



HUBBLE'S STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES: WHAT CAN WE LEARN?



Online contact lens retailers pose a threat to our businesses and our patients, but the story is not all gloom.

BY JUSTIN BAZAN, OD

Optometrists learn about new offerings in contact lenses from industry representatives, trade publications, launch events, etc., and our patients learn about new contact lens offerings from us, their optometrists ... right?

Historically, this was the case, but things have changed in recent years. Your patients may now be learning about new contact lens options online. Online direct retailers have emerged in many fields, with subscription services available in areas from pet foods to ready-to-make-at-home meals. In our field, the online contact lens retailer Hubble has attracted much attention by employing this strategy. How should we deal with this new entity and the others that will surely follow? This article explores some of the strengths

and weaknesses of Hubble's offerings in an effort to help you understand and prepare yourself for this battle.

Many patients are interested in learning about new contact lens technologies—97%, in fact, according to Bausch + Lomb¹—yet many optometrists simply don't bring the topic up, subscribing to the “if it ain't broke don't fix it” mentality.

It is a poor habit, but many doctors don't tell their patients about innovations that have taken place in the contact lens world because it takes extra time. The problem is that nowadays, if you fail to keep your patients informed, they are more likely to be easy targets for savvy marketers.

The contact lens market is being disrupted. Don't let your contact lens business be disrupted along with it.

HUBBLE'S STRENGTHS

Pricing

Despite what you may want to believe, prices matter to your patients—a lot. Many patients think that their contact lenses are overpriced, and Hubble targets that mentality extensively in its advertising.

Hubble tries to keep costs to an acceptable level, and it markets this brilliantly. Consider doing the same for your patients. Address cost up front, and let patients know that they won't have to eat instant ramen for the next 2 weeks if they buy a supply of daily disposables from you.

Consider saying something along these lines, “Back in the day, daily disposable contacts cost an arm and a leg, but these days they are pretty cheap. The ones we are going to try right now are less than a dollar a day!”

I know that my workhorse daily disposable is (in my opinion) a superior product, and it is less expensive than Hubble lenses. I make sure my patients know this too. After I give them this information, Hubble no longer seems like such a good deal.

Education

Hubble does an excellent job of educating contact lens wearers about the benefits of daily disposable lenses. Hubble's website is full of information about the benefits of daily disposables. After visiting the company's website, potential customers get it: A fresh, clean lens every day is the way to go.

Take the time to educate your patients in a similar way. On my office computer, I have an article bookmarked

called “Daily disposable contact lenses cause less damage to ocular surface” that I pull up when I discuss daily disposables with my patients.²

Free Trial

Hubble has baited customers with low costs and the health benefits of daily disposable lenses. The company then lowers the barrier of risk further by offering a free trial. “FIRST BOX FREE!!!” Your practice could borrow this concept and start throwing around the *F* word. (Free, that is.) “Along with your contact lens examination today, we are excited to offer you a free trial of a daily disposable.”

Hubble does a great job of lowering risk with the free trial. The company gets its products onto customers’ eyes, and, once that product is on their eyes, many people will choose to continue to wear those lenses.

Want to get more of your patients into contacts? Take a similar approach. I have found success by asking every patient who isn’t receiving a contact lens examination one question: Why? You will hear all of the common reasons and objections in response, but these are easy to overcome. We have also made a commitment to our patients that, if a daily disposable is an option for them, it’s getting on their eyes. They will get to experience it for themselves so that they can make the best decision for themselves.

Subscription Service

Hubble is a subscription-based service. I love my subscription-based services. Automatic payments of a small amount each month. Set it and forget it. I don’t have to spend a large

chunk of change up front. These services are appealing to today’s consumer.

There are challenges to implementing an office-based subscription plan, but I expect improvements in the not-to-distant future. With these improvements, I anticipate that more offices will embrace subscription plans. The consumers have spoken, and they want subscriptions.

Marketing

Hubble has done an excellent job of marketing its products and creating its brand. The company has created a sales network, generated positive press and consumer reviews, and successfully established and popularized its brand. You can use some of the company’s tactics to do the same for your practice. See the sidebar, *Implementing Hubble’s Marketing Techniques in Your Practice*, for information about a few of those tactics.

Hubble has great press in big name publications, including *Vogue*, *GQ*, *Mashable*, *Tech Crunch*, and more. A lot of this press has to do with using a great public relations firm.

Hubble has trendy, stylish branding that resonates with its target audience (see [instagram.com/hubblecontacts/](https://www.instagram.com/hubblecontacts/)). Are there things you could be doing to ensure that your branding resonates with your target audience?

Hubble is lauded for how it has built its brand and connected with consumers via social media. The company’s ads run on Facebook and Instagram, across its audience network.³ You can do the same thing. Organic reach is minimal, and these days you have to pay to play.

The days of the do-it-yourself approach are over for most of us.

Your day-to-day media posting and monitoring can be managed by a social media savvy team member, but you should leave social media ad campaigns to professionals for best results.

Hubble also engages with its consumers. Its fans leave reviews and glowing compliments online. This is social proof of quality. Your practice can do the same thing. How are you building your user reviews, and how are you leveraging them?

Outsourcing

Hubble keeps a tight crew. The company has added in-house employees slowly—only doing so when it makes sense and is necessary, while outsourcing as much as possible. Even its robocalls are outsourced. Could your office adopt a similar philosophy? For example, does it make sense to outsource your billing or your marketing?

WEAKNESSES

Outdated

Hubble is innovative in its direct-to-consumer approach within the contact lens industry, but the company is outdated when it comes to product innovation. The American Optometric Association’s guidelines for the care of a contact lens patient suggest that a Dk of at least 35 is needed to minimize complications.⁴ The Dk of Hubble’s lens material is 21.⁵ What is the lowest Dk that you would prescribe for your patients? Be sure to let your patients know.

Verification

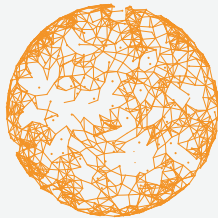
Hubble does a poor (cough, non-existent) job of obtaining verification. Robocalls, verifying with non-eye doctors, selling without proper verification, the list goes on. It’s been well documented that Hubble and other online contact lens retailers are less than aboveboard in handling verifications. These companies don’t appear to care much if they sell to a person who has never been fit in a contact lens.

Tell your patients what it is you do during a contact lens examination

AT A GLANCE

- ▶ The online retailer Hubble has attracted customers by offering contact lenses through a subscription service.
- ▶ Optometrists can learn from the company’s practices and improve their own contact lens business.

IMPLEMENTING HUBBLE'S MARKETING TECHNIQUES IN YOUR PRACTICE



SALES NETWORK

Hubble has built a powerful sales network to market its product. You can work with local businesses to do something similar. Collaborate, cross-promote, or purchase ad space on a local business's website. If there aren't such opportunities already available, create them.



PRESS

Consider using a public relations firm to assist with press exposure. A good place to start is with a do-it-yourself version, such as HARO, a website that provides journalists with potential sources for stories. Visit helpareporter.com to learn more about offering your expertise through this service.



BRANDING

Try to formulate branding that resonates with your target audience.

Consider hiring outside professionals to manage social media ad campaigns and letting a social media-savvy team member manage day-to-day social media posts.

Consider implementing methods of building user reviews and leveraging them for the benefit of your practice.

so that they know not all lenses are equal. Describe how improper contacts can affect the health of their eyes, their quality of vision, and their overall wearing experience. The more your patients are aware of and value your expertise, the less likely they will be to stray from your advice and try something they see online.

Vision Plan Benefits

Hubble does not accept vision plan benefits—for now. The prescription eyeglass business disrupter Warby Parker partnered with a vision plan, so it is possible that Hubble may do the same.

For now, however, optometrists have the advantage. People want to use their vision care benefits. Help

your patients get all the benefits they are entitled to and thus maximize their savings. Often, the price for a contact lens supply after coverage has been applied is significantly lower than the price offered by Hubble.

Slow Shipping

Hubble has a 5 to 10 business day shipping estimate for an initial order.⁶ In this era of instant gratification, 5 to 10 days can seem like an eternity. People simply don't want to wait. And if they are out of lenses, they *really* don't want to wait.

Let your patients know that they will leave your office with a supply to hold them over until their order arrives. Let them know that it typically takes only a few business days

for that order to arrive, and if they need it faster you do offer 2-day or overnight shipping options.

Cancellation Difficulties

The fact that it is difficult to cancel a subscription to Hubble is probably by design. I can speak from personal experience to the difficulty of cancelling a Hubble subscription. I actually had to pick up a phone and talk to somebody—the horror—and I could do that only during hours that I found inconvenient.

Hubble catches some bad press with regard to this, but I'll bet that this barrier to cancellation leads many consumers to think, "Well, whatever. I'll just get this one more order and try to cancel again next month."

Is there a lesson to be learned here? Yes. To avoid that one-star review, be easy to do business with. If somebody needs a copy of a prescription, hand it over, but make sure the patient knows that you offer the best deal on those contact lenses.

Spheres Only

Hubble offers only spheres—for now. It has already announced that it will be expanding into multifocal and toric lenses.⁶ Optometric offices are best equipped to take care of many more patients than just those who wear spherical contacts. This ability gives us a big advantage.

Stop masking cylinder and stop fitting monovision. You can provide

your patients with the best visual experience by using toric and multifocal lenses. As there is no Hubble option for these contact lens modalities yet, fitting your patients with them is a great way to help ensure that they don't end up in Hubble lenses.

A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

There are many lessons to be learned from Hubble. I'm not thrilled that it is providing people with what I consider to be a substandard product, but I am thankful that I have been able to learn from the company's practices, and I hope you can too. ■

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