

Why Buying Eyeglasses On-Line Isn't Such a Great Idea

The St. Petersburg Times - Saturday, July 2, 2011

This isn't a one-size-fits-all purchase. A one-on-one fitting is key to good vision.

by

Anthony D. Record, LDO

If your only concern is saving money, buying eyeglasses online sounds like a great idea. If you wish to ensure your best vision, protect your eyes, enjoy maximum comfort and also save a few bucks, an online optical purchase may not be the best decision. Here are a few reasons why:

Impact Resistance. In the United States there are strict OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) and ANSI (American National Standards Institute) standards for spectacle lenses, including minimum thickness guidelines to ensure maximum impact resistance. Many optical retailers and labs apply even stricter standards - especially for kids. That's not necessarily so in other countries, and many of these orders come from outside the country.

Last year I had a man in my shop who wanted to replace a lens that had shattered when he dropped his glasses. Upon inspection, I noticed that the other, unbroken lens was so thin I could flex it so that the edges almost touched one another. If an object such as a small pebble or other object had hit the lenses while he was wearing them, they easily could have shattered into small pieces, some of which could have damaged his cornea. He had, of course, purchased the glasses online.

Comfort and Fit. Virtually "trying on" frames via a picture on your phone or computer screen has technological allure, and it can give you some idea of how the frames might look on you. But if you never *actually* try them on, you can't really know if they will fit you comfortably. The frames may be too loose or too tight. The temples (side pieces) may be too short or too long. Perhaps they're too heavy and they slide down your nose. Your options: Live with uncomfortable, ill-fitting glasses, send them back, or try to adjust them yourself. Take them to your neighborhood optician and you may not get a warm reception. Why? First, it's not fair to the paying customers who are waiting for service, and second, on-going repairs and adjustments are part of the initial cost of buying glasses in the first place. So you will likely have to mail them back to the place you bought them.

Vision Issues. When you order glasses from a qualified professional, part of the initial consultation is determining your PD (pupillary distance), which is the distance in millimeters between the apex of the centers of your corneas. If you wear bifocals or progressive lenses, a multi-focal height or MFH (the distance from the deepest geometric point on the frame to your lower lid or middle of your pupil). If the PD is off by

from the deepest geometric point on the frame to your lower lid or middle of your pupil). If the PD is off by even a millimeter or two you may find yourself with varying degrees of double vision, stress and strain, and general discomfort. I have seen glasses purchased online with a PD that is “off” by as much as 10 millimeters. To give you an idea on how far off that is, it’s like you ordered pants with a 32” waist size and you received pants that were 37”. Yes, there are websites and phone apps designed to self-take those measurements. I have tried about a dozen of them, and they all came up with incorrect - sometimes significantly incorrect - measurements. If you are a bifocal or progressive lens wearer and the MFH is off, the reading portion of your prescription may be positioned too low, which means you will have to tilt your head back uncomfortably to focus on what you are trying to read. If the MFH is positioned too high, it will encroach on your distance vision, meaning you will have to consciously tilt your head down, or slide the glasses down your nose to see at a distance while driving or walking. Inexplicably, most online eyeglass sellers don’t even ask for an MFH measurement.

There Are Better Ways to Save Money on Eyeglasses. Especially in today’s economy, if you were to simply ask an ECP (eye-care professional) to match a reasonable online offer, he or she probably would. But remember, if something seems too good to be true, it probably is. I’m not going to “match” an incredibly low online price, because more than 30 years of experience tells me it’s not an apples-to-apples match. Consider also that when you purchase your eyewear in person from an educated, trained professional, you’re not only getting someone to guide, consult, fit, adjust, repair, and verify accuracy, you are also meeting someone who will do everything to make sure you remain a satisfied customer for years to come.

Anthony D. Record has been a Florida-licensed optician since 1984, and is a contributing editor to Eye Care Professional magazine. He is also an adjunct instructor at Rockhurst University in Kansas. He owns Max Optics in Port Richey, Florida.

