



MAKE EVERY CONTACT LENS SALE COUNT



Growing your practice is easier than you think.

BY BRIANNA RHUE, OD, FAAO, FSLs

The optometric profession is rife with options, yet many of our colleagues act as though we're wandering in a barren desert. Many tend to believe that all of the opportunities have been squeezed out by big shop rivals, monolith distributors, and direct-to-patient retail platforms. Competition

has created a scarcity mindset—one that optometrists must change.

Optometrists need to shift their outlook on where to look for practice growth opportunities, and that starts with recognizing that an abundance of opportunity exists in our practices with the patients we already have, and by taking care of them in a way that

meets their needs as both patients and consumers. Nowhere is this more true than with contact lens sales. Imagine increasing your revenue by \$60,000 without having to acquire one single new patient. It starts with thinking differently about the patients you already have.

TAKE A STEP BACK

We all want growing practices. The more patients you see, the greater your revenue. But consider your patient acquisition costs. You spend money on research for marketing, advertising, search engine optimization for your locale, social media management and engagement, and maybe even direct marketing campaigns. The dollars and work add up. Imagine a different scenario: growing your practice by 15% simply by selling contact lenses to the patients you already see.

It's easy to gripe about online retailers and feel like we can't do much about it, but in our profession, it has become commonplace for contact lens scripts to walk. It's easy to dismiss these walking scripts as "just one script," but it's not "just one" patient who walks out your

door. Collectively, when “just one patient” walks out from each of the 35,000-plus optometry practices in our nation, we give up our power to online retailers. As optometrists, when we take back the walking scripts, we can disrupt the online retailers who disrupted our industry. And it’s simple to do.

We need to view our patients as more than simply patients. They are also consumers and should be treated as such. We are fortunate that in our business, new and existing patients call our offices because they want our services. We don’t have to hunt for new business. Take advantage of this gift and do business with the patients in the practice that are there, and the rest will come.

When doing business with your existing patients, consider the following points.

THINK LIKE A CONSUMER

Patients are consumers, and as consumers in today’s society, they expect to do business with you digitally. They also expect to be served on their time with ease and convenience.

While the COVID-19 lockdown pushed every single one of us to order everything (from takeout to groceries to purchases as significant as cars) online, most patients are not yet able

to digitally order contact lenses from their optometrist’s office. I’m still confused by this.

Many of us weren’t prepared for this shift during the pandemic. But now is the time to implement strategies for the future of your practice. It starts with thinking like a consumer and adding on technology that really is a must-have, not a nice-to-have.

REMOVE THE FRICTION

The more friction we create in our practices for patients to do business with us, the more patients will resist doing business with us, and the more they will bolt for the monolithic online retailers and big box stores.

It is easier to remove that friction than you think. Ask yourself, “What makes me want to do business with other businesses?” Your answer likely has to do with either service, convenience, or both. Are we listening and making changes to adopt new strategies that may be painful in the beginning, but pay us dividends in the future?

Did you know that 80% of patients prefer to order through text messages, 15% prefer ordering through email, and only 5% order through their doctor’s website?¹ As more patients are being fit with

daily disposable lenses, particularly premium daily disposable lenses, annual supply rates are dropping.¹ It is more important than ever to have an automated reordering system as a direct extension of your practice that allows patients access to their script with one click and to order or reorder.

And 35% to 40% of contact lens orders happen between the hours of 6 pm and 9 am when most of our offices are closed, or between 11 am and 1 pm when we often close for staff training or lunch.¹ If your practice is not accessible when your patients want to do business with you, they will simply go elsewhere.

To remove friction means to implement technology that serves your patients and their need for convenience. This is where we can compete head-to-head with online retailers. Today’s technology empowers even the smallest practice to be the one-stop, ship-to-home option for patients.

Below are three ways we can use this technology to beat the online retailers at their own game.

No. 1: Price. We don’t have to give deep discounts to win our patients’ business—we can maximize their vision plan benefits and in-office rebates.

No. 2: Speed. Patients can order their lenses on the spot and get them delivered much quicker this way and directly to their homes.

No. 3: Customer Service. We are building quality relationships with our patients through our regular in-person interactions.

An estimated 15 million patients ordered their contact lenses from an online retailer without having to do a single eye exam.² As the optometrists performing the majority of those exams, it’s easy to see why one patient matters and how quickly that adds up.

SCALE YOUR PRACTICE

Many optometrists are specializing their practices, whether it be to focus

AT A GLANCE

- ▶ Optometrists have plenty of opportunity to grow their practices, starting by targeting the patients they already see.
- ▶ As consumers in today’s society, patients expect to do business with you digitally, and they expect to be served on their time with ease and convenience.
- ▶ It is not about seeing more patients, but about maximizing every patient experience to better serve that patient and their individual needs.

on myopia management, dry eye, aesthetics, vision therapy, or medical optometry. These specialties serve contact lens patients, and we are able to add these services easily, as most of these patients come in as contact lens patients. By giving up on the sale of contact lenses, you not only give up on your patient, but also on future opportunities to drive other aspects of patient care and your specialty practice. By thinking contact lens patients are not valuable, you may be losing out on many referrals and family members of your 30- to 40-year-old patient segment.

Scaling your practice through the lifetime purchasing power of patients starts with understanding and leveraging your patient data—specifically their contact lens data.

Data (what your patients order and when they order it) give you knowledge and insight that allows you to connect the patient's health to their contact lens orders. Take that a step further, and act on that data, and it is a win-win for your patients and your practice. For example, implementing a contact lens ordering and marketing platform will give you visibility into your patients' ordering behavior, including when they are due to reorder or return for their annual visit.

This technology can send automated text reminders with a one-click option to reorder. You can also remind patients with one click when they are due for their annual visit, so you can reassess their eye health and prescription. With technology, you keep the prescription tied to their health—and their health is tied to you.

Stop here and think about what this could mean for your practice 5 years from now.

How does an extra \$60,000 in your pocket sound? All it takes is seeing 15 patients a day, 5 days

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a week, 50 weeks a year with a capture rate of 80%.

When patients leave our practices to purchase their lenses elsewhere, it is not always the price that has them leaving. A lot of the time, the need for convenience has them going elsewhere. Patients want to be sold to; they are there for a service and then something to give them their best possible vision. We are their guides to their visual health, and that starts with selling what we prescribe.

GET YOUR STAFF ON BOARD

Assess the bandwidth of your practice. We need to help our staff do better things with their time. No one likes to do or should be doing mundane tasks, such as checking on contact lens orders or sending out constant reminders to patients that their lenses are ready for pickup.

Get your staff focused on the patients who are in front of them, which also increases your per-patient revenue. It is not about seeing more patients, but about maximizing every patient experience to better serve that patient and their individual needs.

When you make contact lens orders a one-step process, your practice becomes more efficient. However, transitioning to a new process isn't always easy. There's a learning curve, and that's OK. It is important to always be in a state of learning with your practice because that's how you better serve your patients.

We have the honor of providing optimal vision to our patients every day. It's time we cared for the vision we have for our practices by implementing processes that make it easier to capture those walking scripts and fully take care of our patients by connecting their prescription back to our practice. ■

1. Data provided by Dr. Contact Lens. www.drcontactlens.com

2. Key metrics: assessing optometric practice performance. ECP practice and distributor data sampling. *Management & Business Academy for Eye Care Professionals*. 2015 edition. Accessed April 28, 2023. files.optometrybusiness.com/Key%20Metrics%20of%20Established%20Practices.pdf

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