



ECPs Explore the E-Commerce Equation

BY MARGE AXELRAD / EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

NEW YORK—From the earliest phases of the internet, traditional brick-and-mortar retailers have felt the world shift as the digital revolution in e-commerce has reshaped everything from the distribution of books and music to birthday wishes and entertainment.

In recent years, however, as social media and e-commerce have become much more a part of everyday life, fueled by peoples' familiarity with technology and smart phones' mobility, things continue to change. Online-only players have taken to opening full-time physical retail locations or popup stores. Those in the traditional retail space, like major department stores, national mass merchandise retailers and car dealerships, have invested heavily in their own online commerce presence. In health care, insurance companies, hospitals, caregiver groups and pharmaceutical distributors have bolstered their own online commerce and communications capabilities.

Independents, practitioners and smaller retailers, have started to improve and enhance their web pres-

ence as search, referrals and social recommendations take precedence in bringing, directing and facilitating customers.

It used to be that when e-commerce was mentioned as a next step, that was where independent optical retailers and ECPs drew the line. They wrestled (and still are) with providing PDs to inquiring consumers, with people coming into their stores asking for fixes of poor quality or problematic eyeglasses ordered "online." And, the matter of delivering service for Rx's, particularly for ophthalmic progressive or multifocal lenses online, or matching the proper frame choices for those, is still an issue for many, even as Virtual Try-On (VTO) methods and technologies improve.

But things are changing.

While national and regional optical chains say they are currently working on researching "solutions" to the online e-commerce challenge, there are now also more independent optical retailers and ECPs who have started to dip their toes into offering an online, e-commerce solution for their practices or optical stores and dispensaries. (see story Page 48)

Essilor offered its first MyOnlineOptical (www.

myonlineoptical.com) solutions to ECPs four years ago. That provided a chance for ECPS to choose the brands to feature on their site, they received customer service, fulfillment and processing and MyOnlineOptical (MOO) provided profits to the practice and took a transaction fee. One year ago, MyOnlineOptical added a second business model choice and offered a monthly subscription fee for its service. There is a smaller fee in this approach, to help ECPs manage fixed costs and offer credit card transactions; in this case the dollars back to the ECP are a bit higher.

According to John Walborn, who oversees the MOO program, "Our goal has been to help ECPs present a way to expand their offerings and market to patients. The decision making within the process is theirs to make; we offer resources to help them make the decisions and we're seeing that there are a range of things they might want to choose. Some want to mirror the products in their stores; others want a different online experience or different product categories and want to offer only unbranded products online. The idea is that they maintain control and

Continued on page 46



Independents Get Into the E-Commerce Space

Continued from page 45

make the decisions and we facilitate.”

Walborn also pointed out, “Many more practitioners have participated in contact lens ordering/replacement lenses online and those are now starting to re-examine their options in the eyeglass, sunwear or accessories arena. We are really offering the tools, the supply chain and an efficient fulfillment organization to them.”

The other thing Walborn emphasizes is that the brands requested by the ECPs are vetted with vendors. And that these requests for independents’ online shops are handled completely separate from Essilor’s other lines of business, including the free-standing e-commerce websites it owns (including FramesDirect, EyeBuyDirect and the company recently announced the pending acquisition of Coastal.com). “We approach vendors for approval for MyOnlineOptical sites.”

At VSP Global, there are two programs, Eyeconic and eStores, currently offered “to help build a bridge between the expert service of private-practice eyecare and the convenience of shopping online for eyewear,” the company points out. Eyeconic, which launched in July 2011, provides VSP members and consumers, who are looking to purchase online, a site to purchase glasses and contacts. Eyeconic pays VSP doctors a professional support fee when patients purchase from Eyeconic.com. The site refers online shoppers to VSP doctors either through their order or via the “Find the Doctor” locator directory on the site.

Eyeconic features contact lenses and products from the Marchon and Altair portfolio of frames and sunglasses. Doctors who prefer to offer their own online solution can also partner with eStores, which is linked from their own practiced website and branded to that ECP. Those eStores also offer flexible product pricing, set by the ECP.

A VSP spokesperson shared some facts. All 30,000 VSP doctors are eligible to receive payments through Eyeconic. Any consumer can purchase contact lenses through Eyeconic. As of today, nearly half of VSP’s 64

million members have the ability to apply their benefits to purchase contacts and optical through Eyeconic and, today, nearly 3,500 VSP doctors are actively participating through Eyeconic and eStore solutions. This is an increase of 400 percent over the past 12 months.

Further, VSP said that 31,000 VSP members used the site to ‘Find a VSP doctor’ and half a million people visited Eyeconic in 2013; about 3 percent purchased on the site. In addition, VSP doctors received professional support fees totaling nearly 25 percent of Eyeconic’s total revenue. From January 2013 to December 2013, Eyeconic monthly sales grew by 275 percent.

Michael Hansen, who is president of VSP Global’s newly created Retail Development division, noted, “Eyeconic was created to help ECPs compete more effectively in the retail space. And it’s designed to drive solutions to enhance demands among consumers in ways which benefit that VSP provider.” He added, “This year, we’ll be exploring more strategies to help them be more competitive. We expect significant growth in the next 5 years in this category.”

Iristocracy.com, a new consumer eyewear online site which bowed last year, showcases a curated collection of eyewear and fashion accessories along with a 3D try-on capability. Natasha Vora, co-founder and CEO, emphasizes that the site “respects and values the role of eyecare professionals in its communications with consumers who shop at the site.”

The site advocates eye health and explains itself as ‘prescription free,’ which means the company encourages online eyewear shoppers to have their prescription filled with an eyecare professional. For those who do so within 30 days of their order ship date, they can receive a \$50 Visa prepaid gift card from Iristocracy in the mail after they have scanned and emailed or faxed the company their lens receipt. Vora is looking to expand her roster of participating ECPs and plans to develop an extensive directory and locator soon.

Further, Iristocracy has started working with some

independent optical retailers. Says Tal Landau, store manager/optician with upscale Glasses Ltd., Chicago. “What intrigued us most about Iristocracy’s business model was the virtual inventory that we were able to access, such as, Cazal, Ziggy and others. The virtual try on feature was uniquely different than anything we had seen before.”

He added, “We are using the Iristocracy computer/kiosk in our doctor’s office and it is shown to our clients that haven’t found a frame from our in house selection or to patients that are getting an eye exam. Our most common consumer comment regarding the site is that they wish to try on for fit and comfort with the actual frame. Upon expressing this concern, the team at Iristocracy quickly provided us with 12 actual frames that are for sale on their website that we keep in our store.”

Glasses Ltd. is also testing another approach to offering a more extensive collection for online ‘opportunities’ for its clients. Its new 3-For-3 program points customers who visit its website to the home pages of many elite vendors in its high-end optical mix. If customers see something they like, Glasses Ltd. will order three frames for them and ship them to the customers for home try on – at no expense. The program has just started. Said Landau, “This was part of the recent website upgrade and is still too new to comment about at this point. We’re exploring.”

Stephannie Keller, who runs MyEyeStore, a Minneapolis, Minn.-based company which also helps ECPs develop their own online sites/e-commerce stores, is one who says that working in hand with frame, sun and optical products suppliers is critical to how her clients’ ECP sites operate. Keller, an optician, who has been in the industry for 18 years, owning and running a Pearle Vision franchise, came to the company several years ago. She said, “All the product costs flow through us. So we customize what each of our clients is looking for and we negotiate with the vendor. We are very transparent and can work with

Continued on page 52



E-Commerce Exposed: ECPs Speak Up on Experiences Selling Online

BY CATHERINE WOLINSKI / ASSOCIATE EDITOR

NEW YORK—E-commerce is a concept once thought to be a concern of conglomerate, big box retailers and companies targeting tech-savvy audiences in a new generation of online shoppers.

Online retailing's prevalence, however, has increased steadily over time. Not only a challenge to general merchandise, apparel and specialty retailers, within the eyewear space, e-commerce has been posing a unique challenge to independent eyecare practitioners and dispensers.

Within the past year or so, a small, but growing group of independent practitioners and dispensers are asking: is it time to incorporate e-tailing strategies into eyewear sales, or is it sufficient to continue "business as usual"?

VM talked to ECPs around the country and learned that in this rapidly-changing arena, many remain against it, but some are beginning to explore it.

Those independent ECPS who take the tack firmly and resolutely against the adoption of eyeglass e-commerce see it as a direct threat to their business or, in a more personal vein, as misaligned with their view of patient care.

"From an economic perspective, e-commerce is completely different than brick and mortar retail," said Alex Russakovsky, OD, of **Twin City Eye**, a full-service optometric practice affiliated with **Pearle Vision** in Somerville, Mass. "It defeats the purpose of a store, and then we become our own competition. Unless you have an incredibly large volume of orders, it really doesn't make sense economically for someone with a brick and mortar to sell glasses online."

Julie Kubsch, optician and owner of **Specs Around Town**, an optical boutique in Bloomington, Ill., believes the problems facing ECPs considering e-commerce are the pricing of products, properly fitting patients and offering unique product and personal service.

"I didn't want to risk not having an online presence. With an increasing number of our patients taking their prescriptions and making online purchases, I think it is important for long-term survival."



Jassetta Cargus Nwagwu, OD
Cargus Eyecare
McCalla, Ala.

"The biggest problem with e-tailers is that people usually think it's going to be cheaper because they find it on the internet," said Kubsch, who primarily offers high-end, independent frame lines in her shop. "We are a small business that thrives on unique product and personal service. To get involved in e-commerce sales, I think you need to be all-in and sell a lot of volume to make it monetarily beneficial. Most collections we are involved with don't [permit] online sales and we don't want to jeopardize our relationship with them."



On Carmel Family Eyecare's website, a link is provided to their online optical store powered by MyOnlineOptical.

Kubsch also takes issue with the impersonal nature of online sales and not being able to physically fit each patient. "To fill random requests of people we've never seen puts a whole different spin on it. A lot of sending, returning, time consuming busywork for the sale of a \$300-\$500 frame. Is it worth it?"

For many ECPs, it is. Respective approaches can be categorized by what e-commerce platform they are choosing, what products they are deciding to sell

online as compared to what's sold in their stores and what type of client base they are targeting by offering an online store, but whatever the setup, several optical store owners tell *VM* they are seeing success selling online.

Richard Edlow, OD, CEO of **Katzen Eye Group** based in Baltimore, Md., says his five locations had already delved into technological advancements, so it made sense to adopt e-commerce as a component of the group's online approach.

"For us, it's technology in general – our patients check in at a kiosk, a patient portal makes appointments and they're paying their bills online," Edlow told *VM*. After calculating the cost of making a contact lens order in-store versus what it would cost online, "it was a no brainer."

Edlow's practice works with MyEyeStore, an ECP-facing e-tail hosting platform that seamlessly integrates with a practice's existing website. "We find it's been a pleasure," said Edlow. "It worked out well, it frees up staff for one-on-one customer service and that is basically our philosophy with any technology."

Katzen is not yet offering Rx eyeglasses in their web store, but plans are being made for the advancement in the near future, according to Edlow. "Within a year, patients will be able to order Rx-able glasses online, but pick them up in the office," he said, emphasizing his belief in continuing adjustments and fittings in-store. "To me, that's the best service possible."

Other practitioners, like Jassetta Cargus Nwagwu, OD of **Cargus Eyecare** in McCalla, Ala., are drawn to the appeal of an online store due to the capability to improve patient retention by offering frames online

that are difficult to carry in-store. “We had a lot of patients coming in asking for designer frames, but the cost to carry those frames in office was too much. So, being able to offer them online was attractive and just made sense,” said Cargus.

Cargus had previously attempted an online store, but failed—“It was too time consuming and I realized I needed the right software and lab situation to make life easier. So, I went online and researched turnkey online opticals.” When she found MyOnline-Optical, a web store hosting service provided by Essilor, Cargus confirmed with another user of the platform that it was right for her and moved forward with setting up Cargus Eyewear Online by Brookstone.

“I didn’t want to risk *not* having an online presence,” Cargus told *VM*. “With an increasing number of our patients taking their prescriptions and making online purchases, I think it is important for long-term survival. Also, creating multiple streams of incomes is just a smart business move.”

Cargus identified the speed of frame delivery to be a challenge at times, but said, overall, her patients have been satisfied and retention has improved with the access to frames she doesn’t carry in-store.

“There is potential for incremental revenue for people finding sunglasses and contact lenses online. It’s a new source of revenue in the sense that they might not be making those purchases with us in the office.”

Another MyOnlineOptical user, William F. Billman, OD, PC of **Carmel Family Eyecare** in Carmel, Ind., says the biggest struggle has been advertising his e-store to outside clientele, but having products online that he can’t stock in store has been beneficial. “It’s paid for itself so far, but I would love to market it more,” said Billman. “MyOnlineOptical has been very supportive, and patients have been pleased with the return policy, the courtesy and the quality.”

For Robert Bass, OD, F.A.A.O. of **Optometric Associates, P.C.** in Manassas, Va., VSP Global’s Eyeconic

platform and eStore options have allowed him to enter into the online equation without incurring the costs of hosting his own e-commerce store and has given his patients a way to order online when his office is closed.

“I’m a little guy in a one doctor office,” Bass told *VM*. “I could not afford to set up any of this myself, but it gave me a way to play and to point some patients online.

My eStore is there for patients who only want to purchase from me, and having my name on my eStore is important to those patients,” Bass said. “We do very little for patients who aren’t ours.”

A component he has found especially useful is Eyeconic’s virtual try-on (VTO) technology that he opted to use in his eStore. “I have had patients look online, do the virtual try-on and then come in to order glasses – that has probably happened more than them ordering online. It gave them a way to look at it, have their family look at it. They might have done that with someone else and I never would have seen them. That to me is the cool part,” he said.

Marcus McNeill, owner and optician at **Seek Eye Care** in Fayetteville, N.C. said VTO has been a “game

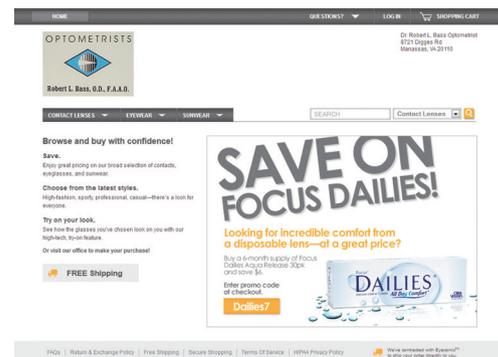


Tom Vogelpohl, OD
Dakota Eye Care Associates
West St. Paul, Minn.

changer” for his business, which offers 2,000 frames online compared to the 600 offered in his brick and mortar boutique.

McNeill believes having VTO and an e-tail store available to patients at home as well as in his office allows him to compete with larger players and communicates to customers that his store is on the forefront of patient care.

“I’ve noticed that many ECPs are afraid of technology,” McNeill said. “I embrace technology. I feel that it gives me an edge against big buck stores and



As a user of VSP’s Eyeconic, Richard Bass, OD is able to promote his eStore with Eyeconic’s offerings.

other competitors in my city. The conveniences that are offered now, like facial recognition and try-on, for a patient to walk in and see that, they know you care about them and want to invest in them. I want to be able to offer them that ability to place the order from home, and when they come in, to pull up my website on a big screen TV to go through the products together and find what they need and what fits.”

Convenience has proven to be a driving factor for many entering the e-commerce equation, both ECPs and patients. At **Dakota Eye Care Associates** in West St. Paul, Minn., a city outside Minneapolis, MyEye-Store has proven to be beneficial due to its ease of use and vast bank of products available for each practice to carry online that they perhaps are not carrying in-store.

“Our idea is that, if we can offer them this convenience, and they’re staying with us instead of going to another provider, that’s certainly an advantage,” said Tom Vogelpohl, OD, who works with three other doctors at the practice.

In their e-tailing store, which appears as a page within their own website, Dakota Eye Care Associates offers eyewear like sunglasses, readers and sports vision products, and expands into fashion accessories such as jewelry, handbags and watches, medically oriented accessories such as low vision aids, contact lens solutions and eye drops, and other products not avail-

Continued on page 50



E-Tailing ECPs 'Site' Retention and Revenue Among Online Selling Benefits

Continued from page 49

able in the practice's physical location.

"There is potential for incremental revenue for people finding sunglasses and contact lenses online. It's a new source of revenue in the sense that they might not be making those purchases with us in the office," said Vogelpohl, who carries some, but not all of the eyewear, lens and health and beauty accessories offered on his site. "We carry some of the products in the office, but not every one, and not quite as much of a variety."

In simplest terms, the practice stepped onto the e-commerce scene to avoid falling behind. "We felt quite strongly it was an inevitability that we had to move this way, knowing full well it may not be profitable right away," Vogelpohl told *VM*. "The way in which we're working with it at this point in time is largely for our patients, although, interestingly, we've had numerous orders from different parts of the country."

Timothy Planty, OD of **Vision Max** in Baytown, Texas, uses MyEyeStore to offer more products,



MyEyeStore clients like Vision Max are able to integrate an e-commerce store into their existing website.

serve different demographics appropriately and save staff time.

"I had delved into the possibility with adding my own web store for selling contact lenses to my patients because it saved staff time—we register all of

our patients online, put all the contact lens information in and they can order up to an annual order, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year without interfering with our staff time," Planty told *VM*.

Vision Max's online offerings have proven so successful, in fact, that he now carries certain products in his brick and mortar location because of their success in the online store. "When trying to decide between an optical contact lens distributor versus MyEyeStore, the advantage was that with MyEyeStore, there are sunglasses, readers, jewelry, purses and a lot of other options to draw patients to buy and I get a cut of that, too."

According to Planty, Vision Max made a concerted effort to make patients aware of their new online offerings with promotional materials like discount cards and posters, provided and customized by MyEyeStore at no extra cost to the practice, as well as on the practice's Facebook page and an e-newsletter.

"We had a lot of patients asking for their prescription so they could go online and buy – now that doesn't happen as much because they're registered in the office. That's where I learned that it wasn't the price, it was the convenience. Price was not the motivating factor."

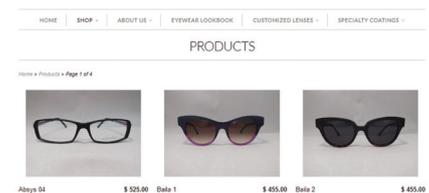
ECP-enabled platforms are not the only options available, either – other practices may opt to use platforms that allow for more customization and control. **Ann's Eyewear Boutique** in Twins Falls, Idaho, for example, used a popular e-commerce platform, Shopify, to set up their online store, which has been up and running for under two months, according to owner, Ann Braga. Braga enlisted one of her staff members, Jenna Harder, who serves as optician, lab manager and website designer at the boutique.

"Shopify is very user friendly – I've done multiple versions of our website over the years, and this was the easiest. The tech support is fantastic," said Harder. "We have control over how the products are presented and have a website that looks as clean and professional as we'd like it to be."

Another staff member, Mindy Frodin, "director of first impressions" and social media director, provides the images of frames sold in the e-store which she takes in a shadow box in-store.

"Mindy takes pictures of all the frames – we were already doing that – and we experimented with different views of how to present each product," said Harder, who emphasized the desire for cohesiveness not only with the images, but with each page of the

*Ann's
Eyewear Boutique*



Ann's Eyewear Boutique used Shopify to build their e-commerce store to maintain control and customization of the website's appearance and functionality.

website. "We like to have full control over everything so we can make it look just right," said Harder.

According to Harder, it took research, trial and error and consultations with other stores to achieve the ideal e-commerce balance. "A lot of online stores seem to be focused on bargains, so we wanted to make sure there was a place for us online," she said.

Since the boutique's e-com launch in late January, orders have come in from people and places around the country, and even around the world. Additionally, the website has consistently achieved nearly twice as many visits since it began showcasing and selling the store's products.

"Having an online store is something we've been thinking about for several years. It was easy to put in place, and hits have been good every day," said Braga. "We'll see what it adds up to." ■

Internet Research, Purchasing Increasing Among U.S. Eyewear Consumers

The prevalence of internet use when making a purchasing decision is rising among the American consumer, and though the increase of actual eyeglass purchasing online is small, it too, is steadily rising.

The Vision Council Internet Influence Report was originally developed in 2007 to measure the influence of the internet on the eyewear purchasing activities of Americans who regularly use or have access to the internet.

The 2013 report, which was appended to the November 2013 standard VisionWatch questionnaire and included 26 questions, was sent to approximately 10,000 American adults and received a total of 9,587 responses representing, demographically and psychographically, the U.S. population over the age of 18.

Key points of the survey are as follows:

Over 61 percent of adults surveyed used the internet to directly purchase products “at least occasionally.” When purchasing eyewear, Americans were most likely to use the internet in some way to buy contact lenses, with 29.9 percent using the internet during their last contact lens purchase, 19.7 percent during their most recent plano sunglass purchase, 18.3 dur-

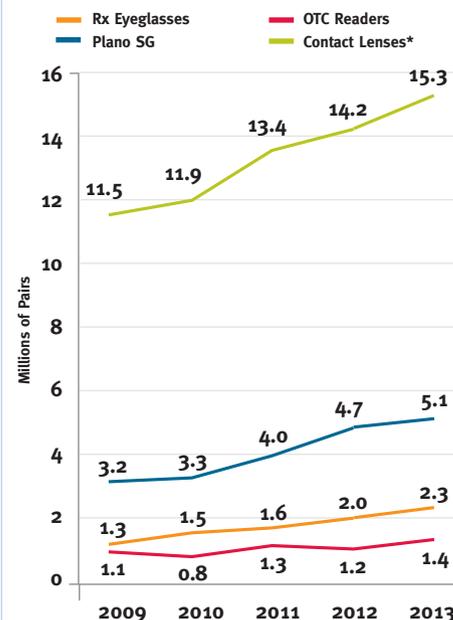
ing their last Rx eyeglass purchase, and 8.3 percent during their last purchase of OTC readers.

When looking for new eyewear, most Americans are using the internet to “window shop,” compare prices and examine possible brands and retail locations where they might make a purchase in person. However, approximately 23 percent of people using the internet to assist in their last eyewear purchase did make the purchase directly online, with 17.5 percent buying contact lenses, 5.5 percent buying plano sunglasses, 3 to 4 percent purchasing eyeglasses and 2.6 percent buying OTC readers.

2.3 million pairs of Rx eyeglasses were purchased online during the 12ME period September 2013, compared to 2.0 million in 2012 and 1.6, 1.5 and 1.3 million in 2011, 2010 and 2009, respectively. Plano sunglasses showed 5.1 million pairs purchased online in 2013, compared to 4.7 million in 2012. In 2013, 1.4 million online purchases of OTC readers were made compared to 1.2 in 2012, and 15.3 million contact lens purchases were made compared to 14.2 million in 2012.

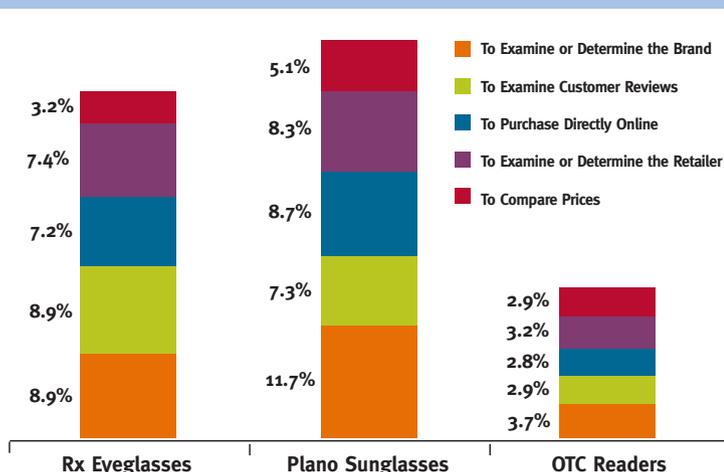
Additionally, as the study concluded, online eyewear purchase satisfaction showed increase in 2013 and has been increasing over the past four years. ■

VisionWatch Estimates:
Total Eyewear Units Purchased
by Consumers Online



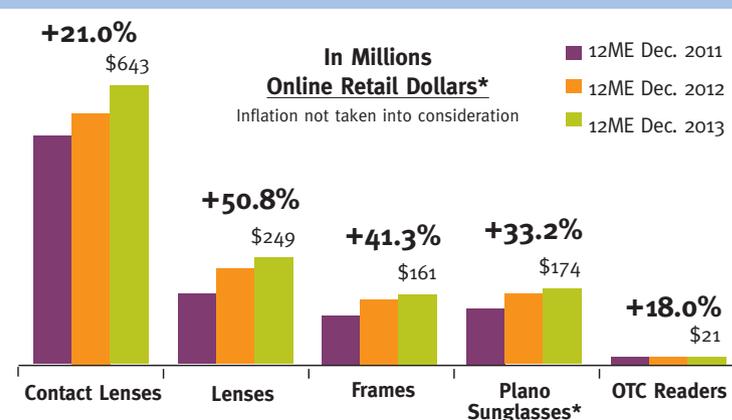
Source: 2013 Vision Council Internet Influence Report
* millions of transactions, not “unit” sales

How Did You Use The Internet During
Your Last Eyewear Purchase?*



*Among consumers that bought eyewear within the last 6 months
Source: VisionWatch / The Vision Council's November 2013 Internet Influence Report

Online Eyewear Retail Dollars



*Online retail includes dollars spent on websites / online retailers for the sale of either spectacle lenses (including Rx sun), frames, contact lenses, sunglasses (plano) and OTC readers. This number does not include sunglass clips and reflects the dollars spent only by those U.S. residents 18 and older. Does not include retail dollars spent by/for contact lenses and exams for those 17 years of age and younger.

Source: VisionWatch / The Vision Council's November 2013 Internet Influence Report

A GREATER VISION *vision-centric philanthropic efforts*

Tickets for March 29 EyeRock Benefit Concert Now on Sale

NEW YORK—Tickets for EyeRock, the optical industry concert benefitting New Eyes for the Needy, are now on sale at www.new-eyes.org. The show, featuring The EyeRock Band is set for 9 p.m., Saturday, March 29 at The Hard Rock Café in Times Square.

Numerous companies are supporting this charity event. (see sidebar) “We are so delighted at the outpouring of support we have received from the optical industry. The list of companies contributing to our cause is quite impressive for our first year. We are thrilled to be part of this exciting event and we are hoping to make this a long-term partnership,” said Jean Gajano, executive director of New Eyes.

“New Eyes for the Needy is doing great things to expand access to eyeglasses for so many people in need. There’s really no other organization like them!” remarked Denise Mogli, Costco’s U.S. optical director of professional services and chairperson of the EyeRock event. Mogli became involved with New Eyes last year and has supported the organization’s mission to expand its reach across the U.S.

The EyeRock Band is comprised of singers and musicians from throughout the optical industry. The

band is dedicated to raising funds for non-profit organizations that provide vision care to people in need. It has played sold-out shows at the Hard Rock Café, B.B. King’s and other top venues.

“Performing with the EyeRock Band is such a terrific experience,” said Bob Stein, chief professional development officer of National Vision and one of the leaders of the EyeRock Band. “Not only is it an evening of reconnecting with my musical friends in the industry and performing some great rock n’ roll, but it’s also rewarding to know that we are helping the optically underserved. No one ever said that philanthropy couldn’t be enjoyable as well, and EyeRock takes that to a whole new level.”

Another leader of The EyeRock Band, David Salk, who owns Focal Point Opticians in Berkeley, Calif. and e-clips, commented, “I am involved with EyeRock because it combines my love of music, my love of this industry, and the joy of collaborating with industry friends who share both a mutual love of classic rock n’ roll, and to be part of something that benefits those who are less fortunate and need help obtaining vision products and services....it’s a win,win,win.”



The School of Rock All-Star Team, a band made up of outstanding teenage performers from Chicago, will also perform at EyeRock.

At press time, EyeRock sponsors include: Gold Sponsor: Suja Life; Silver Sponsors: Charmant USA, Essilor and KBCo., Jobson Medical Information, Marcolin, National Vision, UnitedHealthcare, The Vision Council, Reed Exhibitions; Bronze Sponsors: Briot USA/Visionix, Davis Vision, EyeKing, FGX International, Kenmark Optical, Marco, McGee Group, MCQ LLC, Modo Eyewear, Nouveau Eyewear, Ocuco, Rem Eyewear, Santinelli International, Tura, Younger Optics, and Zyloware Eyewear.

General admission tickets for EyeRock are for admittance and bar snacks only. A cash bar will be available. ■

ECPs Taking Steps to Explore E-Commerce

Continued from page 46

any supplier for frames, sun, contact lenses, other categories, too. The vendor determines their own rules of engagement for the client.”

MyEyeStore has worked with independent practices and groups who might offer the full gamut of product choices in their online store or just categories of products that are not often emphasized in their physical dispensaries. Plano sun, over-the-counter readers, sports vision goggles, and a burgeoning vitamin and nutraceuticals business are part of several sites.

MyEyeStore’s online sites for ECP clients run on a

monthly service fee. “Regardless of what product or service you’re selling today, you’re going to need to be a part of e-commerce,” said Keller. “This is not going away, it’s ramping up more and more every year.

One thing that Keller emphasizes is that MyEyeStore is not involved in selling to consumers. “We don’t inventory product. We ship to the patient. But all is designed to come from the practitioner or the optical with their branding, even the packing slips have their name. It takes communication by the practice in the beginning to tell patients about it. The real value for the practice is in terms of image and incremental sales—the best is when a practice gets an

order from a patient at 3:00 am. They are saving a lot of staff time on fulfillment issues and everyone’s looking to find a way to utilize their staff in more productive ways today.”

MyEyeStore is currently live online with about 20 e-commerce stores. Said Keller, “Three years ago, there was a feeling among independents which was ‘We have to do something, but we don’t know what.’ Now our phone is ringing. People need to get in the game. Practices want to hang on to their patients. The conversation about e-commerce among independents is top-of-mind today.” ■

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