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# Site Support

## More ECPs Tap Online B2B Tools

**A VM STAFF REPORT**

NEW YORK—Some vision care market observers believe that the optical business is still far behind in catching up to the newest technology opportunities of the Web.

Nevertheless, ECPs and optical retailers have been substantially increasing their presence online in the past year, in particular, to conduct their day-to-day business. They are taking advantage of many new resources and tools provided by eyewear suppliers, labs and buying groups who, in turn, have upgraded and enhanced the functionality of their own websites for their accounts' benefits.

Today, more ECPs are using the Internet as much at work as they do at home, according to the latest ECP Internet Usage Study conducted by Jobson Optical Research. (The survey of 621 ECPs and optical retailers conducted in November will be available at www.jobsonresearch.com this month.) In fact, some 49.1 percent today say they go online equally in both places (compared to 42.4 percent who said so last year).

Further, some 55.8 percent said their practice ordered either frames, lenses or other products online in 2010. Moreover, nearly two-thirds, 63.8 percent, say their online ordering has increased in 2010, compared to last year. Some 87.6 percent are using the Internet several times a day. Of the 76.5 percent of respondents who have a practice/company website, 33.0 percent are updating their sites "often," another 43.7 percent "sometimes." More than half, 50.5 percent, say they contact their patients via email.

And they are getting involved in social media, whether used for personal or business reasons—77.2 percent say they regularly visit optical industry sites, and 49.1 percent regularly visit social/professional networking sites. The functionality they are using from business-to-business optical sites, according to retailers and many diverse suppliers, ranges from filing managed vision care claims to product ordering or reordering, accessing product information, tracking product orders, tapping educational courses and resources for themselves or staff training.

Noted Jim Stephens, OD, president, The Hour Glass, Tallahassee, Fla., "The primary function of our business that's done mostly online is filing insurance claims. We find that filing claims online versus sending in paper claims reduces the amount of errors made by an associate."

Matt Matthews, president of Alton-Ill.-based Crown Optical, added, "Our most prominent business activities online focus on exam scheduling/patient management and managing our contact lens business. We are a member of Opti-Port, who provides us with technology solutions that enhance our ability to capture online exams from patients 24/7, and better manage our contact lens business (in office and through patient web orders) within our multi-site platform. Since implementing Opti-Port's online CLX system, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of exams that are scheduled online during hours when our offices are typically closed.

"We believe that integrated systems that focus on key metrics within our business and operations, are going to be crucial to our business," Matthews said. "We look for flexible system suppliers that are willing to listen and work with us to help us grow."

**Vision Monday** spoke with a diverse range of suppliers, labs and buying groups to gauge what kinds of features they have been adding to their websites in order to help customers make their business more efficient. Most of the features for their ECP/retail customers are behind password walls, in order for that functionality to be accessed strictly by those accounts. ■■

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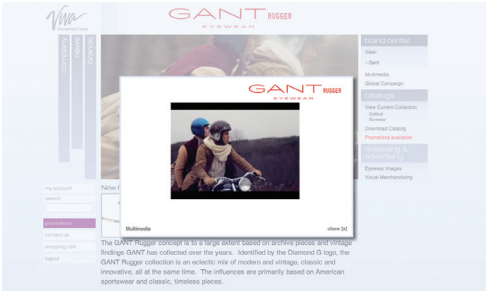
# As Suppliers Expand Web Presence, ECPs Log On

## VIVA INTERNATIONAL GROUP: Functionality and Content Are Key

http://www.vivagroup.com/

"A great B2B site always has its customers in mind and it should be designed and function according to their needs," said Sherry Lay, chief merchandising officer for Viva International Group. "For Viva, this began with the creation of the site itself. We knew our customers wanted the opportunity to learn about our brands




and products and make purchases at their convenience. We keep them in mind with every enhancement we make."

Those enhancements include real-time product stock information; brand info including consumer profile, news, events, specs and trends; Viva corporate information; 24/7 account access and ordering. "The biggest differentiator of www.vivagroup.com is the shopping capability. I also count our real-time inventory status, advanced search functions and the 360-degree product view as unique features," added Lay.

"B2B sites have evolved to be much more customer focused," continued Lay. "At one time, sites simply functioned as platforms for companies to 'talk' about themselves. Now functionality and content is about what the customer needs and wants and with the advance of social media, customers have many platforms where they can interact with a brand."

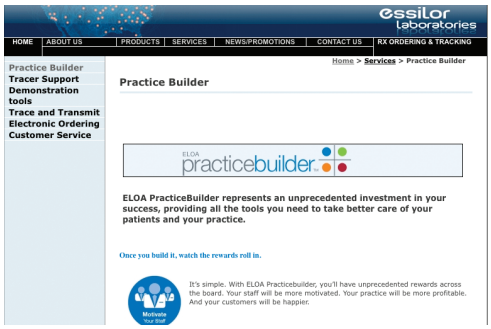
Part of the www.vivagroup.com evolution includes adding online ordering for its international accounts in 2011. "The site was last redesigned in March 2010. We have spent the last few months better understanding our customer and how they use the site and will make improvements based on their feedback. We target March 2011 for enhancements to go live," concluded Lay.

## ESSILOR OF AMERICA: Leveraging an E-Presence

http://eloa.com/Services/Practice+Builder.htm

Essilor of America operates a number of Web sites, each designed to support a specific brand, educational program or business unit. ECPs utilize the sites to get brand information, training guides, promotional materials and lab support. Brand-specific sites offer product range descriptions and availability as well as training to help ECPs sell to the consumer.

Essilor Laboratories of America's Practice Builder Web site offers easy to use promotional




items for ECPs. Essilor also has lab-specific sites, such as Duffens-Optical.com, to ease ordering for ECPs. Essilor is in the process of moving the sites from a Web 1.0 presence that just lists the product range to a "semantic web of the future" that can provide personalized responses to specific ECP search queries, a company spokesperson said.

Essilor also provides ECPs with personalized information through MyOnlineOptical, a Web portal launched in 2009 that enables ECPs to establish their own online businesses. Through its website content, Essilor explains why each product fits an ECP's patient and why specific promotions will help an ECP sell more.

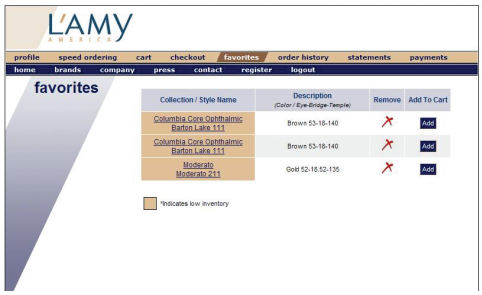
Training is a main focus for Essilor, and the company has leveraged its web presence to deliver webinars and other educational content for ECPs. Through Essilor's ECP University website (www.ecpuniversity.com), Essilor offers two educational programs for Dispensers: New Dispensers Quick Start program and Apollo for Advanced Dispensing Professionals. Each program is offered online on demand with hands on activities and learning.

In Spring 2010, Essilor launched a mobile site that delivers quick access to Essilor news, announcements and tips. Essilor's spokesperson said the company will launch a consumer-friendly mobile application in first quarter 2011, with the goal to peek consumer interest and education, and ultimately drive more traffic into ECP offices. In March, Essilor will launch a revamped EssilorUSA.com with more intuitive and ECP-friendly functionality.

## L'AMY AMERICA: Ease and Speed

http://www.lamyamerica.com

"Through our regular website we offer a richer brand experience for our licensed brands through current lookbooks, runway imagery, advertising campaigns," shared Cheryl Canning, worldwide brand manager of Proenza Schouler sunwear and marketing manager of Chloe and Nina Ricci for Cachet, a division of L'Amy America. "Accounts can then access the B2B portion through the regular website to place orders for all brands and all SKUs by entering their account number and password."




The L'Amy America website offers several functions that make it easier for their customers to manage their accounts, including creating a favorites list for re-orders, referencing past orders, viewing statements and making pay-

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# Navigation and Ease Are Order of the Day

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ments fast and easy. "They can place orders they placed before, or if they know the brand and the name (or number) of a product, they can use a drop down menu instead of scrolling through pictures," added Canning. "Our speed ordering function makes it super quick and easy for our accounts to place orders and sets us apart from other companies."

According to Canning, the elements of a great B2B site include ease of navigation, ease of ordering and ease of payment. To help accomplish this, L'Amy America anticipates adding features that remember returning customers and makes recommendations on a product based upon past purchases. Additionally, the company will be enhancing the look of the site to make it more appealing by using new imagery or colors and running different seasonal promotions on the site for ECPs.

## TRANSITIONS OPTICAL: A Portal Tailored for the Trade

www.Transitions.com/Pro

To provide eyecare professionals with easy access to its broad range of sales, marketing and educational materials, Transitions Optical created the Transitions Trade Portal www.Transitions.com/Pro. The company focused on three main elements when designing the portal: ease of use, design and content, according to Mary O'Hara, marketing specialist, professional communications for Transitions Optical.

"In today's market, having up-to-date and relevant content is especially critical, and we created a site that allows us to quickly and easily upload new content," said O'Hara.

The Transitions Trade Portal provides one-stop access to all the programs and resources Transitions Optical provides to eyecare professionals and labs. The site includes information about Transitions products, tips on leveraging support programs like the Transitions Championship and multicultural program, and marketing tools such as the Transitions Online Marketing (TOM) Tool. A special education section includes staff training tools and accredited CE, includes clinical papers, interactive training tools, training videos as well as ABO- and COPE-approved courses available for download.

"The education section and marketing tools section are the most commonly used resources, including the popular Transitions Online Marketing (TOM) tool where eyecare professionals can download and customize materials to educate their customers," said O'Hara. Eyecare professionals can order POS through the site using both an electronic form as well as through a downloadable form that users can print and fax in. The site also provides ECPs with the latest on news and events from Transitions Optical, including news releases and updates on ongoing programs, O'Hara added.

"Before the trade portal was launched, we only had one Website for consumers and eyecare professionals," she said. "By creating separate sites, we are able to focus on each group separately allowing us to tailor the resources and information appropriately."

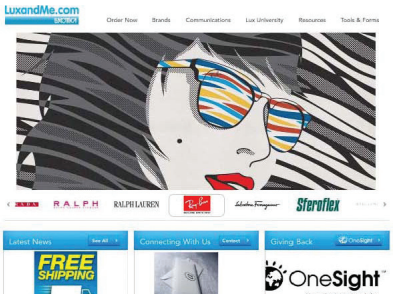
## LUXOTTICA GROUP: Making Life Easy for Customers

http://www.luxandme.com

Luxottica's B2B website, LuxandMe.com, is a very important part of the company's relationship with ECPs. "We want to connect with the entire dispensary and doctor's office," explained Victor Melendez, vice president of marketing for Luxottica. "As such, our site is multi-faceted and offers valuable resources and information for the owner, doctor, buyer, optician, etc."

The site has four main sections, including Order Now, which provides easy access to online ordering; Brands, an entry point to navigate through the company's 25 brands and find catalogs, brand imagery and more; Lux University, practice-building ideas and information; and Resource Center, where information on Luxottica-sponsored initiatives including Think About Your Eyes can be found.

"Our customers rely on us for product availability, product information, news and education," said Melendez. "Our priority is to meet our customers' needs and give them the information they need to have success with their businesses. In the past, B2B was synonymous with online ordering. Today it is so much more. Our site has become an extension of our terrific sales team and provides another way to connect with our customers and demonstrate our commitment to their satisfaction."




LuxandMe.com underwent a redesign in October based upon feedback from users. "We will continue to work closely with the eyecare professionals who use our site to make sure that it continues to adequately meet their needs. Our site is all about making life easier for our customers. We want to make doing business with Luxottica easy so the eye care professionals have more time to focus on their business and customers."

## NASSAU VISION GROUP: Ordering Made Easy

http://www.nassau247.com

Ease of ordering is of paramount importance for Nassau Vision Group, a major stock lens suppli-

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READ MORE ONLINE
FOR MORE ON B2B SITES, INCLUDING A&A OPTICAL, TURA AND RED TRAY GO TO THE COVER STORY
ONLY ON VISIONMONDAY.COM

# ECPs Look for Robust Tools on B2B Sites

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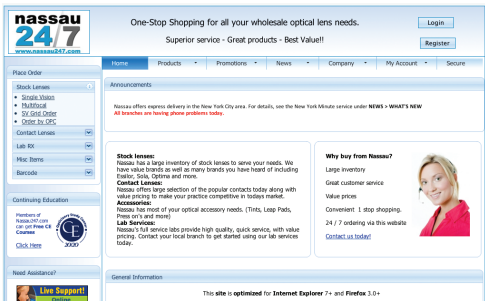
er and wholesale lab operator. That's why the company's website offers eyecare professionals multiple ways to place orders.

"We have a shopping cart that lets customers pick one item at a time," said marketing manager Hans Beltran. "They can also use a lens grid for multiple piece orders or a barcode gun, which lets them scan in barcode tops or a barcode sheet. That's quick and easy." Beltran said Nassau will put more emphasis on the site's barcode capabilities as it updates the site in 2011.

Beltran believes a B2B optical site should enable eyecare professionals to accomplish 85 percent of the tasks that normally would be performed by human interaction. Toward that end, Nassau is exploring ways to minimize the amount of human interaction in processing orders. The company is planning additional customer-friendly enhancements such as more flexible shipping options.




"We're looking to add better pricing and product updates," said Beltran, adding that Nassau is going to increase the feedback from its computer system back to the site in order to provide more "clarity" about out-of-stock items. Nassau will also provide customer-specific pricing instead of just a standard list price, he said.

Many of the site's current features have become popular with customers, such as direct shipping of contacts lenses to patients and a lens availability reference. Being able to place orders anytime is a convenient feature that suits most customers' schedules.

"Most of our online ECPs open an order in the morning," Beltran said. "They fill the cart with patient orders and shelf orders for stock lenses and contact lenses throughout the day, and close the order at around 6 p.m."

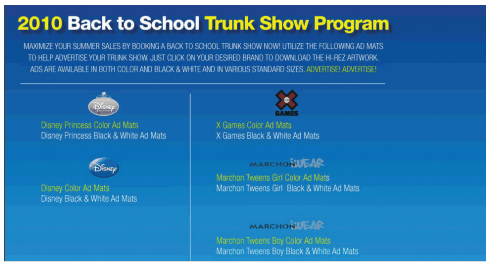
The high volume of orders processed through the site helps Nassau's business run more efficiently by reducing the phone load and spikes, especially near the end of the work day, according to Beltran.

## MARCHON: Robust Features and Tools

http://www.marchon.com/

Marchon's MVP website allows Marchon customers to place orders 24/7 and get real time product availability. Accounts can check open orders, view electronic statements and submit an invoice inquiry. The site also includes catalogs and price lists for each brand; product support (such as Airlock Drill Charts); a link to Jobson's Frames Data; downloadable business tools, like a Style Show Planning Guide and a Guide on the "4 Keys to Inventory Control"; links to Marchon partner companies Office-Mate, Eyefinity, Vision Web and EyeDesigns; and lastly, promotions.

Donna Rollins, vice president of sales operations for Marchon, has a vested interest in the MVP site. "The ease of ordering of product online is the most popular feature on our site," she said. "But we add features when they make sense. For example, if we suddenly have footage from a great Marchon appearance on a top influencing TV show we will post video, as we did after the 'Oprah's Favorite Things' episode."




The Marchon MVP site also offers a robust amount of features and training for users. "I do not think other sites offer the amount of business tools offered by Marchon," added Rollins. "We are constantly trying to improve the ease of ordering while keeping the look fresh. We also want to be careful about not changing the navigation so dramatically that our loyal visitors have to learn the site over and over. Within the Business Tools, we have 'Business Enhancer' downloads: Style Show Guide; 4 Keys to Inventory Control; How to Create Effective Advertising; How to Create Effective Public Relations and more."

## WALMAN OPTICAL: Enhancing Interactive Functionality

http://www.walman.com

As middlemen in the optical industry's distribution chain, wholesale laboratories are the quintessential business-to-business suppliers. Accordingly, Walman Optical, the nation's larger independent optical wholesaler, offers eyecare professionals a comprehensive menu of products and services through its full-featured, B2B website, www.walman.com.

Customers can access links to lens and frame vendor websites, "how-to" videos, self-paced educational programs, product specific newsletters and online product catalogs, price books, self-directed statement and invoice reprinting capabilities and online payment portals. Virtually all of these functionalities are located behind authentication forms and are available only to customers and cannot be referenced by the public.

The Minneapolis-based wholesaler has begun a major site overhaul, and plans to phase in many new features over the next six months. The goal is to "enhance interactive functionality," according to Bob Gustin, Walman's vice president of new business development. "The days of simply offering marketing fluff are rapidly disappearing and being replaced with interactive, informational training and practice management tools," Gustin said.

Walman uses on online videos and electronic versions of existing lens and frame educational

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**ONLINE RESOURCES**

A RANGE OF B2B RESOURCES CAN BE FOUND AT JOBSON INTERNET SOLUTIONS (JIS)

WWW.JIS.JOBSON.COM

# Sites Boast User-Friendly Features, Participation

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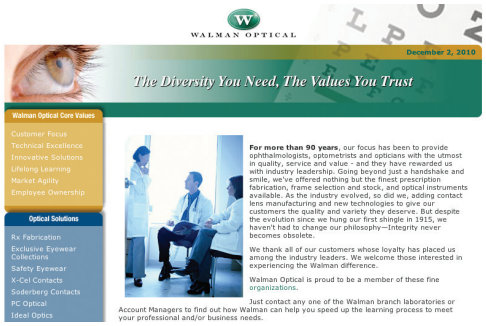
pieces, either produced internally for its offerings of proprietary products or obtained from supporting frame and lens vendor partners. "We have internally developed a series of online, self-paced lens educational tools, including quizzes, to enhance the learning experience," Gustin noted.

Gustin said Walman plans to add more customized online marketing programs targeted at

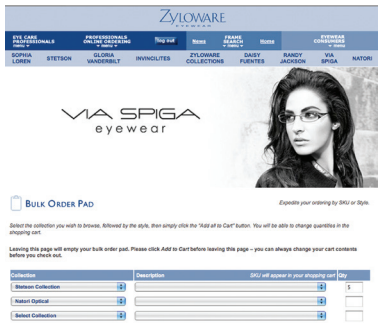



specific customer demographics and much greater functionality in online ordering and order status capabilities. In addition to supporting its lens and frame product offerings, the company will also provide practice management support tools. Other upgrades in the works include a secure Extranet site with online account status, online payment and eventual real-time order status capabilities, and full integration of the DVI REMO online ordering system.

## ZYLOWARE: Be User-Friendly

http://www.zyloware.com

Zyloware.com offers user-friendly resources for the ECPs to place orders, research frames or receive current news 24/7. Some of those features include a sophisticated search function which allows users to search by brand, frame composition, frame size, design elements, color, temple size, and/or lens fitting capability. According to Christopher Shyer, president of Zyloware, "Customers rely on us for easy and quick 24/7 online ordering on a bulk order pad, being on our retail locator list for consumers to easily find them and our in-depth search function."




Additionally, Zyloware.com offers the company's current catalog available for download in its entirety or by the specific brand, as well as facts and news on each brand. Accounts also have the ability to check their order status and history, get updates on frame availability and get estimated times of arrival. "Our website has made our business more efficient by expanding the wealth of services offered to our consumers. It is a user-friendly and 24/7 outlet of information on our brands, frames offered and news," said Shyer.

However, Zyloware is not resting on its laurels when it comes to Zyloware.com. Upcoming changes and upgrades include the ability to view multiple screen shots at the same time and easy clicks to their social media outlets. "We are constantly in the creative and development stage to increase ease and usage," added Shyer. "Zyloware consistently updates the website, whether with new brand images and information or product availability which is updated daily. We have even more new features in the works for 2012. Stay tuned," he concluded.

## BLOCK BUYING GROUP: Encouraging Member Participation

http://www.blockbg.com

Block Buying Group, one of the industry's largest buying groups for eyecare professionals, designed its B2B Web site, www.blockbg.com, with a few basic concepts in mind.

"A great B2B site must be easy to navigate and contain functionality that makes using the site more time-effective than using the telephone or U.S. Postal Service," company president and founder Michael Block told **VM**. "Additionally, the site must contain a well-organized menu of options leading to company information and interactive options. Business people, especially at the retail level, prefer ease of use and consistency," noted Block.

He added, "We have come a long way in the past few years in getting our members to participate in Web-based activities."

According to Block, about 25 percent of his group's members view and pay their monthly statements on the site. The statements are posted immediately after the month end close and email notifications are sent to members. "This saves time in waiting for a mailed statement," he pointed out. "Online payment enables our members to make their payments easily and on-time in a secure enviornment. Also, we can reach our members efficiently and effectively by email and improve communication between our vendors and members by hosting a vendor promotional area."

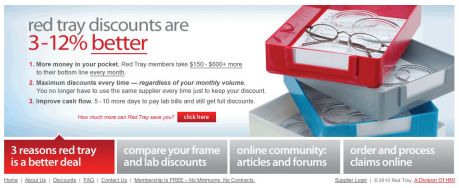
Group members also go online to read a monthly newsletter and use "Blockboard," a classified area through which members buy, sell and search for employment opportunities. Other popular features of the site include a chat forum, a contact lens price comparison tool, access to Jobson's Frames Data and continuing educations courses provided by Jobson.

Currently, online ordering is not available on the Block Buying Group site, although the company provides links to its suppliers that allow that function. However, Block said the company is considering re-entering the area of online ordering, provided it can work with a portal that unites all suppliers and labs.

## RED TRAY | HMI BUYING GROUP: Keeping It Simple Yet Funtional

http://www.redtraysaves.com

Although the Red Tray buying group's website, redtraysaves.com, is packed with advanced features, the company operates on the "keep it simple" principle in order to deliver user-friendly features to its customers.




"The ironic thing about online technology is that the more complex it becomes in terms of options and capabilities we can build into a site, the more important it is that site updates be filtered for user-perceived value and simplicity of use," remarked Diane C. John, vice president of business development.

Through redtraysaves.com, customers can place online orders, see 'paperless' statements, access their billing history by supplier or product class, or choose various electronic payment options. An account management function allows customers to select additional suppliers to bill through their Red Tray account. Customers can also compare supplier discounts, place and track orders for frames, lab work and contact lenses, and process and track insurance claims and reimbursements.

In January, 2010, Red Tray launched several new "online community" resources, including a blog about practice management topics written by Dr. Jerry Hayes, OD, founder/president of Red Tray and HMI Buying Group and a financial expert. The "community" also features monthly podcasts with industry experts hosted by Dr. Hayes, and a forum in which participants can exchange ideas in real-time about practice management challenges and industry issues.

"In June, we went live with the only full-integrated VisionWeb co-brand portal to add the convenience of online ophthalmic product ordering and insurance transaction processing to our members' existing suite of online services at redtraysaves.com," said John. "Partnering with VisionWeb also gives our members free access to their team of experts and regularly scheduled training webinars. These resources are invaluable—particularly as they relate to insurance processing in terms of helping our members navigate coding issues and improve claim acceptance," she said.

## TURA: Focus on Performance and Ease

http://www.tura.com

When it comes to catering to ECPs tastes for doing business via the Internet, Tura likes to keep the focus on performance that is user friendly, direct and informative. According to Audrey Pavia, vice president of marketing for the eyewear firm, "Accounts like the consistency of knowing where to go on the site, yet they like changes to keep it interesting."

Pavia outlined some of the site's more robust

features including ordering capability, inventory status, access to statements, and a check order status. "Clients also like the hold "your favorites" brand information, the quick pick ordering feature, and store locator to direct customers to accounts." In addition, the site offers access to the Tura Advantage Loyalty Reward Program and other special promotions, she said.

"By surveying our users, we have continued to enhance our site based on their feedback, all the while keeping up with the latest Internet technology." The site was lasted updated in April 2008, and the wheels are in motion for an update to launch sometime in the first quarter of 2011, according to Pavia. Plans are in place for the site to be reorganized for even easier navigation while still retaining the electronic efficiencies users are accustomed to.

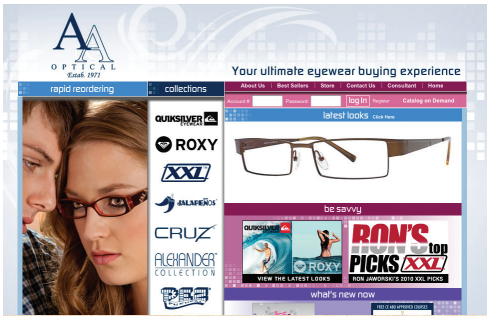
At the end of the business day, users are looking for information presented in a simple direct way, Pavia said. "One of the ways the website has made business more efficient for us is that it allows our accounts to see new product immediately upon release, place re-orders without waiting for a sales rep, and receive immediate status on fulfillment dates."

## A&A OPTICAL: Customer Engagement

http://www.aaopticalco.com

For A&A Optical, engaging the ECP is the first step in the online process quickly followed by customizing the "shopping" experience. Visitors to the site are able to access the typical online shopping features— viewing product in all colors offered for each style on various Collection Pages on aaopticalco.com, according to Juli Ann Radmanesh, A&A's marketing manager.

A highlight and real time-saver of the site is




the Rapid Reordering tool—it allows shoppers who know what products they want to select the product by style name/size/color from a drop down menu and add unlimited amount of products to their order pad and then into their shopping cart. "It's the fastest and easiest way to shop and by accessing our 'Store,' customers can select from numerous branded accessories and clothing as well as frames," she said.

A&A also presents their Best Sellers as an actual collection or sub category where customers can order directly from the Best Sellers section and place product into their carts. "That gives A&A another opportunity to present our new releases, Latest Looks, which is a collection

or sub category where customers can also order," she said.

In addition, A&A capitalizes on the appeal of their celebrity spokesman, Ron Jaworski, former NFL star quarterback, and ESPN Monday Night Football analyst who endorses their XXL collection. "We feature a special section within the XXL collection dubbed, Ron's Top Picks, which is a sub category of the XXL collection featuring the frames Ron Jaworski wears each day. Customers can order directly from the Ron's Top Picks pages, place product into their carts as well as view recent photos of Ron all inside Ron's Top Picks pages," she said.

"We want our website to be friendly and easy to navigate so customers can quickly find what they are looking for which is why the site is Ipad and Iphone friendly. Images were built in J Query instead of the traditional flash so they can be viewed and the pages which contain this feature stay intact even when viewing the pages from an Ipad or Iphone," Radmanesh said.

A&A Optical's site was re-launched in July 2010 featuring an updated look/feel. "We are always looking for new ways to make our customers online experience better, so we continuously add features such as an e-news pop-up to the homepage which invites customers to receive our newsletters, info about contests, PR releases, etc. in their inboxes."

"We make it easy to communicate with A&A by offering a variety of ways customers and visitors can engage with us through social media links and contact us pages. From a sales aspect, we collect leads from the site and utilize traffic data to determine what we need to improve on—we believe a B2B site needs to have the ability to track and store data on visitors," she said.