

An Eye Care Professional's Guide to Competing with Online Spectacle Sellers

(Optical Seminars Course # HS-10)

by

**Anthony Record, DO
Optical Seminars, Inc.**

**PO Box 5445
Spring Hill, Fl 34611-5445
homestudy@opticalseminars.com**

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Course Objectives & Introduction

Upon completing this one-hour course, an optician should:

- More fully understand the negative ramifications of patients ordering glasses online.
- Be inspired to speak out and write about the potential dangers of online ordering.
- Possess the information to more effectively persuade in-person patients to order from bricks-and-mortar dispensaries.
- Be ready to implement some or all the 100 suggestions to “ramp up” his or her version of optical dispensing and offer clients real value in a bricks-and-mortar dispensary.
- Achieve a minimum score of 70% on the final assessment.

Fifteen years ago, I wrote an article which was published in *The St. Petersburg Times*. Although I had to edit it down to 1,200 words, the original 2,000-word article appears below. Though it is obviously written for and geared toward the optical consumer, some of the information may come as a surprise to a licensed optician. The article will hopefully serve many purposes: inform the ECP (Eye Care Professional), inspire the ECP to speak out and write articles in their communities, and to better form a right-minded, conscientious approach in handling the whole idea of patients purchasing prescription eyewear over the Internet. It will also serve as a backdrop for the remainder of this module, which is designed to guide you in forming your own approach to the whole thing moving forward. Here is the article, in its entirety:

Online Eyeglass Sellers

With very few caveats mentioned in them, there have been several articles over the last couple of years touting the benefits of purchasing eyeglasses online, the most recent being “Buy Glasses with a Click” which appeared in *The St. Petersburg Time*. In the interest of balance, here’s a view with many caveats and only one benefit. If you or a loved one wears prescription eyeglasses, I strongly encourage you to read on.

Let’s start with the law. According to Florida Statute 484.001, “the Legislature finds that the practice of opticianry by unskilled and incompetent practitioners presents a danger to the public health and safety [and] that it is difficult for the public to make an informed choice about opticians and that the consequences of a wrong choice could seriously endanger their health and safety...the sole purpose of enacting this [law] is for the protection of the public health, safety, and welfare.” A few paragraphs later, ostensibly to further protect our citizenry, FS 484.002 states that eyeglasses should not be transferred or dispensed to the wearer, “...until the optician has completed the fitting of the optical device upon the customer.” This directive is contained in the statute’s very definition of “opticianry.” In the section on violations and penalties (484.013), “to prepare or dispense lenses, spectacles, eyeglasses, contact lenses, or other devices when such a person is not licensed as an optician in this state” is deemed unlawful. In Florida Administrative Code 64B12, which sets out specific disciplinary actions for people and organizations in violation of these rules, the penalty is up to a \$10,000 fine and loss of licensure, that is, the person’s livelihood.

So, the state of Florida, in all its infinite wisdom, places all these restrictions (and more) on how its people purchase prescription eyewear. Meanwhile, anyone with a computer, Internet access, a credit card, and half a brain can circumvent all those laws and rules, and without consulting a professional licensed by the Department of Health, place an order for prescription eyeglasses at a myriad of websites. Since most of these entities are headquartered out of the state or country, and since most of the glasses are made overseas, they are governed by the laws of Interstate Commerce only and fall between the cracks of the state's authority. In plain English you can purchase your eyeglasses online, and from a legal standpoint probably nothing bad is going to happen to you. Which begs the question: Just because you *can* do something should you? I think we'd all agree that the answer to that question often is a resounding "no."

There are many interesting things for sale on the Internet. During a recent surfing session, I discovered dozens of sites selling in-home, do-it-yourself Pap smears. I don't know about you, but I would prefer my wife and daughter consult a licensed gynecologist when it comes to administering and interpreting a procedure designed to detect cervical cancer. Likewise, I saw an impressive site that was selling a do-it-yourself spine manipulation and Chiropractic booklet and DVD for \$99. If I were suffering from chronic or intense back pain, I think a trip to my local, licensed chiropractor would be in order. For @ \$59 I could order a booklet and tool kit to tune my own piano, but I don't think I would entrust the hammers and keys of my Yamaha grand to my untrained, inept touch. You get the picture – like I said, just because you can, don't mean you should. (That last line came from my online grammar guide.)

But seriously, let's consider the wisdom of purchasing prescription eyeglasses online. In case you haven't figured it out, I think it is a terribly bad idea. Before I lay out my reasons why, let me make two things perfectly clear. First, I DO have a horse in this race. In the interest of full disclosure, I have been a Florida-licensed optician for more than 30 years. I have a private practice in Pasco County (Max Optics), and my wife is also a Florida-licensed optician. In addition, I have been a lecturer and provider of continuing education for Eye Care Professionals in this and many other states. I also present CE courses at the International Vision Expo in New York and Las Vegas every year. Second, if your ONLY concern is economic – purchasing cheaper eyeglasses regardless of the risks involved – read no further, you will probably not be convinced. Just promise me one thing: When something bad happens to you physically (God forbid, you damage or lose your eyesight) good luck finding someone to hold responsible other than yourself. It would be awfully difficult to sue some nameless, faceless somebody operating somewhere deep within Thailand for example. Second, if and when the glasses you receive get loose, need repair, adjustment, break, or if you're not seeing as well as you hoped you would, do not consult a flesh-and-blood optician to assist you. Instead, wrap the glasses up with a note, and send them back to where you purchased them for assistance or repair. That seems like a fair enough request. After all, if you bring them to your local optician say for a screw, and while replacing it, the screwdriver accidentally slips and seriously scratches your lens – who's responsible?

So here are a few more reasons why I think you should think twice about Internet eyeglass purchases:

Impact Resistance - Safety

In the United States there are strict OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) and ANSI (American National Standards Institute) standards when it comes to spectacle lenses. Minimum thickness guidelines to ensure maximum impact resistance are strictly adhered to by ECPs in the United States. Many optical retailers and labs have applied even stricter standards (especially for kids), again, to ensure maximum eye protection. That's not necessarily so in other countries. Last year I had a man in my shop who wished to purchase one lens to replace one that had shattered when he dropped his glasses on a linoleum floor. Upon inspection I noticed that the other, unbroken lens was incredibly thin – to the point that I could flex it so that the edges almost touched one another. Thank goodness the lens had broken when dropped, and not while he was wearing them in front of his eyes. If an object such as a small pebble had hit the lens while he was wearing them, I guarantee they would have shattered into many small pieces, some of which would have almost certainly damaged his cornea. He had purchased them online.

Comfort and Fit

Despite the technological allure and “convenience” of virtually “trying on” frames via a picture on your computer screen, without ever actually trying them on physically, you can never be sure of a comfortable fit. Although they might look attractive on screen, often when they finally arrive the frames are too loose or too tight. The temples (sidepieces) are too short or way too long. Perhaps they're too heavy - they slide down your nose. Those are just some of the chances you take. At that point, you have a few options: live with it, send them back, or try to adjust them yourself. Again, no self-respecting optician would want to do it for you. Why? First, it's not fair to the “paying” patients and customers who are also waiting for his or her service. Additionally, an initial consultation and initial personalized fitting, along with any necessary repairs and adjustments are part of the purchase price. Therefore, send them back to where you purchased them.

Comfort is not the only consideration when thinking about “fit.” When you order glasses in person from a qualified, optical professional, part of the initial consultation is determining your pupillary distance or PD (the distance between your pupils in millimeters) and if you wear bifocals 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” just a few millimeters, it will result in unwanted prescribed horizontal prism. This could result in varying degrees of blurry vision, double vision, stress and strain, or general discomfort. The amount of prism and discomfort is compounded the stronger your prescription and by just how far off the measurement is. I have personally seen PDs of glasses purchased online off by as much as 10 mm. To give you an idea of how far off that is, it's like you ordered pants with a waist measurement of 32 and received pants with a waist size of 37. Good luck with that fit. You should know that of every online site or phone app designed to self-take those measurements, nearly every single one I tested (10-12 of them) came up with incorrect – sometimes significantly incorrect – measurements.

If you are a bifocal wearer and the MFH is off, the reading portion of your prescription will be positioned too low – which means you'd have to tilt your head back to an uncomfortable degree to bring your reading material into focus. The other possibility is that it is positioned too high – which means your reading portion would encroach on your distance vision, and you'd

have to tilt your head down, or slide the glasses down your nose a bit, so that while driving, walking, or watching TV your view is not obscured.

Inexplicably, most online eyeglass sellers don't even ask for the MFH measurement. Apparently, they guess, or figure that one-measurement fits all. Trust me it doesn't. I sold more than a dozen pairs of bifocals yesterday, and every MFH was different! As far as the PD is concerned, some of these sites give you instructions on how to do it yourself, or advice on how to weasel the information out of a local eye care professional. You should know that neither the PD nor the MFH are considered part of your eyeglass prescription. They are considered ancillary measurements and again, accurately determining them is part of the initial consultation with a licensed optician.

Final Inspection and Adjustment

Even after all that, assuming the measurements and frame fit are both perfect, unless the frames are personally fit to your head and ears after the lenses have been mounted, they will not perform optimally. This potential problem is also compounded by the severity of your prescription, but even with mild prescriptions, if you are wearing a progressive, no-line lens, this final fitting is crucial. If the fit is skewed 1 or 2 mm either way, your vision will suffer. Additionally, before wearing them, it is critical that an Eye Care Professional double check to make sure the prescription in the eyeglasses exactly matches what was prescribed by your eye doctor. If it doesn't (and sometimes even the finest lab makes an error) they need to be remade before you begin to routinely wear them. Buying your glasses from a licensed professional helps to ensure that all this is done.

Quality and Service Are Remembered Long After Price is Forgotten

Generally, when it comes to the countless number of online eyeglass sellers there are two categories: First, the ones that sell their products really, really cheap. For those websites I would remind you of an old cliché your mama taught you many years ago: If it's too good to be true, it's probably not. In other words, saving a few bucks is one thing, but if it's selling for pennies on the dollar, those are the glasses that are more likely to be dangerous. They're the ones that probably have many of the characteristics explained above. The second type of online seller offers products a little below what you would pay in the average bricks-and-mortar establishment. Now, I can't speak for all the Eye Care Professionals out there, but allow me to let you in on a little secret that is especially true in today's economy: If you were to go into your local optical shop and say something like, "I saw this Vera Bradley frame online, and with the kind of lenses I want, when everything is considered, it would cost me \$60 less than you're asking if I bought them on the Internet. Is there anything you can do?" I bet you most opticians would match the price or at least meet you in the middle. Now you have a win-win situation. You save a little money and get all the benefits of in-person, customized service, and the optical establishment gets the chance to establish a new-customer relationship. Win-win!

In another old cliché, someone once proverbially said, "The eyes are the window to the soul." In many ways, I think we'd all agree on that one. And in terms of all our precious senses,

which one would you be most devastated by if it were lost? For most of us, I think the answer would be sight. With all that in mind, think long and hard about what you allow to be the only barrier between your eyes and the outside world. I don't know about you, but for myself and my loved ones...only the best.

And that ends the article that appeared in *The St. Petersburg Times*.

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Approaches to Online Sellers

The Vision Council of America's Internet Influence Study (2008-2020), *Eyecare Business*, *Vision Monday*, and Statista (2018-2019) all vary slightly in the statistics. The year 2008 was the first time our industry reported on Internet optical sales. Considering all those resources, the percentage of prescription eyeglasses sold online year by year is as follows:

- 2008 1.9%
- 2009 2.9%
- 2010 2.8%
- 2011 2.4%
- 2012 2.9%
- 2013 3.2%
- 2014 3.7%
- 2015 4.0%
- 2016 4.3%
- 2017 4.5%
- 2018 6.2 %
- 2019 9.3 % (*)
- 2020 14.1%
- 2021 12.9%
- 2022 15.0 %
- 2023 15.0 %
- 2024 14.6 %
- 2025 14.0 % (**)

(*) Note the significant jump in 2020 (the year of the COVID-19 pandemic)

(**) Based on preliminary data at the time of this writing (December 2025)

While more than 90% of optical practices have some sort of Internet presence (i.e., a website), most are simply informational in nature. Just over half actually sell products to consumers.

As an in-person ECP, there are many different approaches to co-existing with online eyeglass sellers. Probably the most important thing you can do to be effective is decide ahead of time exactly what your approach will be. Conversely, probably the worst approach would be to

not make any decisions ahead of time and simply decide by the seat of your pants. Here are four specific ideas:

1. The Ramp It Up Approach

The Ramp It Up Approach involves figuring out all the things that set your practice apart from an online seller and really focus on doing those things to the best of your ability. What are some of those things? Here is a list of “100 Things Online Sellers Simply Cannot Do, But We Can!”

1. Provide a warm, personal greeting when a patient enters your dispensary; offer to shake hands.
2. Take steps to establish a relationship based on mutual trust and respect.
3. Have your diplomas and credentials on clear display.
4. Hand a business card and/or an informational flyer to all clients. (By the way, in the state of Florida, opticians are *required* to identify themselves to clients upon the initial encounter. Handing them a business card that clearly identifies them as the “optician” is one way to fulfill that requirement.)
5. Clearly explain to patients what you are doing for them every step of the way.
6. Answering any questions that arise in an honest, straightforward manner in real time.
7. Smile
8. Listen.
9. Show empathy.
10. Effectively troubleshoot any problems/issues they are having.
11. Educate the patient about HEV blue light, its dangers, and the solutions available. Also honestly explaining the myths and hype surrounding blue light.
12. Explain the importance of and demonstrate the 20-20-20 Rule.
13. Install more appropriate nose pads when needed.
14. Quickly replace missing or damaged nose pads.
15. Quickly and accurately measure the patient’s PD.
16. Discuss task glasses.
17. Show the *true* color of a frame and demonstrate how it *actually* fits.
18. Invite them to a trunk show.
19. Keep a “tickle” file, to notify patients when special, preferred frames arrive.
20. Be bilingual.
21. Say good morning/afternoon; take an interest. (Attend to the “small” things.)
22. Conduct an in-depth lifestyle dispensing interview.
23. Trial framing to demonstrate how the patient will see with his or her new prescription.
24. “Diagnosing” which frame, lens, and lens treatments will best serve the patient’s needs.
25. Take an accurate monocular PD, MFH, and any other ancillary measurements. Explain each measurement and explain that Internet sellers often guess at them, or in the case of MFH do not even ask for it.
26. Conduct a thorough evaluation of the *old* eyeglasses, taking note of lens material, decentration, relative height of the bifocals, and base curve.
27. Ask the patient what he/she likes/dislikes about the old pair of glasses.
28. Offer to take pictures of the client wearing different frames so that he/she can more easily see them while wearing the old pair.
29. Offer to e-mail/text those pictures to a friend or loved one who may weigh in on the decision.

30. Before asking for payment, carefully review the order, explaining line-by-line the charges; explaining all warranty information as well.
31. Offer same-day service.
32. Hand the client some point-of-purchase materials to take home and further learn about the products they have ordered – or may order next time.
33. Offer in-person, home delivery.
34. Inform the patient how long it will take to complete the order. (Remember: Always promise less and deliver more in this regard.)
35. Promptly phone or text (let them decide) the patient when the eyeglasses are ready for delivery.
36. Communicate to the patient that you expedited the order so they could be picked up a little sooner than expected.
37. Create an informative, dynamic in-office video loop for your waiting area.
38. Take a sincere interest in their well-being.
39. Offer an *honest*, in-person opinion as to how a frame looks and fits.
40. Assure the patient that you have meticulously inspected the glasses to make sure they were fabricated exactly to the prescribing doctor's prescription.
41. Consider educating the patient about ANSI standards and let him or her know that the glasses not only meet but exceed those parameters. Some Internet-purchased lenses may not.
42. Let the patient know of any modifications that have been made to the frame. For example, temples that have been shortened, temple tips or nose pads that were changed or modified.
43. Do NOT hand the glasses to the patient. Rather, carefully place them on the patient's face yourself. (It is a good practice to only hand the glasses to the patient AFTER the optician has completed fitting them.)
44. Let the patient know that now it is time to make sure that the frames are custom fit to ensure best vision and most comfort.
45. As you make adjustments, communicate to the patient what you are doing and why you are doing it. (For example, what pantoscopic tilt is and why you are adding it to the fit of the glasses.)
46. Once the fitting and adjustments are complete, now is the time to check for visual comfort and acuity. Ask the patient how the overall vision appears.
47. Have a Snellen (or similar) chart located at the appropriate distance, check distance visual acuity. If the lens is a multifocal check for near-vision acuity.
48. Ask the patient when he or she will be updating his or her sunglasses into the current prescription.
49. Provide the client with a copy of his/her prescription – perhaps on a laminated business card. If properly prepared, this becomes a legal prescription in the state of Florida.
50. If issues arise, professionally and patiently troubleshoot the problem. Compare adjustment angles, re-verify the Rx if necessary, and make any needed adjustments.
51. Instruct the patient on cleaning and maintenance of the dispensed spectacles.
52. Transfer all lab and manufacturer point-of-purchase brochures, certificates of authenticity, care instructions, etc. to the patient.
53. Inform the patient to stop back whenever convenient so you can make routine adjustments, screw tightening, etc.
54. Encourage referrals – ask for them!
55. Get up and walk the patient to the door; hold it open for them; give them a smile and a warm goodbye.
56. After a week or so, make a follow-up call to make sure the patient is satisfied with the eyeglass purchase.

57. Send a personalized thank you card/letter to the patient.
58. Refer patients to ODs or MDs, retinal specialists, etc. as needed.
59. Provide a comprehensive I&R (insertion and removal) session so that they become confident and proficient with the placement and removal of their contact lenses.
60. Instill the importance of following the recommended wearing schedule and what to do in problems arise.
61. Allow the patient to try on colored contact lenses in person.
62. Demonstrate the features and benefits of polarized lenses out in actual sunlight.
63. Demonstrate Transitions lenses in the same manner.
64. Use a digital pupilometer, tablet application, or 3-D imaging to take more accurate measurements.
65. Provide an assortment of *different* cases from which the patient may choose the one he or she prefers.
66. Detect subtle facial asymmetries (ear height, nasal deviation, head posture) and compensate for them in frame selection and adjustment.
67. Identify when a prescription is inappropriate for a chosen frame and proactively recommend alternatives before problems occur.
68. Evaluate vertex distance, wrap angle, and pantoscopic tilt together—and modify the fit to optimize optics.
69. Recognize early signs of non-adaptation to progressive lenses and intervene before frustration sets in.
70. Explain why a patient’s previous online glasses “never quite worked,” using their actual eyewear as a teaching tool.
71. Determine when slab-off, prism thinning, or specialty surfacing may be required—and coordinate with the prescriber if needed.
72. Observe real-time patient reactions, body language, and hesitation during frame selection and address concerns immediately.
73. Recommend frame materials based on allergies, skin sensitivities, or prior adverse reactions.
74. Adjust eyewear for occupational demands such as headsets, safety gear, helmets, or magnifiers.
75. Evaluate frame stability during normal head movement and adjust for dynamic comfort—not just static fit.
76. Explain the why behind lens recommendations, not just the what, increasing patient confidence and compliance.
77. Assess when a patient would benefit from multiple pairs (primary, computer, sunglasses, hobby, backup, etc.) and prioritize appropriately.
78. Coordinate eyewear choices with hearing aids to avoid pressure points and interference.
79. Spot lens fabrication errors that are technically “within tolerance” but still clinically unacceptable for the patient.
80. Provide immediate reassurance and solutions when a patient expresses buyer’s remorse or uncertainty.
81. Adjust eyewear to accommodate changes over time such as weight loss, weight gain, or changes in hairstyle.
82. Educate patients about frame longevity, hinge quality, and long-term durability in a hands-on manner.
83. Offer professional judgment when fashion trends conflict with optical performance.
84. Identify early signs of ocular or visual issues that warrant referral—based on patient comments and observations.
85. Customize eyewear recommendations for patients with tremors, arthritis, or dexterity challenges.

86. Provide immediate, in-office solutions for minor emergencies such as bent frames, loose screws, or discomfort before an event or trip.
87. Explain how lens thickness, edge polish, or roll-and-polish techniques will affect cosmetics and comfort.
88. Serve as a consistent, familiar point of contact rather than an anonymous customer-service representative.
89. Modify eyewear to improve cosmetics in high prescriptions by strategic frame and lens design choices.
90. Demonstrate the real-world visual differences between lens designs using hands-on tools and examples.
91. Identify when a patient’s expectations are unrealistic—and gently reset them before dissatisfaction occurs.
92. Adapt recommendations for pediatric, geriatric, or special-needs patients based on in-person interaction.
93. Provide continuity of care by remembering prior purchases, preferences, and challenges.
94. Make judgment calls when “by-the-book” dispensing is technically correct but not patient-appropriate.
95. Provide accountability—standing behind the product, the recommendation, and the outcome.
96. Serve as an advocate for the patient when dealing with labs, manufacturers, or warranty issues.
97. Help patients feel heard, not processed, during the eyewear selection and dispensing experience.
98. Create a sense of confidence and reassurance that someone knowledgeable is personally responsible for their eyewear.
99. Deliver peace of mind—knowing that if something feels wrong, help is immediately available.
100. Build long-term relationships that extend well beyond a single transaction.

Wow! One hundred things that you can offer your patients that they simply cannot receive when they purchase their eyeglasses online. And that to me is the best approach for competing with online sellers. The more personalized, professional, enjoyable and educational the bricks-and-mortar experience is for the patient, the less likely they will be to even consider purchasing their eyewear online. Your challenge because of participating in this module is to incorporate into your practice of opticianry at least 10 things on the list that you do not do now. In fact, make it right now:

- _____
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2. The Just-Say-No Approach

One thing is undeniable: If all (and I mean all!) the bricks-and-mortar dispensaries and all the licensed opticians in the country truly united, we could probably put an end to most online selling of prescription spectacles. How? By just saying “no.” If someone who is not our patient asks for a PD, just say no. If someone is having trouble seeing out of glasses purchased online and they ask for us to check and see if they were made correctly, just say no. The glasses aren’t fitting well, and they ask for an adjustment...just say no. The glasses need repair...a screw...a semi-rimless re-string? Just say no! If that really happened – if bricks-and-mortar establishments resolved to have nothing whatsoever to do with Internet-purchased goods, consumers would think long and hard about clicking that mouse.

Realistically, I know the chances of that happening are slim to none. For some reason, more than almost any other profession, we have developed the habit of servicing goods that were not purchased at our location – and even more amazing is that we do it for free! When challenged and asked why that is, most practice owners would say they do it to “capture” that patient as a new client for their practice. And while that happens occasionally, more often the recipient of the free repair/minor adjustment returns to the original establishment for further service...or where their insurance company requires they go...or to the optical company offering the latest 2-for-1 bait-and-switch come on...or (you guessed it) the Internet.

Many newcomers to our industry ask why that is. How did we get to the point where we service goods purchased elsewhere...and for free? Many years ago, virtually no ophthalmologists, and even few optometrists sold eyeglasses in their practice. Therefore, they counted on referrals from opticians, and opticians counted on the doctors steering the patient back to purchase the eyeglasses. (Incidentally, that’s why opticians traditionally absorbed the cost of goods when the doctor changed the patient’s prescription). But in 2025 virtually every ophthalmologist and optometrist sells eyeglasses. Which begs the question: Why do we still do it? I have no answer for that other than tradition. A tradition that makes no sense to me these days.

Sadly, the reality is that as an industry, we’re not going to be saying “no” anytime soon. Which means we must think of different approaches. As stated earlier, I think the “Ramp it Up” Approach is the most effective approach.

3. The Pay-to-Play Approach

Some opticians I know have decided to charge clients a nominal fee to take their PD – perhaps \$5 or \$10 dollars (I’ve even heard \$25). What I like about this approach is that it starts to turn the tide away from doing things for free. I also see some potential challenges with this approach. Because the patient has paid a fee for the initial measurements, if they receive glasses through the mail and have any problems with them, guess where they’re going to get them “fixed.” Your office. I see situations where the patient who has given you \$5 or \$10 (and even the one who got it for free) comes back and takes up precious “chair time” while you troubleshoot the problem. While you’re doing that, who’s waiting for your attention? The long-term, loyal patient who spent \$600 in your office and now needs a minor adjustment, or that patient’s family member who is going to spend a significant amount of money on a new order. It

just doesn't seem worth it. Additionally, what if you find something wrong? For example, what if the Rx was simply filled incorrectly? You'll have to take the time to educate the patient as to what the problem is and try to convince her that it wasn't the measurement you provided that's the problem. Assuming the client believes you, she will surely return (yet again) when the glasses come back from the Internet seller. More chair time!

Other opticians take the Pay-to-Play Approach to an even higher level. They charge somewhere between \$25-50 for their Internet services. For that higher fee the patient gets all the initial measurements taken. When the glasses arrive, the patient is *encouraged* to return for verification of Rx and an initial fitting. The fee also includes all future adjustments and minor repairs.

(By the way, in a humorous, albeit true, aside, I feel obliged to share with you the most ingenious approach to giving PDs to clients who wish to purchase eyewear online I ever heard. A Florida optician shared his "approach" at a recent live, continuing education seminar: "I'm more than happy to give out PDs to any client who asks. I just give it to them in inches." Genius!)

4. The Beat-'em-at-Their-Own-Game Approach

Remember what I wrote in my newspaper article: There are two "classes" of Internet sellers. The unbelievably cheap sellers (which I believe all ECPs should passionately avoid and do everything they can to turn consumers away from) and the ones who offer the same quality of frames and lenses that we do, usually for a slightly reduced price. Some people have decided to sort of "partner" with these websites. They will sometimes *encourage* their patients to browse these sites to find frames they like. Then they offer to match or even beat the website's price by 10-15%. I like this approach for many reasons. First, it's doing to the Internet sellers what they're doing to us. We're using their virtual inventory, their try-on features, and all the information on their site – for free! How's that for doing unto others! Second, it's a win-win. The patient gets to shop online, but then ultimately gets all the hands-on attention from an in-person dispensing experience, and the optician and his or her practice make the profit.

Regardless of which approach (or combination of approaches) you take, there is something you absolutely must do, and that is you *must* be intimately familiar with the pricing and policies of the websites you send your patients to.

Be Proactive – A Lesson from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*

As I write this module, it has been 36 years since Stephen R. Covey's legendary *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* was first published in 1989. Who could have predicted that this work of genius would go on to be the 17th bestselling book in our country in the last 100 years! Its wisdom is still as valid today as it was nearly 40 years ago. No matter which combination of the earlier approaches you decide to follow, to be successful you are going to have to make the decision to be proactive. And guess what? Habit #1 of highly effective people, according to Dr. Covey is "Be Proactive."

One of the introductory paragraphs of this section of the book, explains what is meant by “proactivity.” Dr. Covey writes, “While the word *proactivity* is now fairly common in management literature, it is a word you won’t find in most dictionaries. It means more than merely taking initiative. It means that as human beings, we are responsible for our own lives. Our behavior is a function of our decisions, not our conditions. We can subordinate feelings to values. We have the initiative and the responsibility to make things happen.”

One of the most proactive things you can do in your quest to compete with Internet eyeglass sellers most effectively is to spend a few minutes each month surfing the Web – but not as an eye care professional. Rather, surf the Web with the mindset of a layperson. Don’t search for “Varilux,” think like a layperson and search for “no-line bifocals.” Don’t search for “Prescription Eyeglasses,” think like a layperson and search for “Cheap Glasses.”

As I revise this module it is the fall of 2025. I just searched for “Prescription Glasses” using Google Chrome and the first search result is the website for Eyebuydirect (www.eyebuydirect.com). They are offering their “Best Deal Ever” for Cyber Monday: 50% off lenses and 35% off frames. It is a very engaging site and offers tutorials on how to read a prescription, pupillary distance, frames and face shapes, and how to buy glasses online. LensCrafters is the second search result. The second result is Glasses USA (www.glassesusa.com), which is touting 1000s of styles to choose from at 50% off. The third result was for Zenni Optical (www.zennioptical.com). Its banner advertises “Glasses under \$30” and 40% off second pairs. They also boast more than 30,000 X (formerly Twitter) followers. What also caught my eye is that there was something missing that was there the last time I had visited the site – true reviews or testimonials. Now there is simply a link labeled “Testimonials,” and of course they are all glowing comments. The last time I had visited there were all sorts of reviews – good, bad, and ugly. Not only for Zenni, but all similar sellers had done the same. For example, on EyeBuyDirect’s website, with 2,276 reviews, customers gave their purchase an average 4.5 stars out of a possible 5. That looks impressive. But on the first couple of pages of reviews, I noticed one that only rated them 2 out of 5, and another that was only 1 out of 5. Reviews such as this are now nowhere to be seen. Here they are:

Example 1:

"I, like some others, decided to check out the reviews after the fact. In any case, I am quite disappointed with the overall service and quality. I was actually looking forward to their 10-14 day door delivery service only to place the order April 22nd and receive them today (May 27th). That’s 25 business days!! 5 weeks to wait for glasses was quite a while. I called and 'live chatted' on several occasions and was never satisfied with the customer service. They said they would send me an email update, but never did. One person told me they would arrive on May 10th -that didn’t happen. They have arrived and the frame on one of the pairs is slightly bent and they are lopsided on my face. I will have to take them somewhere to get fitted and the arms reformed. I am happy with the sunglasses, but overall, the frames are pretty cheap - the cases on top of it are even cheaper. I am worried about storing the sunglasses in the case because 1-they don’t really fit (you have to squish them in there) and 2. If the case dropped the plastic would shatter.

I told them about my disappointment on live chat and they said, if it’s not ok, send them

back (with your prescription) and we will re-do them. Well - I don't particularly want to wait 4-6 weeks to return them and then another 4-6 to get them back (not quite worth it). I will just deal with it on my end!

Good Luck - some people had a great experience, but unfortunately mine wasn't.
Purchase at your own risk! "

Example 2:

"Bad! Do not order from these people. My frames measured larger. They offered refund if I pay a restock of \$10 plus postage and sent me their 'proper' measuring guide-without side lugs-which led to the frames being smaller than stated. I am taking my case to PayPal. I have photos including their screen shot of the size frames and their product diagram which includes side lugs."

The next search result was for Zenni Optical, offering "Shop 5600+ Styles Starting at \$6.95." They also claim a 4.5 out of 5.0 rating, with more than 21,000 reviews. That sounds impressive, but with a little further digging, I noticed that nearly 1,200 reviewers rated Zenni with only one or two stars out of five. I looked at some of the lower-rated reviews and found the following:

Example 3:

"I've been wearing eyeglasses for over 40 years. This is the first time they've been made incorrectly. I was not given a choice of a refund of my money. I was only told I can only have another pair sent to me (remade) or a store credit.
This will be my last order with your company. It has been over a month that I ordered and I still have no glasses and am out the \$ for them.
My glasses normally cost over 400, and now I see the value. At least I can count on them being made correctly and quickly. "

Example 4:

"I received my glasses and the prescription is incorrect. I know it's wrong because it should be the same prescription in my other glasses that I purchased about 2 years ago. And I can see through them just fine. The left lens on these ones causes my vision to be blurry, and they make me dizzy and nauseous. I contacted someone and they were not helpful at all! I was so upset I haven't even tried to get the problem resolved again and will never order from Zenni Optical again. "

I guess Caveat Emptor (the Latin phrase meaning Let the Buyer Beware) pertains when purchasing eyeglasses online! Being familiar with these reviews, the company's selection, and policies, and maybe printing and posting some of these and similar reviews might help educate

patients and enable them to make a more informed decision. Both actions are a great example of proactivity. In fairness, it is worth noting that these companies are making strides in improving customer satisfaction based on previous years. Either that or they are selectively manipulating their reviews. Who knows?

Conclusion

In conclusion, consider another startling statistic that appeared nearly 10 years ago in a 2015 edition of our industry trade publication *20/20*. It was a statistical blurb which stated that 81% of the people who purchased prescription online expected the same quality that they would receive at a bricks-and-mortar location. Hopefully all serious, professional opticians will do everything in their power to make sure their expectations are *not* realized.

Good luck with the Final Assessment.

Final Assessment

1. According to a 20/20 statistic, what percentage of respondents expected the same quality from the eyeglasses they purchased on line as compared to eyeglasses purchased from a live, in-person optician?
 - a. 21 %
 - b. 41 %
 - c. 61 %
 - d. 81 %

2. Proactivity is a lesson that was shared in what best-selling business book?
 - a. *Good to Great*
 - b. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*
 - c. *The One-Minute Manager*
 - d. *The Manager's Role as Coach*

3. When researching optical goods and services offered on the Web, this module suggests:
 - a. Doing it at least once a month
 - b. Doing so with the mindset of a layperson
 - c. Having your practice manager do it
 - d. Involve the doctor

4. Offering to match the prices of an online seller is part of which approach to dealing with online sellers?
 - a. The "Beat 'em at Their Own Game" Approach
 - b. The "Just Say No" Approach
 - c. The "Pay to Play" Approach
 - d. The "Ramp it Up" Approach

5. The part of Florida's Rules and Laws that states opticians are licensed to protect the health and welfare of its citizenry is found in:
 - a. Florida Statute 484
 - b. Florida Statute 456
 - c. Florida Administrative Code 64B12
 - d. Florida Administrative Code 64B29

6. In Florida, the maximum monetary penalty for bricks-and-mortar optical establishments that operate without a license on the premises when optical dispensing occurs is:
 - a. \$500
 - b. \$1,000
 - c. \$5,000
 - d. \$10,000

7. One of the reasons why Internet sellers seem to circumvent FS 484 is:
 - a. They have gained exemptions from the state
 - b. They have obtained a special license from the state
 - c. They operate under the name of a licensed optician
 - d. They operate out of state or out of the country

8. One of the most serious reasons why buying glasses online is a risky proposition is:
 - a. Lack of adherence to OSHA and ANSI guidelines
 - b. Vague policies regarding warranties and returns
 - c. Some necessary measurements are compromised
 - d. Most online sellers have no money-back guarantees

9. The author of this module witnessed a patient with lenses that had cracked. The reason for this was:
 - a. An unacceptably thin lenses
 - b. The frame material
 - c. The lens power
 - d. The lens base curve

10. How do most online sellers deal with the MFH (minimum fitting height) of progressive lenses ordered on their websites?
 - a. They give instructions for the buyers to take it themselves
 - b. They give instructions for another person to take the measurement
 - c. They encourage the buyer to pester a local optician to do it
 - d. They don't even have a field on their order form for the measurement – they guess.

11. If a person enters your dispensary and asks a Florida optician to take his or her PD measurement, the optician:
 - a. Is required to do so
 - b. Is not required to do so
 - c. Must charge a fee to do so
 - d. May not charge a fee to do so

12. In the opinion of the author of this module, a patient's PD is:
 - a. An ancillary measurement that is taken as part of the initial fitting
 - b. An integral part of the prescription
 - c. Usually is not necessary to produce an acceptable pair of spectacles
 - d. Something that should only be provided to a patient for a significant fee

13. All online sellers are selling inferior products for prices that bricks-and-mortar dispensaries simply cannot compete with. According to the author of this module:
 - a. That statement is always true
 - b. That's not necessarily true; bricks and mortars could compete
 - c. Bricks and mortar dispensaries should never compete
 - d. It is illegal for bricks and mortar dispensaries to compete

14. In the United States, in 2025, about what percent of prescription eyeglasses were purchased online:
 - a. 4 %
 - b. 14 %
 - c. 24 %
 - d. 34 %

15. About what percent of bricks-and-mortar optical establishments in the United States maintain a presence on the Internet with a practice website?
 - a. 50%
 - b. 60%
 - c. 70%
 - d. 90%

16. What percent of those ECPs in the United States actually sell products online? Just over:
- a. 30%
 - b. 40%
 - c. 50%
 - d. 60%
17. Providing a warm greeting, conducting an in-depth lifestyle interview, educating the client, and transferring all point-of-purchase materials to the patient are all examples of:
- a. The “Just Say No” Approach
 - b. The “Pay to Play” Approach
 - c. The “Ramp it Up” Approach
 - d. The “Beat ‘em at Their Own Game” Approach
18. Refusing to replace a lost screw for glasses purchased online is an example of:
- a. The “Just Say No” Approach
 - b. The “Pay to Play” Approach
 - c. The “Ramp it Up” Approach
 - d. The “Beat ‘em at Their Own Game” Approach
19. Charging a nominal fee to take the PD for someone who wishes to purchase eyeglasses online is an example of:
- a. The “Just Say No” Approach
 - b. The “Pay to Play” Approach
 - c. The “Ramp it Up” Approach
 - d. The “Beat ‘em at Their Own Game” Approach
20. As of the writing of this module, what was the offer that appeared on Zenni Eyewear’s website?
- a. Glasses delivered in 24 hours
 - b. Glasses starting at \$6.95 complete
 - c. Glasses unconditionally guaranteed for two years
 - d. Glasses made exactly to your doctor’s prescription

