

TO PARTNER OR NOT TO PARTNER WITH INDUSTRY

Hear from your colleagues some of the benefits of collaboration and how to get involved.

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AND JESSILIN QUINT, OD, MS, MBA, FAAO



JOSEPH J. ALLEN, OD, FAAO
Industry Partnerships Can Help the Greater Good

Ask a random person on the street about the latest smartphone, and they can probably tell you about the newest model and how many megapixels the camera has. Do the

same thing, but ask about the latest soft contact lens, and what response do you get?

Why isn't the general public jazzed about the newest contact lens? Why haven't they preordered it like the next iPhone? Part of the reason is because we simply don't talk about these advances enough with our patients. If your friend got a new grill and you were really impressed by it, you would probably mention it to your other friends, right? It's the same with eye

care products. If we are impressed by a product we are using, we should spread the word. Working with industry is one way to achieve this.

We're direct conduits from industry to our patients. We can assess what's going wrong with a patient from both a subjective and an objective perspective and provide better insight on what the next solution must be. I want the world to be a better place, and I want to help more people, but I also need help from industry to accomplish these things. This is why I'm an advocate for collaborating with companies. What are some options?

PICK YOUR PATH

There are many ways in which ODs can collaborate with industry, including consulting and speaking. In these roles, we're not only educating our own patients, but we're also helping patients who aren't ours by educating other doctors about new products. Sharing our knowledge and experience can help our colleagues make informed decisions about the care they deliver.

We can also get involved by being a part of research studies, which I think is a huge asset for a clinic, showing that we are proactive, working directly with industry to bring new technology to our patients.

We might even consider using this information in our favor as a marketing tool for the practice.

IS AN INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP RIGHT FOR YOU?

Some optometrists just want to get to work after they graduate from optometry school. They want to open a clinic and be with patients all day, which is great. Other optometrists like the technology, they like working on projects with other teams, and maybe they like presenting. They like to teach and educate. These are the types of individuals who should consider working with industry.

HOW DO YOU MAKE THAT CONNECTION?

An easy way to initiate a relationship with a member of the eye care industry is to simply reach out on your own behalf. If there's a product that interests you and you think you might like to have it in your clinic, companies are always willing to work with you. They're happy to have someone sit with you on a phone or a Zoom call, or they'll even send a representative out to your clinic to discuss the technology with you, to talk about their products, and to explain how they can be of service to you.

Beyond that, if you're interested in working with industry on a deeper level, talk to a company rep about it. I've had companies come to me about doing a research study, asking if I have patients with a particular condition. If I had the patients they were looking for, then I learned about their study protocols and we proceeded from there. I'm also a big advocate for just going to in-person events, introducing myself, handing out business cards, and networking in the purest form.

Whatever you end up doing, remember, by working with industry you're helping to spread the word about products you believe in, not only to your own patients but to the larger optometry community.



ROBERT S. STUTMAN, OD, MBA, FFAO
Industry Collaboration Is About Innovation, Education, and Leading the Profession Forward

Every interaction optometrists have with industry should ultimately be focused on patient care or the potential to affect patient care on a larger scale than we do one-on-one in the exam room. Building relationships and networking with industry partners exposes us to emerging technologies and innovations sooner than would occur if we did not have industry relationships. I'll explain.

CONNECTING YOUR PRACTICE

In my years in clinical practice at a referral-based center, I have had the opportunity to build relationships with industry representatives, thereby learning about new and emerging technologies in the earliest stages. This allows us not only to offer these new technologies to patients, but also to educate our referring doctors and peers on them, explaining how they affect patient care.

For example, when our practice was looking at adopting femtosecond laser technology for cataract surgery 10 years ago, it was new, with early clinical data support, and had a significant entry cost. We realized that asking ourselves the key questions in the right order would be instrumental in guiding us to making the right decision. Rather than, a) How much does it cost? and b) Is it the right thing to do? we asked, a) Is it the right thing to do? and b) Would I want this technology for my own or my family's eye care? then, c), How much does it cost and how do we make it work? Asking these key questions in the correct order when assessing the technology from the medical and patient-care perspectives first will ultimately drive the direction of your decisions.

ON A PERSONAL NOTE

I love being a consultant, researcher, and speaker for industry. For me, it's about educating my peers to allow them to take better care of their patients. Patient care really has to be at the core of everything we do. Getting involved in programs with companies in an advisory or consultant role to educate our colleagues about new technologies is important, so if you're interested in collaborating with industry, there's definitely a need.

While I was president of the Maryland Optometric Association, we put in place a partnership program with industry to support the state association and its education programs. I recognized early on that partnering with industry brings not only financial support to the association, but also educational support to the profession, so that we can all access the great work that industry is undertaking. When you think about it, everything we do is supported by industry, whether it's products or devices, pharmaceuticals or procedures. So it's our industry partners who support our state and national associations and who help to create the education needed to move the profession forward.

THE TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

Working with industry is beneficial in several ways. It helps us to stay current, to know what's coming down the pike, to know what's available now, and to stay abreast of the current standard of care for taking care of patients.



JESSILIN QUINT, OD, MS, MBA, FFAO
Partnering With Industry Promotes Personal and Professional Growth

Optometry is a dynamic profession that has seen tremendous growth over the past few decades. I believe that part of this growth stems from our

industry and its undeniable impact and influence on new products, diagnostic technologies, education, and pharmaceutical and surgical treatment options.

Without our involvement with industry, optometry would not be the profession that it is today. Working with eye care companies allows optometrists to be part of that growth and enables us to be directly involved in the pathway of our profession's success and advancement. So, what do those relationships look like, and how do we forge them?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

There are a number of ways in which optometrists can work with industry, including participating in speaking engagements, education, clinical research, advisory boards, and consulting roles. The profession needs leaders to partner with industry, and there are always opportunities for new leaders to become involved.

Step One: Determine Your Why

The first step to becoming involved with industry is to identify an area and avenue of interest. Is there a particular specialty you are passionate about? Are you a pro at writing, speaking, or developing big ideas? Opportunities include writing for industry publications, speaking at the podium, or serving on an advisory board to offer ideas and insights in optometric clinical practice. It also includes being part of a clinical research project and serving on panels to discuss product development. Regardless of your interest, it is crucial to make sure your *why* is authentic and rooted in more than gaining credibility or financial wealth.

Step Two: Spread the Word

The second step is to let your colleagues, industry representatives, and mentors know that you have an interest in partnering with industry. Get the word out and let them guide you toward opportunities. Even if it feels awkward at first, put yourself out there and express your interests. No one will know what you truly desire unless you tell them. If you want to be involved, say yes to every opportunity in the beginning. Often the smaller speaking gigs and writing assignments can lead to bigger opportunities down the road. You have to start somewhere. Plus, these small opportunities help you to build experience and confidence and to get your name out there.

HOW IT'S WORKED FOR ME

I first became involved with industry when a local pharmaceutical representative asked if I would be willing to share with colleagues my success with a particular drug. I said yes and participated on a panel discussion at a local dinner. My partnership with that company grew, and subsequent involvement in their advisory boards, consulting roles, and roundtable discussions gave me experience that has led to other industry opportunities.

I networked at conferences and began writing for industry periodicals such as *Optometric Management* and *Modern Optometry*. I said yes to being a guest on podcasts such as Try Not to Blink, In Focus, and The MOD Pod. Those experiences created new paths, leading me to opportunities with other companies. It was a snowball effect that has allowed me to partner with industry in numerous ways.

I love public speaking, writing, and being connected to optometry in a

way that is different from my everyday clinical practice. Working with other consultants and speakers is inspiring and motivating, and it helps me deliver better care to my patients.

THE GOAL

Numerous benefits come from working with industry, but it is always important to remember that the true goal is to remain focused on patient care. Taking care of our patients is why we entered the profession of optometry in the first place. All of our industry involvement should support patient care in a positive way. Although collaboration with industry is key to the growth of optometry, it is imperative to remember that our patients must always come first. ■

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