

CONSTANT CONNECTIVITY

How It's Changing the ECP-Patient Dialogue



BY ANDREW KARP / GROUP EDITOR, LENSES + TECHNOLOGY

In today's wireless world, mobile devices, apps and software innovations are enabling eyecare professionals and their patients to stay constantly connected. With a few clicks on a smartphone or tablet, an optometrist can e-mail a patient a link to a video tutorial about a new surgical procedure or remind them to take their medication. An office manager at an eyecare practice, faced with a sudden cancellation, can quickly fill the appoint-

ment time by sending a text message to dozens of patients. Patients can locate the nearest eye doctor, read a Yelp review or watch a YouTube patient testimonial about the doctor. They can also schedule an appointment, get information about the latest products and procedures or ask their doctor questions about their treatment.

The rapid proliferation of these new technologies is adding new dimensions to the ECP-patient

dialogue. As a result, ECPs are able to offer more personalized treatment, and patients are gaining instant access to information about doctors, eyewear products and treatment options.

Vision Monday spoke to optometrists, opticians and other eyecare professionals to learn how they are using the latest mobile technologies and software to enhance the patient experience while increasing profits and improving efficiencies in their practices. ■

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Smartphones, Tablets and Mobile Apps Change the Conversation

Thanks to smartphones and tablets, ECPs and patients are connecting in new and novel ways. Used for voice and text messaging, e-mail, and in combination mobile apps, the ubiquitous devices make it possible for ECPs to remind patients about appointments, notify them when their glasses are ready, inform them about special events and even send birthday greetings. Patients are using these technologies to locate nearby doctors, communicate with them through online social networks, book appointments, read patient reviews of ECPs and ask their doctor questions.

One product developed specifically to help eye doctors connect with patients is EyeXam. A bi-directional mobile app and web platform developed by Global EyeVentures in partnership with Eyefinity, EyeXam is available as a free download from The Apple Store. The app offers features

such as a doctor directory, a GPS-based doctor locator and avenues for communicating with EyeXam users, patient self-screening and the ability to share results and live chat with doctors' offices. Patients can also manage appointments with the app and receive communications from their doctor, including reminders and targeted messages. Doctors can utilize a web-based dashboard to monitor app activity, access a list of everyone who has viewed the app, by e-mail address, and connect with app users.

"EyeXam provides a direct pipeline between you and your patient," said Justin Bazan, OD, owner of Park Slope Eye in Brooklyn, N.Y., who recently began using the app. "There's no need for instant messaging or e-mails. If you have the app on your phone, you're instantly connected."

Bazan said he likes the immediacy that EyeXam offers. "It lets you correspond with people in real time," he said. "If someone contacts you through the app, you can reply instantly. It may be the deciding factor as to whether they book an appointment with you. By contacting a patient at their highest level of interest, you strike when the iron is hot." He added that if a doctor receives a text message from a patient, the message will pop up immediately and be less likely to be ignored, as e-mail messages sometimes are.

Some eyecare practices are using specially designed software to send text messages, e-mails and electronic newsletters to patients via their smartphones. One vendor, Demandforce, describes its software as "a complete marketing and communication platform" for eyecare practices.

Optometrist Andrew J. Neukirch, the CEO of

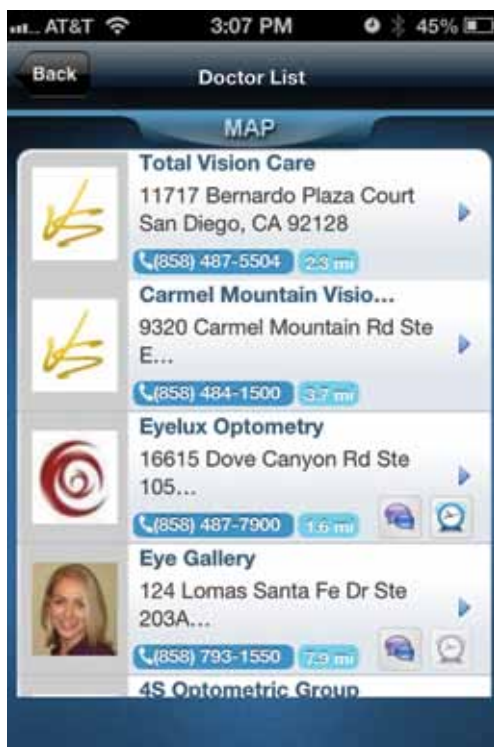


Andrew Neukirch, OD, said Demandforce helps him reduce expenses at Carillon Vision Care.

Carillon Vision Care in Glenview, Ill., said Demandforce probably saves his staff about five hours a week because they no longer have to call patients to remind them of appointments. "We have about 5,000 active patients, and the automatic appointment feature is very helpful," said Dr. Neukirch. "Patients don't have to pick up the phone, they can just click a couple of times and send us a text. I'm surprised how well it's catching on. Patients of all ages like it."

Dr. Neukirch likes Demandforce's recall feature that sends patients text and e-mail messages as their next appointment approaches. It also sends out birthday greetings. However, a few established patients were slightly annoyed by the frequency and timing of the messages, he said. "Some of them were getting messages in the middle of the night, so I had to explain that they should turn off their ringer when they went to sleep."

Dr. Neukirch said Demandforce saves him about \$7,000 a year on postage, since he uses it to send patients a quarterly electronic newsletter rather than mailing it to them. Demandforce's survey feature is another plus, he noted. "Our patients get a thank you for coming in, and with it there's a link where they can take a survey. We ask them about the cleanliness of the facility, their wait time, whether the doctor explained their treatment clearly and whether they were satisfied with the prod-



EyeXam mobile app's doctor directory.



Justin Bazan, OD said EyeXam provides a "direct pipeline" to his patients at Park Slope Eye.



ucts available. Based on the results of the survey, I've brought in higher end product and our patients are delighted."

Dr. Neukirch said Demandforce also helps his practice manage its online reputation by collecting certified reviews of the practice and publishing them on the web. The software can also be used to post the reviews on the practice's website or Facebook page, a feature which has helped attract new patients to Carillon Vision Care. "Our total number of patients has gone up. Word of mouth is the number one reason, but a lot are people who are new to the area find us online."

Solutionreach is another company that provides eyecare practices with a variety of services to streamline office management, manage online reputations, and market through social media, including text, e-mail, voice, video, web and social media tools. Tracie Hartman, office manager of Family EyeCare Associates in Tacoma, Wash., said Solutionreach's versatility appeals to her. "It's all editable and customizable for each patient. For example, we can change the frequency of the recall notices. When an appointment is scheduled we send out a reminder immediately and the patient will put it into their phone. Then they get a reminder one week before the appointment, then one day before. All they have to do is hit confirm, and we put it on our books. That has decreased no-shows to almost none."

The Solutionreach software can generate a cancellation list, a feature Hartman also finds valuable. "If we have a patient call and cancel a day or two before an appointment, we have a list of people



Tracie Hartman, office manager, Family EyeCare Associates likes Solutionreach's customizable features.

who want to be notified. We send out an e-mail, and the first one to call gets the appointment. We get responses within minutes. Some patients say it's like a game to see if they can call first."

Hartman said Solutionreach's recall system is much more effective than the old method of sending out postcards, which patients tend to lose. "We're booked a month to a month and a half out. A couple of our patients just love the fact we're in touch with them."

Family EyeCare Associates also sends out more lighthearted messages to patients. Last Halloween, the staff dressed in costumes and invited patients to come in and join the fun. And when her husband, Erick Hartman, OD, turned 60 last June, the office send out a mass text and invited patients to come in for an open house celebration. "The patients told us they liked the fact that we put our practice in front of them and are connecting with them," said Hartman, adding that the office also sends birthday greetings to patients featuring the staff wearing party hats and boas.

Recently, Solutionreach introduced a new service that taps into two trends that have been changing the way business is conducted in both the retail



Family EyeCare Associates uses Solutionreach to send patients personalized birthday greetings.



Optician Oleg Gonik and Maria Zenteno of Flatbush Optical using Solutionreach's patient video system to record a patient's testimonial.

and the health care spaces—the rise of personal recommendations to drive business to a particular location and the advent of video and its accessibility to consumers and patients on the web and via mobile devices. The company's new video survey service, SR Video, enables an eyecare practice to capture patient feedback and share it online.

"What I love about the Solutionreach video is once in a while, we make a true friend, and not only are people happy but they're happy to the point where they really want to express themselves," said Oleg Gonik, a New York State licensed optician who co-owns Flatbush Optical, which operates two locations in Brooklyn, N.Y. "People write reviews, but it's awesome when you have a face to go with the review. We upload the videos to YouTube Flatbush Optical; it's all linked to Flatbush Optical. Every little bit of exposure we can get on the Internet now is very desirable. It puts us above a lot of competitors."

Gonik is selective about which patients are asked to make videos. "You have to get a patient who is representative of the neighborhood's demographics," he said. "You want everyday, common people, so that when others see it they recognize themselves." ■

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Education, Try On and Measurement Made Easy

One of the most significant ways that technology is changing the patient experience is in the area of patient education. Brochures and other handouts are rapidly being replaced by more technologically advanced means of communicating about products and procedures.

Eyemaginations offers iPad apps, software and educational videos designed to help doctors present complex information to their patients in an engaging, easy-to-understand manner. The company's Luma software is widely used in eyecare practices, including Matossian Eye Associates, a multi-specialty ophthalmology practice with offices in Doylestown, Penn., Hopewell, N.J. and Hamilton, N.J.



Cynthia Matossian, MD,
Matossian Eye Associates.

"We use Eyemaginations in many different ways," said Cynthia Matossian, MD. When the patient is dilating, there is a 10 to 20 minute wait, depending on how long it takes the pupils to dilate. That's the perfect time to show the patient topic-appropriate video clips.

The clips consist of related vignettes that we group together according to categories, such as cataract surgery, implants, glaucoma, macular degeneration or contact lenses. It's a personalized playlist drawn from all the offerings that Eyemaginations has.

"For example, under contact lenses, the subjects could be soft, gas permeables, colored, toric and multifocal contacts. The patient is exposed to these different topics. This way they're educated and know the basics, so when an MD or an OD talks with them, they don't have to start at ground zero. Not only is the patient better prepared to ask more advanced questions, but the focus is much more personalized and appropriate for each patient. That

way, we don't have a teenage patient watching a looping video on cataract surgery, or have an 88 year-old watching a video on contact lens fitting."

Although Matossian Eye Associates does not have an optical dispensary, it uses Eyemaginations videos to inform patients about spectacle lens options. "We don't use those clips regularly," said Dr. Matossian. "But sometimes patients ask us about them, so it's important that we provide patients with correct information. Patients are very appreciative, because they know that we are going out of our way to explain to them products that we don't even carry. It personalizes the treatment, and helps with patient satisfaction and retention."

Many dispensers are now using iPad apps to virtually demonstrate lenses. Lens companies such as Carl Zeiss Vision and Hoya Vision Care have developed apps with realistic lens demos that ECPs say are quite effective. One of the newest apps of this type is Carl Zeiss Vision's i.Demo, an interactive app for iPad. Available as a free iTunes download for Carl Zeiss Vision account holders, i.Demo is designed to help patients choose the best lenses and treatments for their needs. Through still images and videos depicting real life scenes, i.Demo shows the advantages of customized versus standard lenses, computer and office lenses and treatments such as AR coating. It includes an optional "profile" feature that allows the ECP to capture the patient's needs and the recommended lens solution



An AR lens demonstration on Carl Zeiss Vision's i.Demo.



Robert Gole, OD, using i.Demo at the Yorkview Optometric Clinic.

that results. The profile and recommendations can then be printed out for the patient.

Robert Gole, OD president of Yorkview Optometric Clinic in Newmarket, Ontario, has installed i.Demo in multiple locations in both the exam rooms and dispensary, and he encourages his staff to use it. "I ask patients how they use their eyes, so we can determine what types of scenarios to show them," explained Dr. Gole. "Whether it's golf or crocheting, i.Demo helps them visualize it. You definitely engage the patient. There's a 'wow' factor. They say 'That's exactly how it is, doctor.'" Dr. Gole said once patients experience i.Demo they are more inclined to purchase the lenses they've seen demonstrated.

Another i.Demo user, Chad Douglas, OD of Douglas Family Eyecare in Warren, Ohio, said i.Demo is "a huge part of my encounter with re-educating my existing patients and educating new patients. I love it because it allows me to elaborate on what the patient's prescription is. Whether they're nearsighted or farsighted, I can show them on the screen how it will look. For the first time progressive lens wearer, I can show them a standard progressive and then show them how new lens

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New Tools Give ECPs an Edge

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design technology can enhance their field of vision by making it 40 percent wider. I can even show them the difference between a standard single vision lens and a digital one, or what a difference various lens materials can make, or what a Transitions or polarized lens can do. It's priceless."

Dr. Douglas said i.Demo has changed the way he practices optometry. "When I think about how I practiced 15 years ago, I never recommended a product to a patient. But i.Demo allows me to communicate more about lenses. It's also made me learn more about the lenses, and become involved in all aspects of the patient's care. Now I'm providing better service because I'm dealing not just with pathology, but with preventative eye health."

Another app that offers "real life" lens demonstrations is the Hoya Vision Consultant (HVC) Viewer from Hoya Vision Care. Hoya describes it as "an augmented reality app for the iPad" that allows patients to "experience" the benefits of Hoya lenses before they buy them. Hoya offers five demo modules: progressive lenses, single vision lenses, indoor lenses, anti-reflective treatments and polarized lenses.

"The HVC uses the camera on the tablet. When you hold the tablet up, you can actually see what it looks like through a Hoya progressive," said Thomas Gosling, OD, owner of Optical Matters in Littleton, Colo. "Sometimes, an optician might try to draw a progressive when discussing it with a patient. But



Thomas Gosling, OD taking patient measurements with Hoya's Spectangle app.

when the patient sees the demo, they get it. It speeds up the dispensing process." Dr. Gosling also noted that HVC is effective when demonstrating lens treatments such as polarization or AR.

"I show patients a lens without AR. I rub my finger over the lens and they can see how it scratches, gets water on it and smudges. Then they see lenses with different levels of AR. When you go to highest level, they see all this stuff disappear. They don't have to imagine the benefits."

Dr. Gosling said that although the HVC app cost him about \$119, the cost was quickly offset by increased sales of premium lenses. "In the first week we must have upgraded a dozen people. That's the beauty of it."

Dr. Gosling also uses another Hoya app called Spectangle to take personalized measurements for free-form lenses—pantoscopic tilt, vertex distance, seg height, PD, face form, A, B, and DBL—using an iPad3. He photographs patients using an iPad camera, makes adjustments on the screen, enters in Rx data and lifestyle preferences, then pushes a button to send the order to the lab. According to Hoya, Spectangle addresses many of the drawbacks required to prescribe personalized progressives, including the time necessary to take frame and fitting measurements, equipment investment and ease of operating measuring devices. Although designed specifically for iD MyStyle, Spectangle can also be used to take accurate PDs and seg heights for any lens style, according to Hoya.

"Patients like it because after the measurements are taken, they see how they are referenced in a 3D picture of their face, and they come to a better understanding of what we're trying to do," said Dr. Gosling. "They see how the lens is more personalized, just like the service we're giving them. It ties in nicely with the HVC Viewer."

The newest tablet-based dispensing device on the market is Essilor of America's M'eyeFit. Introduced in January, M'eyeFit precisely reads pupillary dis-



Essilor's M'eyeFit precisely reads pupillary distance, fitting height, A & B, pantoscopic tilt, wrap, and vertex measurements.

tance, fitting height, A & B, pantoscopic tilt, wrap, and vertex measurements, according to Essilor. These measurements ensure that patients receive the maximum benefits from premium Essilor lens designs such as Definity 3 Plus, the most technologically-advanced Definity lens, as well as Definity 3, Definity, Definity Fairway and other Essilor lenses.

Essilor said the M'eyeFit allows ECPs mobility in the office, and acclimation to the device is quick—in pilot tests ECPs were able to open the box and begin using the device in only 10 minutes.

The M'eyeFit device comes preloaded with additional tools to make dispensing easier, including frame selection, patient education, patient information management, online ordering and PMS connection.

Some multifunctional apps combine lens demonstration and patient measurement capabilities with virtual try-on technology. ABS Smart Mirror packages these features into an iPad app, which uses Augmented Reality technology to educate patients about lenses, take multifocal measurements and aid them with eyewear selection. The Smart Mirror iPad app takes pictures and five-second videos, allowing patients to see themselves wearing up to four frames. Pictures and videos can be e-mailed to the patient or used to update their Facebook page.

Davis Duehr Dean is a large eyecare practice that recently began using the Smart Mirror iPad app in all of its 20 locations in southern Wisconsin. "The nice thing about using an iPad app like this is that it's portable," said Kyle Kravick, retail manager for David Duehr Dean. "We snap pictures of the patient in the frames they like, then sit down with

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Wireless Devices Connect ECPs With Patients

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them and show them. If someone is wearing a frame with a nice temple embellishment, they can see it without having to turn their head.”

Kravick said using the Smart Mirror iPad app reinforces the practice’s technologically advanced image, particularly when taking personal measurements for digital lenses. “In our practice, about 60 percent of our lens sales are digital lenses,” he noted. “Whipping out the old pupillometer, PD stick and markers don’t impress patients too much when you’re selling \$400 to \$500 lenses. This puts some ‘wow’ back into taking measurements.”

Kravick said although Davis Duehr Dean has only been using the Smart Mirror iPad app for a short time, it is already boosting sales. “On the clinical side, we had a slow January, but our sales were up 10 percent in retail,” he noted.



Smart Mirror’s iPad app “puts some ‘wow’ back into taking measurements,” said Kyle Kravick of Davis Duehr Dean.



VSP Optics Group’s otto app is intended to serve as an eyecare practice’s “virtual optical assistant.”

Another multi-functional retail system is PFO Global’s SmartEyePix. The desktop system offers eye and face measurement, frame, contact lens try on, order management, benefit verification, and marketing support. SmartEyePix provides in-office patient education and communication through a two-screen system that enables practitioners to involve patients in the entire process, according to PFO Global.

One of the most comprehensive iPad apps for ECPs is otto from VSP Optics Group, which previewed it last fall at Vision Expo West. An acronym for “one touch to optical,” otto serves as an eyecare practice’s virtual optical assistant. Developed in collaboration with PFO Global and designed for the second and third generation Apple iPad, otto simplifies the measuring and dispensing of digital lenses, and brings eyewear consulting, electronic claim filing, and other features to the point-of-care. The system is still in development, but VSP said it plans to launch it soon.

New technology is also enhancing the patient experience with managed vision care. For example,



vpQuote helps patients with vision insurance calculate their out-of-pocket costs for eyewear.

software company called vpQuote has launched an online patient payment calculator for vision plans. The vpQuote Vision Plan Calculator enables optical dispensaries to determine the amount patients owe using their vision plan for optical sales given the selected frame, lenses, and lens enhancements.

“The most helpful thing about vpQuote is that you can show the patient what it would cost them out of pocket with their plan,” said Martha Proffitt, an optician for Dr. Todd Long’s ophthalmology practice in Charlottesville, Va. “The program is on the computer and it comes up automatically, so the patient can see it in writing. You just put the name of the plan in and everything comes up and gives you the prices.” She said the vpQuote software helps upsell patients from standard products to premium ones because it calculates how much would be covered by insurance. ■