

THE BENEFITS OF AN AUTOMATED CONTACT LENS ORDERING SYSTEM



These systems offer eye care providers a way to fight back against online retailers.

BY MARK SCHAEFFER, OD

These days, products—and even some services—can be ordered and delivered at the click of a button. The contact lens marketplace is one area in which online outlets have some advantages over brick-and-mortar locations. Easy-to-use websites, constant marketing, and ads on social media have turned contact lens sales into an area of optometric practice that makes

practitioners' heads spin. The never-ending barrage of faxes these services generate to verify prescriptions and robocalls can take valuable staff time away from patient care.

However, resources available today can also allow patients to receive their supply of lenses from their eye care provider (ECP), thus helping providers to compete with the third-party online contact lens sellers. If you make

use of these resources, your patients will still be purchasing their lenses from your brick-and-mortar location, but doing so through a more convenient, more cost-effective avenue—one that is also more profitable for your practice.

Creating an automated system to allow your patients to order contact lenses online will positively affect everyone involved in the practice. Patients will have the opportunity to order their contact lenses with no interruptions, on their own time, and with the ability to maximize their benefits. Staff members will be able to focus on patient care instead of playing phone tag or checking emails to order lenses. And the practice will receive the revenue generated with little to no overhead. Everyone's lives are made easier, and a higher level of service is provided to the patient.

WHERE TO START?

Connecting with contact lens distributors can be a helpful first step toward creating an automated system. These companies, such as ABB Optical Group, WVA, and Nassau OOGP Vision Group, have systems that link into the practice's account.

The companies can provide resources such as websites or portals to manage orders, track progress, and create reports (see *Benefits of Automated Reports*). The systems that these companies implement

already align with relationships they have in place, and there is consistency with the ordering process. These companies also have dedicated teams designed to help facilitate the launch and execution of their services.

The distributors can build value into the established relationships practices already have. Customization of the tools they offer can help small offices and regional groups successfully integrate an online system into their existing contact lens business.

Subscription platforms such as Eyesubscribe are available through WVA. These services allow patients to receive regular contact lens shipments automatically, can be integrated into the practice's management software, and can update patient records without any work by the staff.

These companies' online software applications are designed to look as though the patient is ordering through the practice itself. Websites, invoices, and emails have the practice logo, come from an office email address, and appear to the patient to be an extension of the care provided by their ECP. The sites are mobile-friendly, and the systems track the patient's contact lens orders in real time.

The ordering website can be handled by a third party, such as Dr. Contact Lens (see *Online Ordering Service Options* for more information). With this

system, patients can use their vision plan benefits and submit out-of-network claims for reimbursement. The patient will receive the manufacturer's rebate, and the revenue generated in the transaction goes to the practice. Because the data are pulled from the EMR and point-of-sale software, all of the reporting from that software will also include the online orders.

AN ANSWER TO ONLINE RETAILERS

When patients order contact lenses outside of the practice, negative effects can include decreased compliance, increased time between examinations, and decreased patient retention. Recall is an important component of online ordering systems. With email addresses and text alerts tied into the EMR, automated reminders about eye examinations and supply renewals will prompt patients to return to the practice at proper intervals.

Subscription services can help ECPs capture a greater share of daily disposables sales by automatically shipping lenses to patients with monthly fees. These services, such as LensFerry through EyeCare Prime (see *Online Ordering Service Options*), offer value for both practices and patients: for practices, they increase annual supply sales, especially in the daily disposable modality; for patients, they provide notifications and text messages with reminders and simple tools for reordering their contact lenses.

ONLINE ORDERING SERVICE OPTIONS

LensFerry

lensferry.com

- Founded more than 12 years ago;
- Available through EyeCare Prime;
- Provides integrated patient relationship management and commerce as well as digital marketing.¹

Dr. Contact Lens

drcontactlens.com

- Founded by an OD;
- Allows patients to order contact lenses with one click instead of going through a verification process;
- Connects with EMR and point-of-sale software to verify prescriptions in real time; and
- Lenses can be delivered in one to three business days, depending on location.

Yourlens.com

- Retail contact lens website from which patients can buy contact lenses online direct from their licensed ECPs;
- Serves nearly two-thirds of ECPs in the United States;
- Advertises a large inventory to expedite delivery.²

1. Lens Ferry. lensferry.com/index.html. Accessed August 5, 2019.

2. About us. YourLens.com. yourlens.com/about-us. Accessed August 5, 2019.

AT A GLANCE

- ▶ The contact lens marketplace is an area in which online outlets have some advantages over brick-and-mortar practices.
- ▶ Implementing an automated contact lens ordering system allows patients to continue purchasing their lenses from your practice, but through a more convenient and cost-effective avenue that is also a more profitable avenue for your practice.

BENEFITS OF AUTOMATED REPORTS

A major added benefit of implementing a contact lens ordering system for your practice is report monitoring.

- The data these systems collect can provide valuable information that can be analyzed through either a contact lens distributor or a third party.
- The vast amount of data generated allows practices to gain knowledge of and insight into the contact lens business and the practice itself, including:
 - The contact lens industry's growth and breakdown;
 - Opportunities for improvement;
 - Insight into the practice's annual supply percentages;
 - Insight into the practice's sales percentages in each lens category and any changes that occur; and
 - Monitoring of new lenses and materials available.

Staff members can sign patients up either in the examination room or before checkout. The patient's vision benefits can be used prior to enrollment, providing maximum savings.

A VITAL ASSET

Offering diverse ways for patients to receive their contact lenses is vitally important to optometric practices today that are looking to

thrive tomorrow. People are moving more of their purchases online, and online contact lens ordering systems present an opportunity for practices to maximize technology and use it to their benefit.

With an automated online system, everyone can have a higher quality experience in the delivery of eye care; the practice keeps its relationship with the patient, even after the examination is finished, and industry partners continue to receive the support of the OD community. Most important, patients can combine the perks of healthy contact lens wear with the convenience and cost-effectiveness of purchasing their lenses from their ECPs. ■

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- Financial disclosure: None