Roger Bacon system. “The scanning software is straightforward and simple to use. All you have to do is open the app, have the patient stand still looking straight ahead, and walk 360 degrees around them. The scan takes under a minute to perform.

“As with any new technology or system it does take a week of consistent use and practice for the opticians to feel perfectly comfortable using the software and to talk about it intelligently,” she noted.

“The Roger Bacon 3D line has helped us create a unique shopping experience for our patients,” said Eileen. “Patients go home and talk with their friends and family about the new technology they saw and the biometric scan they just received. That is especially important in the Philadelphia area where we are located, because it’s extremely dense with optometrists and opticians.”



10-year-old Violet loves her one of a kind 3DNA frame.



(L to R) Dennis Zelazowski of EyeDNA, Raymond Brill, OD, Perry Brill and C. Xiliu Yang.



This screen shot shows how a 3DNA frame can be customized to fit an individual wearer.



A 3DNA kiosk at Chiang's Optical in Wan Chai, Hong Kong.

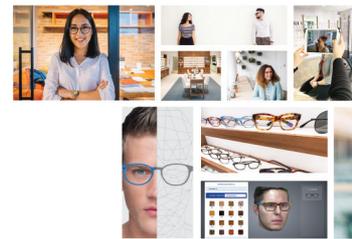
EyeDNA's Facial Scanning Technology

The 3DNA system from EyeDNA also offers a line of eyeglasses called 3DNA that are designed with a proprietary 3D facial scanning technology. The system was developed by optician and inventor Dennis Dennis Zelazowski and C. Xiliu Yang.

Instead of using 3D printing to make the frames, 3DNA uses materials such as sea shell, carbon fiber,

acetate, wood, buffalo horn, stone as well as titanium-acetates and thin metals. The frame shape, nose pads and hinges can also be customized.

Customers can visit an authorized retailer and get scanned at a 3DNA kiosk or else can send the company a 3D selfie taken with an iPhoneX or iPadX. On-site opticians work with customers to style the glasses and create a unique look. Custom-



ers receive their glasses within 10 working days.

Brill Eye Center in Mission, Kan. is part of a growing network of opticians that are carrying the 3DNA line.

“3DNA is paving the way for creation of a new skill set which is creative design, color theory, frame engineering, and lastly understanding facial shape structures and building the architecture of a frame around it,” said Perry Brill, general manager and optician, who has been using the system for the past year. “You have to follow the 3DNA software curriculum to achieve proficiency and feel comfort-

able promoting it to patients. It take about three to six months of study. It’s a gratifying feeling developing this skill set.

“We are a hands-on tactile industry,” observed Brill. “However, software is a digital form of hands-on that gives ECPs the ability to dig deeper beyond the traditional methods of opticianry.”

Brill said customers who use the 3DNA system soon become “assistant frame designers” and can guide the creative process. “Patients are used to customizing products in all aspects of life,” he noted.

“When you buy a latte today, it’s not just a latte. You can choose almond milk, drop some cinnamon in it, and the barista tops off the whole creation with a stunning design of the frother milk. Optical consumers expect more from retailers today. That’s why they are going online. Customers like how they can engrave their name, how they can be the only one in the world with their frame. It’s a sense of relief for many patients to not have to weed through 2,400 frames at our practice. Designing from scratch removes the ‘shopping’ experience and creates a level of seriousness that many patients enjoy.” ■

New Systems Turn Customers Into ‘Assistant Frame Designers’

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fering personalized eyewear is a sure way to maintain its exclusive niche. It now offers customized 3D printed frames that founder Edward Beiner himself has designed. One market for this high-end eyewear is the Millennial age group, he said. “They love technology, but they also like vintage and artisanal and they like a story that can connect the old with the new,” he explained. “And that was my goal. Marketing becomes as important as the product itself.”

Many others in optical retail are pointing their teams in this same “customization” and personalization direction. Darren Horndasch, president and chief executive officer of 40-location Wisconsin Vision, said he agrees the effort to find more and better ways to personalize the eyewear shopping experience is a sector-wide challenge today. “This is an interesting reflection that we have been discussing recently,” he told *Vision Monday*.

“A speaker at [January’s] Vision Council Meeting, who most recently was with Tesla, said the three most important things to consumers today are [in order] customer experience, convenience and [the ability] to give the customer what ‘they’ want, not what ‘we’ think

they want. I have challenged our team to throw ideas out and to sift through how we might achieve these goals,” he added.

On the supplier side, several companies (many of them featured in this special report) already are taking steps to help create “personalized” products for the end consumer.

Among the optical companies with “personalization concepts now in place is Tom Davies, which offers “bespoke” eyewear, Netherlands-based Roger Bacon Eyewear, which has developed a made-to-measure 3D printed eyewear collection that it sells through independent optical retailers, and EyeDNA, which has developed a facial scanning technology it uses in a line of eyeglasses called 3DNA.

Thema Optical has debuted its latest and most advanced technology custom program, V.E.A. – The Virtual Eyewear Assistant: a personal shopper assisting customers with the creation of biometric frames. V.E.A. was created for opticians to facilitate the personalization process.

Also, Luxottica introduced its first customization effort in 2014 with the launch of Ray-Ban Remix and now has expanded the scope of its customization offering to reach a broader range of consumers, while Silhouette Interna-

tional provides a customized frame and fit with Signature Lightness and The TMA – The Icon. Accent Rings collection, which raises the customization process with innovative rings that accentuate each lens shape.

“Digital is the future for Luxottica and for the entire industry,” Del Vecchio added in his announcement at the Mido eyewear show. “Today, we must face new challenges to keep up with the times and satisfy the changing behaviors of consumers who are influenced by new technologies.”

Fuel3D, the company that developed the FitsYou 3D fitting system, examined the importance of “fit” on buyer experience in a consumer study. The results indicated that people are struggling to find eyewear that fits, yet fit is the single most important factor affecting customer experience, brand choice and ultimately where people purchase their eyewear, the company noted. (Fuel3D provides 3D scanning and measurement solutions.)

“Buying eyewear should be easy and fun, yet our study shows that all too often people struggle to find the right fit and don’t enjoy the experience,” George Thaw, CEO for Fuel3D, told *Vision Monday*. “As a result, retailers, opticians and brands are losing customers and sales.” ■