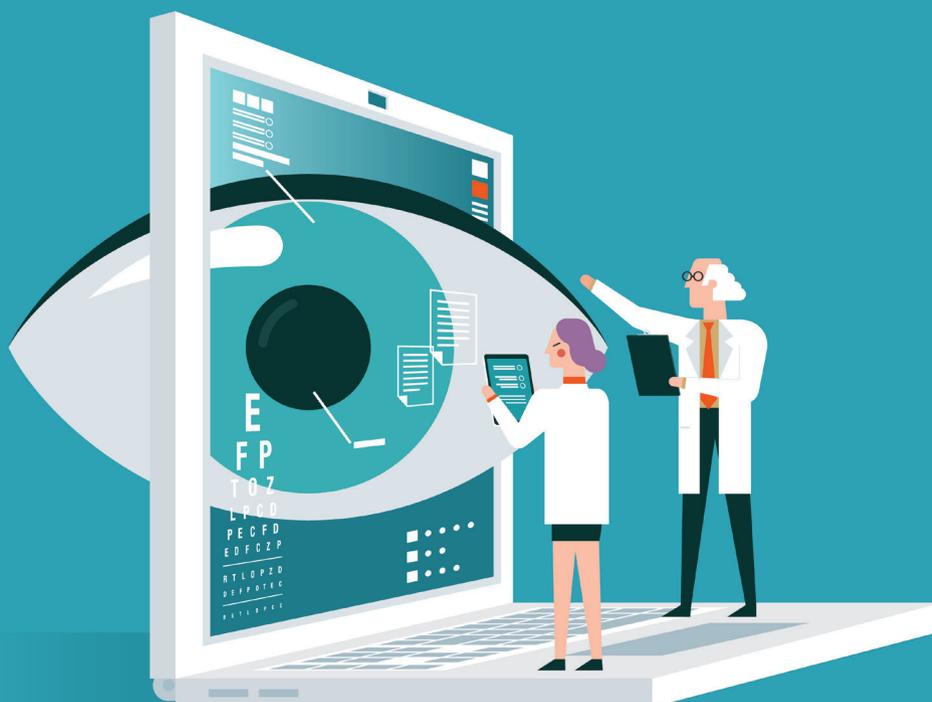


Modern Optics

ECPs Embrace New Digital Tech Tools



BY MARGE AXELRAD AND ANDREW KARP

NEW YORK—The COVID-19 pandemic has propelled much change and many health care-related issues and business shifts. But shutdowns, stay-at-home, work-from-home, school-from home, virtual meetings and entertainment, along with cultural changes, have also expedited many new behaviors and attitudes toward technology among consumers of all ages. As a result, patients' expectations of what constitutes a next-level type of experience with retailers and vision care providers (actually, all types of health care providers) has been one of the

first and most visible impacts of the pandemic on business of all types.

VM sees this embrace of “brick with click” as a megatrend and we continue to report on and examine new types of digital tech being adopted—at a faster and wider pace—by optical retailers and independent ECPs as well.

Consumer and patient attitudes about technology in health care delivery and in access to services and related products have visibly relaxed, as is evidenced by some of the practitioners and office managers that VM talked to this month.

They are reporting enhanced customer relationships, improved patient/dispenser/doctor dynamics

when they can connect prior to, during and after patient visits, a development that the pandemic underscored.

VM will continue to monitor the faster adoption of digital tools in optical. If you or someone you know has discovered the value of new ones, please let us know at vmedit@jobson.com. We will continue to cover these developments throughout the year.

On the following pages are examples of just a few of the tools and software services that are creating efficiencies, streamlining processes and adding to the bottom line of many independent practices today. ■

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ReVision Optometry Takes Toplogy's TOP for a Test Run

ReVision Optometry

San Diego, Calif.

Digital Technology Snapshot: TOP (Touchless Optical Platform) by Topology

ReVision Optometry, the San Diego, California practice of Dr. Brian Chou, is one of the first practices in the U.S. to use TOP (Touchless Optical Platform), a proprietary app developed by Topology that enables opticians to precisely measure patients, either in-store or at home, to ensure an exact fit of their eyeglasses. Optician Cindi Geib described some of system's key features, and what she and her patients like about it.

Cindi Geib, ABOC, Optical Administrator

"We're part of their test trial. I've probably been utilizing it now for maybe a month at most. But it's something that I hope will end up being profitable and that we will sign on for good.

I think the technology is really interesting, and perfect for this time we're living in. In this day and age with people being nervous about COVID, we have to clean and sanitize the glasses that people try on between every patient. But with Topology we can scan the patients remotely ahead of time, before they even come into the office.

The system is very easy to use. It literally prompts you. It tells you exactly where to look into the camera, and tells you whether to turn your head left or right. It's just a few simple steps that anyone can do. I email patients a link or they can download the app and scan themselves wearing preselected frames. When they're done with their scan they'll email it directly to me. I can pull up the scan on the iPad, verify that it is a good scan and put in their PD and other measurements.

Some patients don't even want to come into the store, so we could do a virtual appointment with them, which I have not done yet. But it would be very easy to just do a screen share, pull up their scan and show them remotely how they looked in these frames. We show people how they can cus-



Optician Cindi Geib uses the new TOP dispensing system to scan a patient at ReVision Optometry in San Diego.

tomize the fit and I think people are pretty blown away with that. I think it'll really help people shop online.

I've used other virtual try-on systems, and it's always so weird. The frames are floating somewhere on your face and you can't really tell how they look. With TOP, the frames really fit. You can

show someone the side view by turning their face side to side.

Right now, the tiniest percentage of my frame inventory is actually in their database. Once we have all of the brands, and the actual inventory in there, I think it's really going to help save time and definitely be more profitable." ■

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ACEP's Smart Mirror Helps Dispensers Sell Features and Benefits of Products

Bard Optical

Peoria, Illinois

Digital Technology Snapshot: Smart Mirror

Bard Optical, an optical retail chain that operates 21 stores in central Illinois, has been using ACEP's Smart Mirror system for several years. Company vice president, Mick Hall, first learned about ACEP's Smart Mirror system during a visit with another retailer that belongs to the same information sharing group as Bard.

He recalls being impressed with Smart Mirror's ease of use and multi-functional design, which lets dispensers use an iPad to take accurate patient measurements and demonstrate lenses in a way that vividly illustrates their features and benefits. Now Smart Mirror is an integral part of Bard's dispensing process, and both staff and patients appreciate how the system's advanced capabilities can make the eyewear selection process easier.

Mick Hall, Vice President and General Counsel, Bard Optical

"We looked at Smart Mirror for two different opportunities. One was measurement. Prior to Smart Mirror we were using pupilometers and PD sticks, the tried and true methods for measuring.

The other opportunity was for demonstrating products such as AR or polarized. We would have different demonstration aids and information given to us by the vendors, but there was no central location for it. We also wanted the ability to take a photograph of someone and show them how they look in a new frame after they put their original glasses back on.

When I first saw a dispenser using Smart Mirror I was complete blown away by the ease with which they were taking measurements and the depth of information available with the product demonstrations, particularly for polarized and AR lenses. The way that they were able to show me what those products can do for a patient was so revolutionary to me, because they used videos, not some card



Mick Hall

Optician Gabby Whitman uses Smart Mirror to demonstrate lens options to a patient at Bard Optical's Knoxville Ave. office in Peoria, Illinois.

or static photograph.

When you say to a patient, 'I want you to spend some extra money to get this high index lens because it's going to make your lens thinner, people have no idea what you mean by thinner. So to be able to show them a cross section comparing a high index lens to a poly lens, using their exact prescription, is huge. I've had staff members who have said polarized sells itself when you use Smart Mirror, because the patient can actually see the polarized effect by moving a little slider on the iPad back and forth.

Our consumers are visual learners, and because they are visual learners, the visual media of Smart Mirror allows them to see what they want to purchase, and how it's going to work for them.

When we first adopted Smart Mirror, we found some of the staff who had been in the industry for a long time wanted to continue doing things

the old fashioned way, the way they were trained. So I literally went into every office and took out all their PD sticks. The only person in the office who could have a PD stick was the office manager, and only because if they needed to measure an outside frame that was being brought to us for some reason.

We eliminated all of the other crutches they were using. It took a little bit of training to get the buy-in from the staff, but once they saw the impact that it had on the patients, everybody bought in. But we had to throw some of them into the deep end first.

The iPad is increasingly familiar to patients, too. They may have one themselves. So to be able to do a product demonstration on a media that they already trust is important. We're in a visual industry, so to be able to share with patients the visual side of our industry through an iPad has a resonating effect on them." ■

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Modern Optics

Shamir's Spark Mi Up Allows for a Safer Patient Experience

Eye Eye Eye

Fresno, Calif.

Digital Technology Snapshot: Shamir Spark Mi Up

Eye Eye Eye is owned and operated by Kamran Khan, a veteran optician with 30 years of experience. An optical boutique specializing in independent, upper end lines, Eye Eye Eye attracts patients who are looking for something a bit different. Most recently, that differentiator has been Spark Mi Up, a touchless measuring device that looks like an ordinary tabletop mirror, yet allows ECPs to take all required measurements with just a few clicks, while keeping patients at a safe distance.

Kamran Khan, Owner and Optician, Eye Eye Eye

"I've tried various apps in the past, but they just seemed a little hokey to me. This is the first one that I've seen that looked a little more high tech, versus just some guy with an iPad who takes a

little plastic marker on your pair of glasses. I've been doing this for about 30 years so it took me a little bit to start trusting some of that stuff versus the measurements I was used to taking.

I knew COVID was coming, so Shamir's Spark Mi Up was a good way to make the customer feel a little safer and give them a little bit of distance so you're not right in their face the whole time. So that's why I decided to try it.

I've had it for a couple of months now. The reaction from the customers has been great. They expect you to have things like that, along with some sort of telemedicine for refractions.

It makes taking measurements a little bit easier. I would still take all of the measurement, the PDs and the wrap on the frame and the vertex that I would do before, but this definitely speeds that up. The equipment gives the impression of something a little more high tech and more accurate. That has made my life easier.

Now I can snap a picture, make sure the picture is good and then start talking about something else with the patient. Then I can put in all my measurements after they're gone. Because of that I've actually been able to work in another appointment.

Patients ask about it all the time. Over the past few weeks, I think I've gotten

least two referrals from patients that were here and they recommended me to a friend because I had the latest technology. That helps pay for the device.

It's very compact and comes with its own little laptop which powers the whole thing. You can basically put it almost anywhere. That little arm on it adjusts up and down, so it's very easy to use." ■



Optician Kamran Khan with Shamir's Spark Mi Up.

New Hartford Eye Associates Sees the Value in Virtual Try-On Galleries

New Hartford Eye Associates

New Hartford, NY

Digital Technology Snapshot: My Frame Gallery/

Frames Data

In Central New York State's Oneida County, New Hartford Eye Associates, a Vision Source practice, has succeeded in cultivating a great reputation among the customers and patients in the markets it serves. For four years, the practice has won the Best Optometrists designation from local media, its doctors and staff creating a destination for patients in the upstate region. Denys Meade, New Hartford's practice manager for 15 years, has started to embrace new types of technology.

Denys Meade, Practice Manager, New Hartford Eye Associates

New Hartford encourages its patients to "Experience Modern Eyecare." An example is an online gallery,

culled from the brands they feature in the practice, a service powered by Frames Data's My Frame Gallery. Meade said that it is something that can encourage patients to scroll through selections and choose eyewear models and shapes and colors that appeal to them, then save them to a Wish List, so they can be set aside for the patient's on-premises appointment. It helps give the opticians a sense of what the patients' inclinations are, so they can provide further guidance for fit and size.

Meade recalls using My Frame Gallery for a virtual trunk show as well, to emphasize three different frame lines in the annual "Glitz, Glam, Glasses" event which for eight years was held in person and in 2020, needed a new approach. She emailed the link to the online gallery to customers, posted to Facebook and put it on YouTube. It was a huge success.

And since then, the practice has incorporated a wider mix of its product selection into its Online Gal-



Denys Meade



New Hartford uses My Frame Gallery to allow patients to browse a mix of all the brands it carries, and uses a second online Gallery to highlight promotions.

lery—and still maintained a second Online section to highlight special promotions. "Business is different, but we have brought the Gallery into the practice's normal intake process, acclimating patients to the new system with instructions on how to use it and getting them used to the program becoming a new part of their yearly checkup and eyewear purchase." Patients really love it, she added. ■

Village Opticians, Early Adopter of OptikamPad, Continues to Rely on the Technology

Village Opticians

Whiting, N.J.

Digital Technology Snapshot: OptikamPad iPad App

Joel Wolf was an early adopter of Optikam, one of the pioneers of digital measurement. Now, after more than a decade, he continues to rely on the system, which has evolved into a complete dispensing solution that helps ECPs assist patients at all stages of the eyewear dispensing process.

Joel Wolf, Optician and Owner, Village Opticians

“I was one of the first in the U.S. to buy the Optikam system, about 14 years ago. I’m a progressive minded person. When I bought this technology, I was very excited about it. I found it through the internet. A rep that came by and showed it to me and I bought it before he finished explaining it to me. I have a very big business background outside the optical industry and it just made sense to me to be able to show patients visually the benefits of different lens options.

It increased our sales immediately. I wanted to have something that would give patients a unique experience so they would not see glasses as commodity. The frame selector was a great tool, especially for patients who were either really nearsighted or really farsighted. It gave them the ability to be able to see how they look the day they ordered their glasses as opposed to when they pick them up.

Soon after I bought the system, they added electronic measuring, and that really kind of revolutionized our office. It makes us more efficient and professional. We make sure that patients understand that we’re using state-of-the-art technology to demonstrate the lens that we’re trying to sell them.

The patients really appreciate it when you go in and take measurements electronically. They are starting to expect this type of experience when they come into your practice. There’s no other industry that you would go out and spend a lot of money on a pair of lenses, and then take a 99 cent



Optician Joel Wolf takes patient measurements using the OptikamPad iPad App.

felt marker and dot them up. That doesn’t resonate well with the patients when they’re spending that much money, and they see you’re using the same technology that’s been used for 30 or 40 years.

The learning curve is very easy. It’s very intuitive. Most people can learn it very quickly, even if they’re not very technical.

I’ve been using the measurement features for eight or nine years. The app on the iPad really made the biggest difference. The reason the app is so good is because it’s so easy to work with. You don’t have to move patients from a dispensing table to the system itself. It makes it easier to work with older patients because you don’t have to ask them to move them around.

When you’re selling these new digital lenses,

such as personalized and compensated progressive lenses and you don’t have the right tools to measure and fit them, the patient doesn’t get the full benefit of what they’re paying for. Using default measurements isn’t fair. If patients spend that extra money for those lenses, the lenses should be compensated properly.

The year the economy crashed was the same year that we started using the Optikam software. Even though the volume of patients was decreasing because the economy was so bad, our sales were increasing. I never felt the effect because of the software. I always say that in 30 years, putting in the Optikam software was probably the one thing that I did in my office that had the biggest impact on our success.” ■

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Modern Optics

Clear View Vision Care Leverages Zeiss' Technology to Set Itself Apart from the Pack

Clear View Vision Care

Tucson, Arizona

Digital Technology Snapshot: Zeiss Visufit 1000

Clear View Vision Care leverages the latest vision technology to differentiate itself from its competitors. Owner Dr. Jeffrey Martin and his staff employ a full range of Zeiss equipment to provide patients with a highly personalized experience. The latest addition to their armamentarium is the Zeiss Visufit 1000, a digital centration system that captures 3D measurements and offers virtual try-on of frames.

Jeffrey Martin, OD, FAAO, owner, Clear View Vision Care

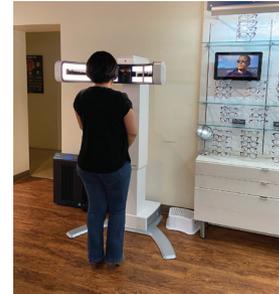
"We've always had a strong affinity with Zeiss. Being able to leverage their iProfiler technology where we're able to do iScription and produce individualized prescriptions has been fantastic. Not every patient that needs that, but a surprising chunk of people benefit from it, and having them have an

experience in our office that they can't just go get anywhere is a great differentiator.

What's really changed thing for us has been this past year. I promised myself that during the pandemic when we were shut down I was going to do nothing to add to the practice. I was just going to keep the same status quo. But then the Visufit 1000 became available, and that was good news.

The Visufit 1000 is a large standing device that allows you to take frame measurements and free up space. You don't have to put any type of doodad or dongle onto the patient's frame. You create an avatar of the patient when they come into the practice that is eventually going to allow us to let patients shop online. Having a strategy for competing in that space is going to become even more important. This particular device replaces our prior device, which wasn't bad but it was cumbersome and time consuming. The Visufit 1000 is much quicker, and it's much more kid friendly.

It's a big unit, and people walk in and they look



The Zeiss Visufit 1000 uses nine cameras to capture multiple views of a patient, which are then combined to create their avatar.

at it and say, 'What the heck is that thing?' We build a lot of the buzz in our office around technology, and so anytime we find something that is a difference maker, it improves the patient experience.

We tell them they're being measuring down to a 10th of a millimeter. If we find out after the fact that their head was slightly tilted during the imaging, it can correct for that. You can't make those adjustments with any other system that's out there that I'm aware of. It's all part of the Zeiss experience we give them." ■

Luxottica's PromoBoxx Helps Patients See Brand Stories Clearly

University Vision Centre

El Paso, Texas

Digital Technology Snapshot: Luxottica's PromoBoxx

Alejandra Zamodio, optical manager of University Vision Centre, has been with the practice for 9 years and reports that the main office, which has served the El Paso area for 10 years, just opened a second, smaller office about 20 to 25 miles away, last June. University Vision Centre has embraced technology for a long time now she said.

Alejandra Zamodio, optical manager of University Vision Centre

Said Zamodio, "We've always been a little more technologically adept than other traditional offices—we've been utilizing digital measuring tools, iPads for lens demos and so forth. With the pandemic, we are looking at these as tools to also show patients what

we're featuring in the office and help them browse or consider our offerings before they come in."

Zamodio noted that the office never fully shut down; even in late March, April and May they were open for appointments with patients at least working partial days. "We also wanted to demonstrate our cleaning and sanitizing protocols with them. In the latter part of last year and this year, it's still important to offer new and modern ways for people to 'see' selections.

Two months ago, the practice started to use Luxottica's PromoBoxx, which is a digital marketing platform that allows independents to easily promote their favorite Luxottica brands with digital marketing content via social media email, and more. Customers create an account and have professionally made content at their fingertips at no cost to them.

Said Zamodio, "We have two of their digital media screens which are easily updated with new im-



University Vision Centre can showcase brands' personas and new products to patients across multiple channels.

ages which is a great way for people to see the latest images from the brands. We have also just started sharing those brand collection videos and images directly to our social media, Instagram and Twitter or Facebook.

"And it's great that the ad campaigns also feature the new releases, so, for example with Tiffany, we just got new frames in last week and the images are already up on the Boxx and we can showcase these new arrivals to patients. They've made it really convenient for us by giving us some suggested caption and post ideas." ■



Hoya Spectangle's Position of Wear Measurements Offer True Personalization

Optical Matters

Littleton, Colo.

Digital Technology Snapshot: Hoya HVC Viewer and Spectangle

Dr. Thomas Gosling is a longtime Hoya customer who is a proponent of the company's dispensing technology. He uses the HVC Viewer, an iPad app with interactive, augmented reality features, to show patients how they will see with different lenses before wearing them. Using Hoya Spectangle, Dr. Gosling or optician Marc Petersen take position of wear measurements that can be used to customize the patient's prescription.

Thomas Gosling, OD, Owner, Optical Matters

"The Hoya HVC Viewer is great for showing patients how different lenses, such as progressives and photochromics, actually work. For example, you can show a patient how the cylinder on a lens that has no Hoya iD technology compares with a

lens that has the technology, and how that lens takes out the peripheral distortion. It really helps patients understand the benefit of going with a premium progressive because it shows the construction of the corridor, and how much wider the corridor is in a higher-end progressive versus the limitations of a standard progressive.

I use the Spectangle app for taking position of wear measurements. The beauty of it is the fact that you're taking the measurements with the frame on the patient's face, versus a pupilometer where you're measuring how far apart their eyes are. That doesn't have anything to do with how the glasses are sitting on their face and where the optical centers are in correlation to the frame.

An important benefit of Spectangle is the fact that you're actually taking all the measurements with one picture, so it's quick and easy.

The other benefit is that by taking the panto, face form and vertex you can really show the patient how the lenses are going to be optimized for



Optician Marc Petersen takes patient measurements with Hoya Spectangle.

them. That's especially important for higher prescriptions.

That's the benefit of position of wear measurement. That's true personalization.

The experience of using this technology is differentiating, especially as an independent optometrist. We're not just dotting the lenses up, we're taking extra steps to take these measurements, and it looks like we're definitely more high tech. It's the patient's perception that extra technology is being utilized to enhance their overall outcome with their glasses." ■

Online Appointment Booking Also Creates Learning Opportunities for Patients

Ranch Road Vision Source

Austin, Texas

Digital Technology Snapshot: Essilor's SmartBook

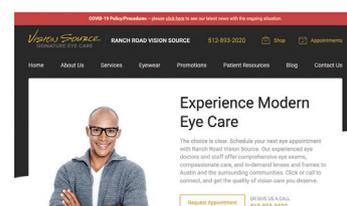
Dr. Shazeen Ali, Ranch Road Vision Source, has served as a dedicated provider of quality vision services and products to Austin, Steiner Ranch, Anderson Hill, and the surrounding Texas areas since 2015. She is a therapeutic optometrist specializing in primary eyecare and certified as an optometric glaucoma specialist. She has adopted several digital technologies in both her exam room and in the dispensary as well as helping connect with patients online before and after they visit the practice.

Dr. Shazeen Ali, Ranch Road Vision Source

Dr. Ali told VM that early on, just about a year or two after the practice opened, she has been work-

ing with SmartBook, as a way of enabling patients to schedule appointments online. "We love it and patients love it, too. Now we are working with Essilor's SmartBook in which we can set the appointment slots' timing and, when we send reminders about eye exams and products to consider, we can also mention their PALs, discuss eye fatigue and Eyezen. Or blue light and UV protection or AR coating options."

Since the advent of the pandemic, Dr. Ali said, "With so many people working remotely and with virtual learning and screen time for all, these are helpful suggestions which plant a seed with the patient, so they can learn about new products and product solutions before they get here." She noted, "I also find it helpful to continue those conversations during the exam with the patient. When we are looking at retinal images, we can show them which areas of the eye are vulnerable with increased UV



Technology has been a consistent element of Dr. Shazeen Ali's patient outreach.

exposure, for example."

Dr. Ali's practice has been using other digital tools, too. These were employed prior to the pandemic and now have really proven their additional value. She said, "We want to communicate to patients in ways that make sense for their lives and our busy practice, even after hours."

Dr. Ali said she continues to explore additional digital tools and technology for help in managing operations and connections with patients, in the dispensary and in the exam area. ■

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