

Best Practices Case Study



Increasing Polarized Lens Sales: How To Grow Your Business Using a Wellness Approach to Prescribing Eyewear



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BACKGROUND

Wouldn't you rather prevent a disease than try to cure it?

Optometrists (ODs) are primary care providers for the eyes. And the smartest ODs take a preventive medicine (wellness) approach to eye care — where the goal is to do everything possible to protect, promote, and maintain healthy vision. This approach is far better than trying to limit or reverse eye problems after they have already begun to affect a person's vision and lifestyle.

And perhaps the most effective way for a wellness-based optometrist to help people enjoy a lifetime of good vision is to routinely prescribe polarized sunglasses for everyday wear.

Protecting eyes from the sun's damaging ultraviolet (UV) and high-energy visible (HEV) rays can significantly decrease the risk of cataracts, macular degeneration, photokeratitis, cancer of the eyelids, and more.

And since damage to the eyes from solar radiation is cumulative over a person's lifetime, for the greatest protective effect polarized sunglasses should be prescribed for all patients (emmetropes as well as patients with refractive errors) beginning as soon as possible — preferably in childhood.

DO WELL BY DOING GOOD

As one mid-sized Midwestern optical retail recently learned, taking a wellness approach to eye care can be a boon to business. Prescribing polarized sunglasses for every patient is the classic win-win scenario: it's good for patients, and good for the financial health of the optical retailer, too!

When XYZ Optical (actual name withheld at retailer's request) first decided to attempt to grow its sales of polarized sunglasses, its year-over-year sales in the segment was essentially flat and accounted for only 1 to 2 percent of total optical sales.

At first, the company tried the usual methods to boost sales: advertising, promotions, point-of-purchase (POP) displays, financial incentives to its opticians, etc. These tactics produced occasional boosts in sales, but nothing sustainable — or close to XYZ Optical's goal of polarized sunglasses accounting for 20 percent of overall sales.

Then XYZ tried something new: getting their optometrists to take a wellness approach to the long-term health of their patients' eyes by discussing the benefits of polarized sunglasses at every exam and writing two eyewear prescriptions for every patient: one for clear corrective lenses for indoor and night-time use, and a second for polarized sunglasses.

The result: Sales of polarized lenses quickly grew to 25 percent of total lens sales — a percentage XYZ Optical has maintained for the past three years.

OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS

Not every doctor at XYZ Optical immediately accepted the two-prescription initiative. But the company's top-level management developed a process and remained steadfast, holding all staff members accountable. Team members participate in an intense 3-day training program. The company also tracks the number of polarized lens sales generated by each doctor's prescriptions, and offers financial incentives based on polarized lens sales. Opticians remain committed to education/training on the eye health benefits of polarized lenses, sales are tracked, and mandatory meetings are scheduled if sales fall below certain levels.

Clear and consistent communications are considered major factors to implementing this successful initiative. Top management outlined a process to all doctors with expectations that they discuss the health and visual benefits of polarized sun lenses with every patient.

Managers also clearly communicated sales goals and expectations to all opticians. And XYZ Optical's doctors and opticians now have a consistent patient hand-off (called the "Transfer of Trust") for seamless communication with the patient about the benefits of polarized lenses.

The Transfer of Trust occurs after a doctor finishes a patient's exam. The optician arrives and the doctor discusses his or her eyewear recommendations with the dispenser in front of the patient. Everyone is present and hears the same information. This transfer is instrumental in connecting the importance of doctor's recommendation and written prescription with the optician's eyewear sales process, according to XYZ Optical.

MEASURABLE RESULTS

It's now standard practice for patients at XYZ Optical to receive two prescriptions. The doctors have embraced the idea of educating patients about preventive health care of their eyes and the benefits of polarized sun lenses.

The optometrists never discuss specific brands; instead, they focus on the eye health benefits of polarized lenses. XYZ Optical's opticians accept the responsibility of "selling" polarized lenses. They are trained to explain the added value of Coppertone-brand polarized lenses to patients. XYZ's educated and well-trained opticians help create educated patients, which in turn has led to a healthier bottom line, according to the company.

IMPLEMENTATION ACROSS THE BOARD

In summary, XYZ Optical's success in significantly growing revenue from polarized lens sales is attributable to a company-wide commitment to wellness-based eye care and clearly defined responsibilities for all team members:

Management



- Understand current polarized sales as a percentage of overall revenue; set clear sales goals, timelines and retail pricing.
- Outline company expectations to doctors, opticians/dispensers and receptionists.
- Provide clear and effective education and training for all team members.
- Hold each staff member accountable with achievable goals, effective sales training, and one-on-one consultations.
- Implement a tracking and reward system to ensure follow-through from doctors and opticians.
- Develop an employee sunglasses program. The best recommendation is a personal polarized experience.
- Create a calendar of special sunglass offers to advertise to patients.

Receptionist



- When scheduling eye exams, ask patients to bring any glasses they are currently using AND their current sunglasses to their exam.
- When patients arrive, make sure they have their eyeglasses and sunglasses with them.

Doctor



- Explain all testing you perform during the exam.
- Educate all patients about the dangers sunlight poses to the eyes over time and the health and visual benefits of polarized lenses.
- During the examination, discuss macular degeneration, cataracts, skin cancer and other serious eye problems, and how protecting eyes from exposure to the sun's UV and HEV can reduce the risk of these problems.
- Write two prescriptions for every patient: one for glasses with clear anti-reflective lenses for general wear and a second for polarized sunglasses with UV and HEV (“blue”) light protection.
- Answer all the patient's questions and complete “Transfer of Trust” to the optician.
- Tell the patient that the optician is like a pharmacist who will fill their eyewear prescriptions accurately and help them select the best frames for their needs.

Optician/Dispenser



- Ask to see the patient's sunglasses. If they don't have a pair, reiterate the importance of protecting the eyes from the sun's UV and HEV rays to reduce the risk of macular degeneration, cataracts and skin cancer. If they have a pair, congratulate them for investing in their long-term eye health by wearing protective sunglasses outdoors.
- Explain that the doctor has prescribed polarized sunglasses both for superior vision and comfort in bright sunlight and also to reduce the risk of serious eye problems caused by UV and HEV light.
- If the patient says they weren't expecting to purchase two pairs of glasses, assure them they are not alone and that many people aren't fully aware of the dangers sunlight poses to the eyes. Inform them that the entire eye care team at XYZ Optical is committed to helping people enjoy a lifetime of good vision, and that wearing polarized lenses is the best way to prevent avoidable long-term damage to the eyes that could lead to permanent vision loss.

THE DECISION IS YOURS

The opportunity to help patients enjoy a lifetime of good vision and experience all the joys that go with it is available to eye care providers who choose to build their practice using a patient wellness and preventive care approach.

And you don't have to sacrifice profitability when taking a little extra time to fully educate patients about the potential dangers of the sun's UV and HEV rays and the protective and visual benefits of polarized eyewear. In fact, as XYZ Optical has shown, taking this approach can significantly increase revenues — while helping people take better care of their eyes.

Maybe it's time for you to consider a similar approach.