

Pursuing a Path to E-Commerce

Independents and Optical Retailers Start to Add Click to Brick



Image Credit: Getty Images / nadia_bornatova; zubada; Dmitrii Musku; TCmake_photo; cveiv

BY MARGE AXELRAD / SENIOR VP, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Call it a paradigm shift. A sea change. A transformation. A mindset adjustment. All describe the still-changing and already-changed attitudes among optical retailers and independent eyecare professionals toward establishing an enhanced online presence that supports e-commerce and connectivity with customers and patients.

The pandemic environment of the past 18-24 months has accelerated new patterns of behavior and expectations among consumers of all ages. Shopping and purchasing habits have changed to the point that omnichannel or brick-and-click are coexisting more than ever before.

Further, eMarketer recently reported that while online commerce will continue to grow at aggressive double-digit rates, brick-and-mortar stores will still be very relevant for shopping with 84 percent of sales coming from physical stores. Those stores

will become more experiential and incorporate more technology to support a new kind of shopping journey, experts say.

In 2020, more than 44 percent of adults who purchased eyeglasses used the internet to assist in their acquisition of prescription eyeglasses, up from 22 percent in 2017. With 14.1 percent of 2020 eyeglass buyers using the internet to directly purchase eyeglasses throughout the year, about 30 percent of 2020 eyeglass buyers used the internet to compare prices, find the type or style of eyeglasses they wanted to buy or find the ECP or retailer they bought from in-person later. These are among the conclusions of the 2020 Internet Influence Report from The Vision Council.

Observed Andy Chance-Hill, Ocuco's omnichannel director, "We've watched in other fields and business sectors for years as more aspects of those businesses have shown up online. We know and understand that among ECPs and optical retailers how they have grappled with the internet and

what it means for the complexity of a category like eyecare and eyewear. But around the world as the pandemic lockdowns happened, it was interesting to watch the way each ECP dealt with the closure.

"Patients wanted to connect to doctors, they wanted to connect to the stores, the stores wanted to be able to present its services and product choices to consumers. We'd always seen that digital marketing and social media were gaining traction but now the website and all of these related tools needed, truly, to be managed. We've seen a new interest, most certainly, in omnichannel solutions," Chance-Hill said.

Added Ocuco's Dermot Walsh, chief revenue officer, "We operate three lines of business, our retail EHR, our lab systems and omnichannel. And omnichannel is now the fastest-growing business line from a revenue and staff point of view as well. Actually, COVID-19 changed online sales, so that a goal was not just 'drive to store' but 'drive to site.'

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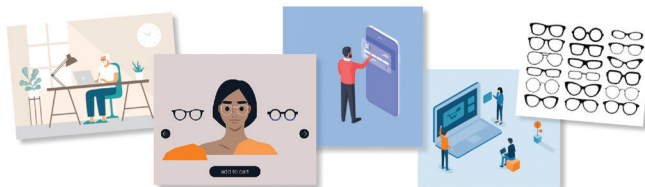
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JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2022

Pursuing a Path to E-Commerce



Visionist Takes a Stylish and Curated View of What an E-Commerce Site Can Be

NEW YORK—Pierce Voorthuis of Georgetown Optician began to conceptualize what a new type of online shopping experience for luxury eyewear might look like months before the pandemic began. Despite the immediate challenges of reacting to and thriving during the pandemic, in the interim of then and now Georgetown became a part of LOH (Luxury Optical Holdings) and subsequently, LOH was acquired by the New Look Vision Group.

But the initial “project,” combined with other concepts for an online presence being developed at LOH took on new importance and finally late last year, Visionist made its initial bow as a website geared to help people “Change the way you see the world,” an environment and presentation encompassing a range of luxury optical ideas and distinctive brands.

In an interview with Tim Mayhew, CEO of LOH, Voorthuis told *VM*, “We asked, how can we develop an e-commerce site that really takes both the magic of independent eyewear that we all love and wear and really respect and combine that with the expertise of the optician? That’s something that most online players, until now, have glossed over.

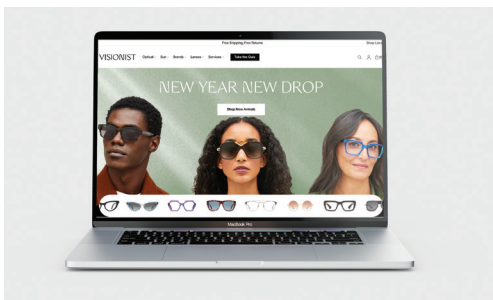
We really believe the optician is integral, to ensure that eyewear is delivered properly and expertly to our customers. Marrying those together with a component of service is what we wanted to do.”

Mayhew added, “You know, necessity is the mother of invention. During 2020 when we were

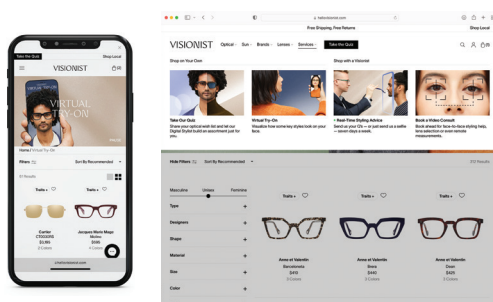
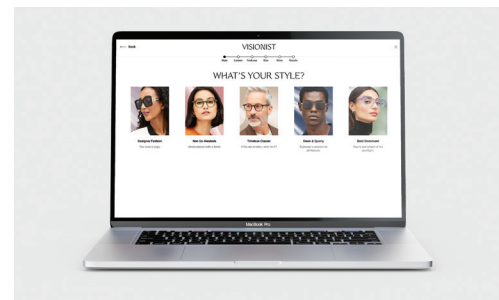
in the most crippling phase of the pandemic, we recognized we had an obligation to continue to service our customers. But there was a bit of a quandary, because our doors were not open. Our people managed to continue to serve our clients remotely but we realized that we needed to give them better tools to do that.



Tim Mayhew, CEO,
Luxury Optical
Holdings.



Visionist displays on desktop, laptop or mobile phone and offers a range of services and interaction options to visitors.



Services range from a Style Quiz to booking a virtual consult, VTO and real-time advice.



Pierce Voorthuis,
vice president,
Visionist.

“At its heart, Visionist just has core principles and a value system and deep commitment to support independent designers. A second element of our thinking was to think of developing a more diverse company, not only in terms of ethnicity but in terms of the diverse needs of customers, too.

“That’s why we were attracted to a partnership with Georgetown Optician because they personify independence. They are a leader. And, their social media and online presence are really elegant. We had a creative team and agency working on our ideas but we were lucky that Pierce could bring his knowledge of independent eyewear to a modern e-commerce site.”

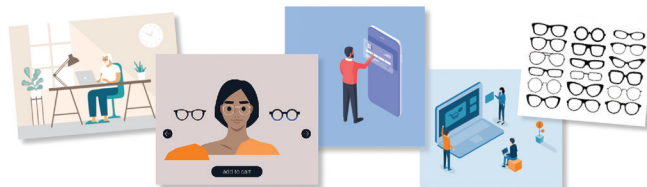
LOH’s Morgenthal Frederics and the Robert Marc and Lunor brands do have a presence on the Visionist site, Mayhew noted, adding, “But we are also super excited to be partners with several brands among the finest eyewear in the world right now. We want to be able to showcase the collections well enough so that a customer can buy online and feel comfortable buying online.

“But we also recognize that brick and mortar is truly important and will never, never disappear. And we really want to support our brick-and-mortar partners. And so that’s where we’ve created functionality, where people can find the balance and brands which our partner stores feature via Visionist. A Shop Local locator provides those.”

Flexibility and choice are key elements of the investments being made in Visionist and in the types of services that customers can interact with on the site—or in person. Said Voorthuis, “Our goal is to create a more omnichannel experience where the stores are tied into the experience even if some customers solely want to order and do everything online. We want Visionist to be self-sufficient but we also want to create a link with our partner stores throughout the country where we are confident our clients can also avail themselves of in-person services if they want.”

He added, “Investments are being made in amazing systems behind the scenes, a proprietary and new enterprise software system. And we’re very proud of our state of the art finishing lab at the Visionist offices in New York.” ■

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Independents and Staff Lean Into Online Showcases, via Optify

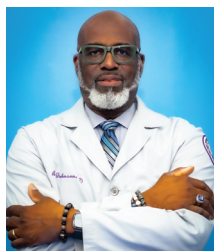
NEW YORK—As more independent eyecare professionals start to lean in to connecting with patients with more online options on their websites, they are finding that their embrace of digital tools that can integrate with existing systems are adding a new dimension to how patients perceive the practice and use new online connections to increase the productivity of office visits.

Dr. Ansel Johnson, Vision Salon Eyecare Associates, Blue Island, Ill., acknowledged, “We’ve had a very medically-focused eyecare practice. That’s kind of been my passion. But with the pandemic, we did start to think of things particularly on the optical side, in new ways. We’ve got a lot of high-end technology and the latest equipment and instruments to help manage our patients with diabetes and glaucoma and offer a wide range of services. But optical is still a significant component of my practice.”

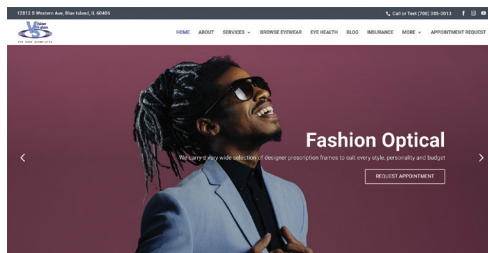
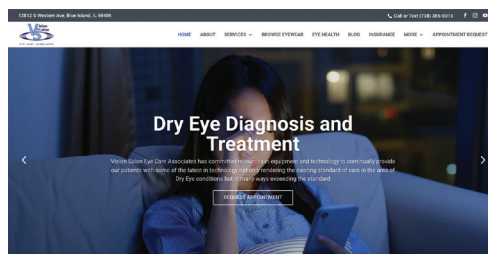
Dr. Johnson noted that the practice had been offering contact lens ordering online for several years. Prior to the pandemic he wanted to explore “some sort” of online ordering for eyewear. “We see what’s happening in our industry and it can be frustrating as big online players like Warby Parker start to come for our patients. We didn’t want to be one of those practices that won’t consider change.”

For Vision Salon, Dr. Johnson has built a strong outreach to the community and views the practice’s website as a significant element of those relationships. “What you’re really building is trust with patients and that’s why we pay a lot of attention to our website and our social media and other forms of outreach. When we added in Optify we saw that as a way of offering new options for people to see the collections we have.

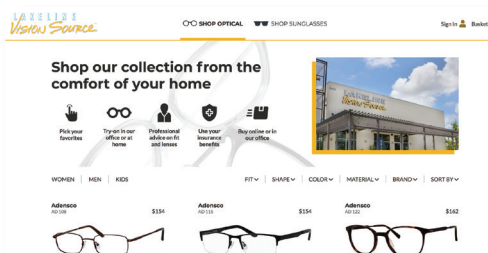
“And then once frames are pre-selected and they work with our opticians, they learn more about measurement and fit and that underscores that trust of our expertise on the optical side. I had



Ansel Johnson, OD



Vision Salon Eyecare Associates gives visibility to its new Browse Eyewear function.



Dr. Sorrenson’s opticianry staff are very supportive of patients’ browsing the new online shop.

looked at other services and systems but felt that Optify has several robust options and we’re learning more all the time. We just implemented it in August of last year after preparing for the process.”

Another optometrist who is seeing the benefits and who is struck by the enthusiasm of her staff for the practice’s online shop’s selection options is Dr. Lorrie Sorrenson, Lakeline Vision Source in Cedar Park, Texas. The practice’s online browsing shop is supported by Optify. Dr. Sorrenson said, “We’ve gone through numerous attempts to do this at our office. We’re not sure that selling glasses online at this time is meaningful, however, our online shop is extraordinarily helpful in getting patients to do some shopping before they come in. And, my opti-

cians absolutely love it and would love it if all of our patients would take advantage of the process, they are so sold on it.”

Dr. Sorrenson added, “I’ve interviewed my opticians and basically all of them said it saves at least 15 minutes on the frame choice process for them—and that’s significant. Every single communication we have with the patient before they arrive has the info about the link to go online and pre-select, our confirmation email, our text the day prior and Optify also sends their own communications out for us, too.

“We started this in 2021. We can see in our info that a patient’s visit has a flag on it and that our Optify queue can help our team get a tray pulled. It’s upped our patient capture rate by 3 percent to 4 percent already. As long as you make it real simple and get your team involved, it’s a real win



Lorrie Sorrenson, OD

for everyone. Those patients inclined to buy frames tend to use it, and their use of the pre-selects mean they’ll tend to buy those frames from you, so it’s a win-win.”

Dave Barton, Optify CEO, and his team bring their own opticianry and optical expertise to the forefront for clients. Despite all the prep that

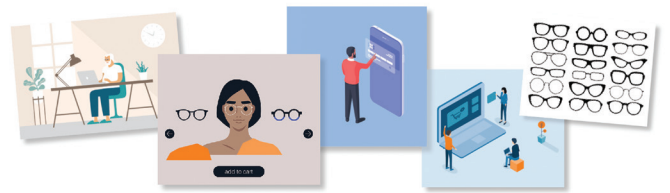
was underway prior to the pandemic, Optify actually launched in April 2020 and talks about the new opportunities that a range of customizable online communication, messaging, try-on and optical product fitting and measuring knowledge can come into play to help streamline tasks for the practice’s optical staff.

This also helps the practice realize untapped revenue, or increased capture rates and it creates new patient perceptions of the practice.

“These automations,” said Barton, can take the lift off of the practice staff and the software reaches out to the patients to get them to the site—via special messaging emails and social media. Then once the patient is on the practice website they’re

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Canada's New Look Brings a 'Full-Store Experience' to Customers' Homes

MONTREAL—After years of work and development, New Look stores, part of Canada's New Look Vision Group (which consists of several retail/eyecare brand banners) is now live this month with its two-pronged e-commerce approach, bringing what it describes as “the full store experience” into its customers' homes. New Look's suite of tools now offers two ways for customers to buy glasses online with New Look, according to Jean-Michel Maltais, the group's senior vice president of omnichannel.

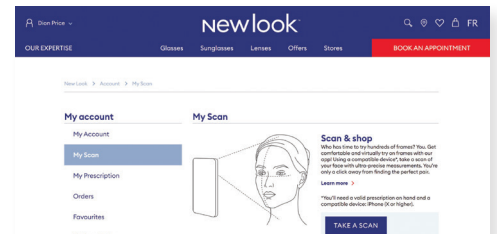
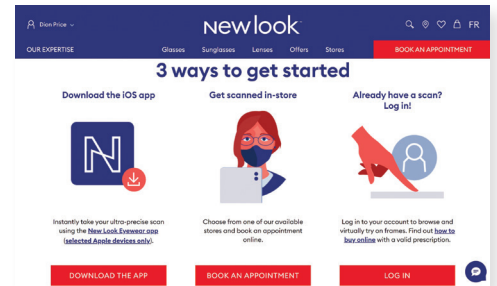
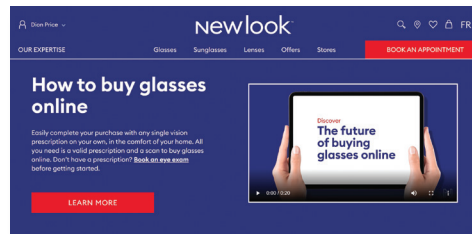
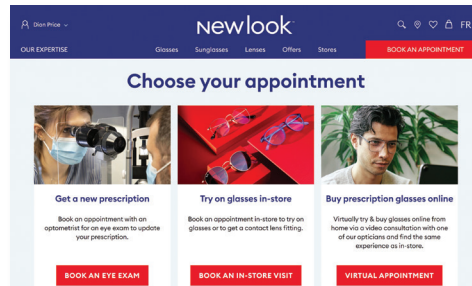
One is with an online optician—this is live now and brings the full store experience into the customer's home. The customer can purchase glasses with both single vision and progressive lenses, with the assistance of an optician through a GoToMeeting video call, which is called a “virtual appointment.”

The customer simply books an appointment and receives an email to attend the video call. Prior to the time of their appointment, they will take their ultra precise 3D facial scan using New Look's iPhone app. During the video call, the optician will use the customer's 3D facial scan to virtually try on frames and share this view live. They will then select the lenses, coatings and complete the purchase. This is as close as it gets to a store experience, but is done from the comfort of the customer's home.

With the second option, which is starting this month, New Look's customers can engage via online e-commerce. Maltais said, “This will enable the customer to buy single vision glasses directly on our website [progressives will be added in a few months]. Before making their purchase, they will take their 3D scan using our iPhone app. This will enable the same three things already available with the online optician which is the most precise virtual try-on experience and the taking of the customer's full measurements either in the app or on the website, as precisely as in-store. And the personalized, physical adjustments to enhance comfort, made by an optician before the glasses are



Jean-Michel Maltais



shipped to the customer.”

New Look's stores are using Topology's technology for these approaches. Maltais told *VM*, “Our engagement with Topology, who powers the technology behind the scan that enables us to sell online glasses with store-level quality, comfort and vision, started two and a half years ago.

“The online optician project started about 18 months ago and has been live for a year. The online virtual try-on and self-serve e-commerce has been in development and testing for about a year. We have been patient because our omnichannel strategy is not just to sell online, but to offer the same quality online as we do in store. This has required a lot of fine-tuning, but it truly revolutionizes the industry.”

Asked what have been New Look's early learnings from the multi-dimensional project, Maltais replied, “We have seen that customers have become doubtful over the years about the fact that you can buy glasses of as high quality online as you do in store. They have been disappointed by early experiences and have been buying online mostly when there are big discounts because the risk is low.

“So one of our challenges is in restoring their belief in the quality of e-commerce as a channel

in eyewear, and convincing them that you do not have to compromise on quality if you buy online. Therefore, we are placing a lot of emphasis on communications as we are not just introducing a new product, we are transforming the way customers buy glasses online.”

In addition, he noted, for the virtual appointments, New Look is seeing that the customer simply makes their purchase during the appointment rather than storing favorites to come to store. The experience is pretty much identical to that of being in a store. “We have seen a higher conversion rate from our virtual appointments than we see in store, however, which goes to show how high the standard of quality is,” Maltais said.

Like other optical retailers who spoke to *VM*, Maltais cited the “absolutely critical role that sales associates play in the process. “First, we take the 3D scan of our customers when they come in store to offer both a virtual try-on selection process in store, but to also enable the customer to come online to try on glasses virtually without having to download the iPhone app. When the scan is done in store, it works online, so it saves the customer a step in the process and delivers a truly omnichannel

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Standard Optical Prioritizes E-Commerce as a New Element of Online and In-Store Interactions

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah—Even though its planning began prior to the pandemic, Standard Optical has escalated much of its adoption of digital technology within the past two years, now prioritized as part of its overall goal to simplify and offer a range of options for patients who want to interact in multiple ways with the 100+ year-old family run company, a regional optical leader here for many years. E-commerce in particular, has become part of that new interaction, as a purchasing option, a way to explore product choices to make the in-store visit more productive, sometimes backed by on-screen consults with experienced optical staff for recommendations at the same time.

CEO Aaron Schubach explains that he and his team researched several options and found that the Ocuco group, with a range of omnichannel solutions, would be a good fit. The company was able to integrate various functions with Standard's existing site and systems and had the experience that would help implement options in a timely way.

Schubach said, "The patient's experience is not just about what happens inside an office but how they experience your brand everywhere. If they encounter your website, your social media, you



Aaron Schubach

want them to have the same connection, the same confidence level in you and your team's expertise.

"We sell our own brands and name brands in our locations. We want to be able to have them explore, try on virtually, look around, create wish lists but we also want to be able to offer them a complete transaction if that's what they want to do."

Standard also is leveraging the optical expertise of its team to offer one-on-one patient chats online, or visually virtual consult sessions where there can be a discussion about face shape, about a patient's RX needs.

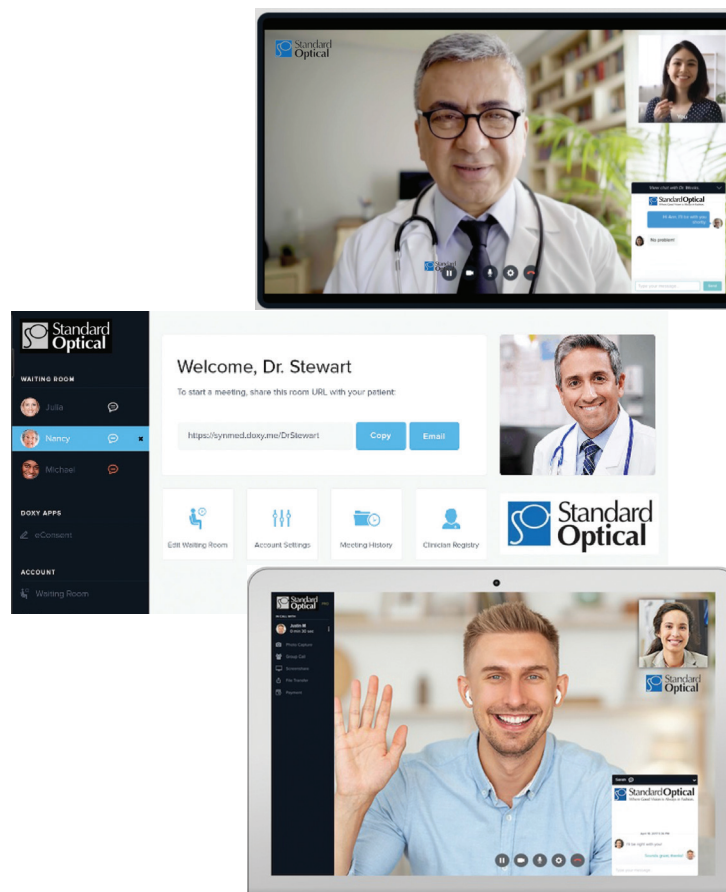
Noted Schubach, "It's hard to really inform or educate people with a paragraph of written text on a website. So if they choose, they can talk to a live optician face to face where they can have a real dialog. We have a call center in Salt Lake and our call center employees are all certified opticians. We've been involving them in this approach and it's really working well. On a Sunday afternoon when our stores are closed, we've had some very productive interactions."

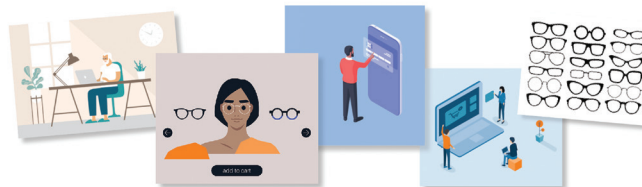
Schubach also pointed out that "endless aisle" opportunities for customer interactions on the website enable Standard to show product beyond what's featured in the stores—where perhaps not every physical location in the regional operation carries the same styles. Conversely, with an iPad in the

stores, where the group utilizes Smart Mirror too for customers, there's a way for customers to see other color options of frames on the online site.

Schubach is still evaluating the actual on-site e-commerce revenues and is happy with the actual dollars to date. "But the other benefits of doing this is that it enables Standard to feel current and modern. We're in a really tech-savvy community here and the impact also is great for our Opticare managed care business, since people can use their benefits on the site as well.

Schubach said, "If you don't adapt to people's habits, it doesn't mean they will always buy online and never come into the store. But it's more about saying to patients, 'What do you want to do? How do you want to interact with us?'" ■





An Independent 'Meets Patients Where They Are' With New Tools and Communication

SACRAMENTO, Calif.—Megan Douglas, marketing manager of EYEcenter Optometric, with five offices in Northern California, has been with the practice for five years. The full service eyecare offices, even pre-pandemic, were utilizing several digital tools to help patients, including contact lens reordering and the ability to fill in some assessment forms online, a patient portal and some payment options, way before the new 2020-2021 business climate sped up other changes.

Today, EYEcenter's Douglas said, "It's become very clear that the practice needs to reach patients where they are, and make it easy for them to get in touch, schedule an appointment, see our selections and do it on their own time. This is something they can do from their phones, it's a lower stress experience for them—and for us—and it also empowers the consumer."

To that end, EYEcenter is utilizing My Frame Gallery resources, featuring virtual try-on of the frames carried at the offices, an option featured prominently on their practice homepage, and they are also using that Gallery environment to enable patients to book appointments online. "We're definitely looking at ways to ramp things up, especially within the past year. We communicate to them often about our

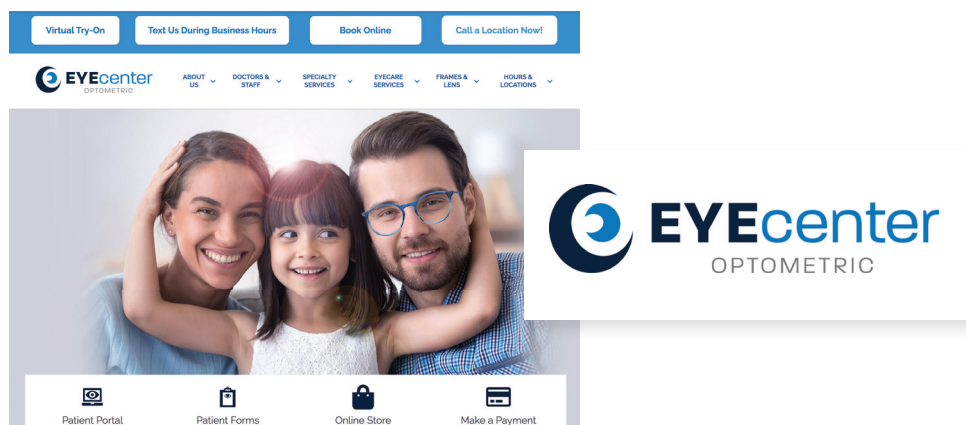


Megan Douglas

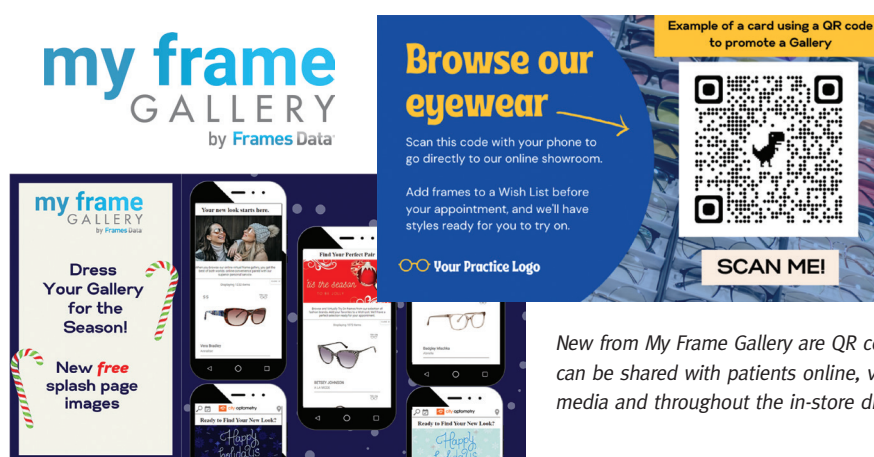
VTO which lets them pull together a wish list ahead of their appointment, and we tell them again when we send appointment reminders, too."

She noted, "We have five offices and it helps those teams to pull frames from the wish lists to have ready for patients' appointments or be able to pull other choices that are similar to those choices to help improve the experience for the patients when they get to the location."

Douglas really likes a new feature from My Frame Gallery which enables patients to make use of Quick Response codes as well—these can be scanned and linked to images and additional in-



VTO to Online Booking, Patient Portal and other digital features are a prominent element of EYEcenter Optometric's homepage.



New from My Frame Gallery are QR codes which can be shared with patients online, via social media and throughout the in-store dispensary.

formation. "In fact, we just received an option to order small posters featuring the QR codes and I've printed several cards about these near our frame boards and, also by the front desk, which people really like," Douglas said.

So far EYEcenter Optometric is not selling product via e-commerce on their website, but currently they're studying the interest level and engagement of patients with the VTO and products shown online. "We're not ruling it out but want to learn more about it," she noted.

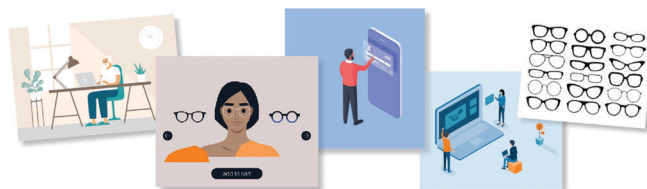
Douglas also added that new digital tools and

online communications, including social media about them, has helped tremendously during a period when staff schedules have sometimes been impacted by the pandemic and everyone, especially the patients, want their time within in-office visits to be as valuable as possible.

"Our practice is always adapting the latest tools so that we can still give our patients the personalized service they want and expect. Our interactions can be streamlined especially when we can use it to personalize their experience with us—just as it happens on the eyecare side at our offices." ■

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Luna Focuses on B2B Vision Technologies and Services for ECPs and Retailers

DRAPER, Utah—In late January, 1-800 Contacts announced the formation of a standalone business focused on providing technology and services to third parties in the vision space. The new business-to-business (B2B) company will offer 20 integrated technologies and services—ranging from telehealth platforms for new and renewal glasses and contacts prescriptions, eyewear virtual try-on, a digital pupillary distance tool, glasses and contacts fulfillment and more.

This suite of solutions will enable eyewear retailers, brands and doctors to modernize their customer experience both online and in stores, the company said. The new combined company will operate under the brand, Luna. Luna means moon in Latin and speaks to the company's "moonshot goal" of offering quality, affordable, accessible vision for all, the company explained.

John Graham, CEO of 1-800 Contacts, said, "We have always been focused on the constant pursuit of a better way for vision. We take a customer-centric approach to make buying glasses and contacts simple and affordable. To expand our reach, we knew we'd have to expand upon our partnerships with other retailers and doctors."

Luna is a separate business held under common ownership with 1-800 Contacts that is being formed through the combination of the businesses of Premium Vision, Ditto, 6over6 and ExpressExam, each of which are distinctive leaders in their respective areas.

Premium Vision is an affiliate business of 1-800 Contacts that provides contact lens fulfillment services and an e-commerce site platform to other optical retailers. In 2021, 1-800 Contacts announced the acquisition of Ditto, the leading eyewear virtual try-on technology company. At that time, the company shared its intention to combine Ditto with 6over6, which 1-800 Contacts acquired in 2019.

6over6 has created the world's first medical grade mobile subjective refraction app so customers can obtain a new prescription using only a smartphone. ExpressExam is a telehealth prescrip-



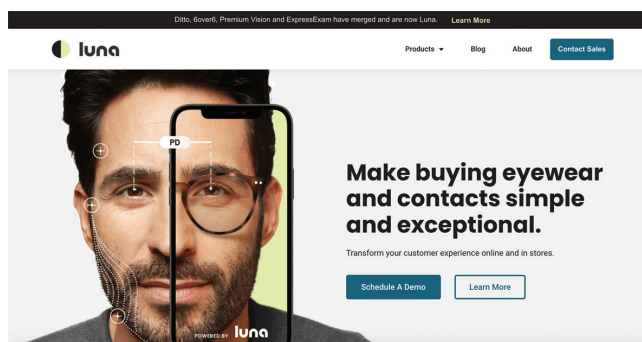
Kellen Fowler



Kate Doerksen



Ofer Limon



luna

Luna is now a separate B2B company under common ownership of 1-800 Contacts, offering a range of digital tech services to ECPs and optical retailers.

tion renewal platform that connects customers with doctors in order to renew a contact lens or glasses prescription online.

Stated Kellen Fowler, president of Luna, "We are excited to bring the complementary capabilities of Ditto, 6over6, Premium Vision and ExpressExam together to create the Luna business. This suite of products is unmatched in the industry and creates turnkey solutions that make it much easier for our clients to successfully execute the digital transformation that will set them up for future success."

Fowler has been an executive at 1-800 Contacts and helped to launch Express Exam. Kate Doerksen, cofounder of Ditto, will be head of revenue at Luna. Ofer Limon, cofounder of 6over6, is now head of clinical products and technology at Luna.

Doerksen said, "Our clients have been asking us for additional technology solutions for years. By combining forces, Luna can deliver much-needed integrated technology and services solutions. We have products that can help every single optical retailer, optometrist and eyewear brand modernize their patient experience."

Further, she noted, Luna will have access to 1-800's North American infrastructure for certain warehousing and fulfillment, which will be offered to business partners, to create an unmatched turnkey suite of digital technologies and services.

Luna's business is already partnering with leading global retailers, brands and doctors around the world. ■

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New Integration Between SmartBook and Frame Dream Premium Boosts Capture Rates

HOUSTON—A recently launched patient journey shaping tool has been introduced to Vision Source practices. SmartBook and Frame Dream have teamed up to create a new integration between their platforms which delivers patients a personalized, modern, intuitive journey, the organization said. Vision Source noted that these “weave together their digital and in-person eyecare experiences while helping practices increase capture rate and per-patient value and reduce in-office selling time.”

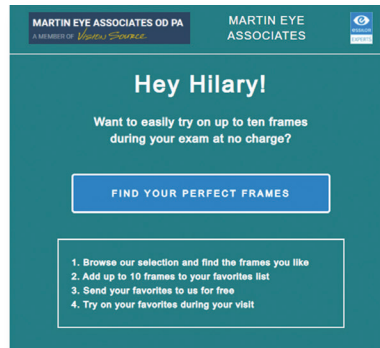
It starts when a patient books an appointment through SmartBook. The patient will receive an automated email inviting them to preview eyewear ahead of their appointment, guiding them through a simple questionnaire (if desired) to help curate a selection of flattering and functional frames to browse. The patient can then designate “favorite” frames and send their selections to their doctor, who will be able to view selections and appointment information in one unified dashboard.

Vision Source members with SmartBook who participate in Frame Dream Premium get exclusive features, including automated Smartbook communications that drive patients to pre-select frames before their in-office visit, exclusive access to PreView, a mobile-friendly frame selection portal with enhanced search and filtering options to help patients with their selections.

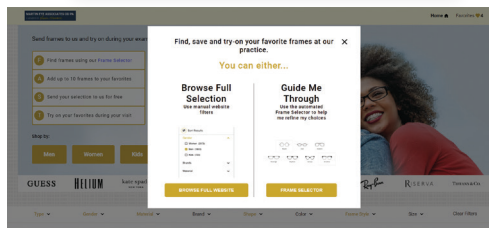
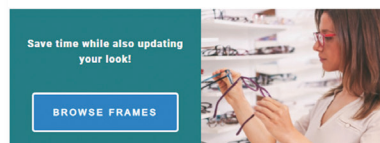
In-office patient experiences are customized and enhanced, as practices are able to preemptively pull “favorited” frames to have on-hand when the patient arrives. And practices realize time savings as both optical staff and the patient start with a good idea of what will work best for the patient.

Vision Source reports that participating practices have seen:

- A near 100 percent capture rate when patients pre-shop frames and share their selection with their doctor.
- A 15 percent increase in capture rate when patients engage with the framedream browsing platform (whether or not they send favorite selections to their doctor) versus average patients.



What next? Go to your regularly scheduled exam and your eyecare provider will have samples of the frames you shared ready to try on. Pick the best and update your look, all in one visit, or choose nothing and only pay for the exam.

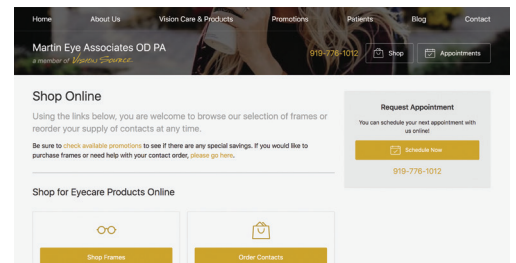


For many independent practices, Vision Source pointed out an integrated, automated patient communication and optical browsing platform such as this would be cumbersome to set up and manage, and would be potentially cost prohibitive. “Providing tools which offer independent practices a way to differentiate themselves and create delightful patient experiences is one of the ways we look to be an invaluable partner to our customers,” Vision Source said.

Dr. Alex Martin, Martin Eye Associates, Sanford, N.C., said, “Exclusive tools like PreView by SmartBook have helped make running my optical even more efficient. The ability to let patients pre-select frames before their appointment has helped my



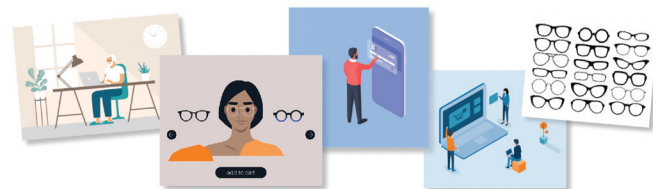
“PreView by SmartBook and Frame Dream has allowed our patients to see our frame gallery ahead of time and narrow down what they want; our patients get to “shop” ahead of time resulting in better frame styling, easier frame selections, as well as more multiple pair sales as the patient realizes they need different glasses for different parts of their life.” – Dr. Michael Siegel, Vision Source of Mt. Olive, Mt. Olive, N.J.



“Exclusive tools like PreView by SmartBook have helped make running my optical even more efficient. The ability to let patients pre-select frames before their appointment has helped my Optical staff streamline the selection process by pulling frames for the patient before they arrive for their appointment. My capture rate for the patients who engage with the PreView site before their visit has been close to 99 percent.” – Dr. Alex Martin, Martin Eye Associates, Sanford, N.C.

optical staff streamline the selection process by pulling frames for the patient before they arrive for their appointment. My capture rate for the patients who engage with the PreView site before their visit has been close to 99 percent.”

Added Dr. Michael Siegel, Vision Source of Mt. Olive, in Mt. Olive, N.J., “PreView by SmartBook and Frame Dream has allowed our patients to see our frame gallery ahead of time and narrow down what they want; our patients get to “shop” ahead of time resulting in better frame styling, easier frame selections, as well as more multiple pair sales as the patient realizes they need different glasses for different parts of their life.” ■



Independents and Retailers Supplement Brick with Click

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“The timeline to implement e-commerce has been the challenge but we created a special task force internally to come up with ways to reduce implementation time and came up with a series of bolt-ons to enable virtual try-on, direct e-commerce, catalogs and telemedicine or teleretail consults, too in a four-to-five-week timetable.

“And our diverse optical systems and lab knowledge of what’s involved behind most ophthalmic/eyecare business and services gives us a true advantage in expediting what can be done for our clients.”

Having an extensive familiarity with the various elements of what goes into dispensing a pair of well-made and measured prescription eyeglasses and all the communication points among practitioners, opticians, selling associates and patients/

consumer is a distinct advantage for firms who want to help more eager independents and optical retailers take the e-commerce plunge.

For an ECP to get e-commerce to literally work in a business as multi-dimensional as optical is both cost and time-prohibitive. Observed Dave Barton, cofounder and CEO, Optify, “Actually, to make it work, and we’ve refined this as we’ve developed what we offer now, is to look at the practice website, make sure that search is optimized and then once the patient or consumer gets there, help make it clear about what they can now do on that site.

“Glasses are a buying journey, not an impulse buy. You’re not buying a towel on the internet. You’re buying a pair of prescription eyeglasses. Yes, there’s interactivity that happens. So, you’ve got to do it at the right time in the right way so patients

have confidence. It can boost trust and improve captures, too.”

Optify, which launched its business in April 2020, is now working with hundreds of independent practices across the U.S. and a new multi-location service option is coming soon, Barton said.

Vision Monday takes a look here at some of the independent ECPs and optical retailers who are rethinking their approach to e-commerce and their online presence now. They are moving beyond their judgmental and often unfavorable perceptions of online-only players who have competed in the eyewear space for years now, to more confidently tap new digital tools to leverage their ophthalmic expertise, reputations and personal relationships with patients/customers—and new prospects—in a new and modern ways. ■

Canada’s New Look Brings a ‘Full-Store Experience’ to Customers’ Homes

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nel experience. Second, the opticians that deliver the service as part of our virtual appointments are the same as the ones who work in our store. So as we progress on this journey, not only do our customers experience an omnichannel journey, but our staff are also becoming omnichannel salespeople.”

New Look presents the same frame brands as they do in store, therefore the majority of common known brands such as Tom Ford, Hugo Boss, Kate Spade and Ray Ban are all available, as well as

some of their private label brands such as Madison, Caché and Avenue by Julien Couture.

Maltais also said, “We have been openly communicating about the virtual appointments for many months now, on our website, through social media, by email, on TV, through PR and most importantly, in our stores, where we take the 3D scan of customers using the Topology app on an iPad pro. Regarding the e-commerce functionality, in addition to continuing to sharing this in store when we take people’s scans, it will be announced

to our customers first by email, and we will then extend our communications to all channels as we move forward.”

The New Look Eyewear banner has 85 stores across Quebec (73), Ontario (6), Saskatchewan (2) and British Columbia (4). The New Look Vision Group also includes other banners such as Iris, Greiche & Scaff, Vogue Optical, Edward Beiner, Black Optical and LOH. The New Look Vision Group now has over 460 stores across Canada and the U.S. ■

Independents and Staff Lean Into Online Showcases, via Optify

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having a modern experience by exploring frames and style options—they can buy or they can be encouraged to pre-select and make their in-office visit more productive.”

He said, “Working with us for online is something that would be so costly for a practice to work

with some of the general e-commerce options out there that have no experience at all with the optical sector, unlike us and this is all we do.

“Patients have been trained for the last decade, not to go to the optometrist website to look at glasses. So now you’ve got to train them to go to your site. The Vision Council’s internet influence

research reports that 44 percent of ECPs’ patients visit somebody’s website to look at glasses before they come in. So much of what we’re doing now is helping to reeducate patients about what the potential is now for online options and choices. Glasses are a buying journey and we’re helping ECPs become a part of that process.” ■