

Group Dynamics

ODs Seek Alliances and Buying Groups To Cope With Business Challenges



BY JOHN SAILER / SENIOR EDITOR

Navigating an uncharted sea of changes—health care reform, managed vision care, online retailing, corporate competition—all impacting the existing challenges of running an independent optical business, ECPs are looking to align themselves in groups that can provide them with a competitive edge.

According to The Vision Council 2013 Buying Group/Independent Practice Alliance Report, currently 41 percent of respondents in a study conducted in August of last year belong to one buying group or ECP alliance and 29.2 percent of respondents belong to more than one buying group or alliance. The study also indicated that reliance on buying groups/alliances is on the increase. More than a third (35.5 percent) indicated that they were relying on buying groups/alliances more than one year prior to the study, and 36.2 percent said that they would be relying on buying groups/alliances more over the 12 months following the study.

At the same time, the confusion of health care reform and its alphabet soup of acronyms—the Affordable Care Act (ACA), accountable care organiza-

tions (ACO), electronic health records (EHR), ICD-10, and more—are leading ECPs to seek guidance from these alliances and buying groups as well. As a result, ECP alliances are expanding their educational opportunities while some buying groups are becoming hybrid organizations as they also add services to their discounts and rebates. By adding business management services such as meetings and education, some buying groups are beginning to look more like alliances. Similarly, by adding “preferred” and “advantage” discount/rebate programs, alliances are fine-tuning the purchasing portion of their services.

Amidst all this change and growth, some of the executives of ECP alliances and buying groups who *Vision Monday* interviewed for this article predict that the involvement of private equity and investment firms into this sector of the U.S. market might accelerate both the pace of expansion and the rate of consolidation among groups, which might eventually shrink the number of options down to just a few, even larger groups.

Members of the various groups detailed in-depth on the following pages told *Vision Monday* some of the most important questions an ECP should ask when joining a buying group or an alliance:

- What is the time period of the agreement and is there a contract?
- What are all the fees, percentage payments, if any?
- What is the return on investment?
- Do the profits go back to the group or to the owners/directors?
- Are the owners/directors practicing ODs?
- Is ordering/billing centralized and consolidated through the group, or do I have to do it on my own?
- Who are the other members of the group, are their practices similar to mine, are they competitors, and where are they located?
- What virtual training, real-time education, CE, networking meetings and other events (national, regional and local) are available?
- What vendor/supplier partners is the group aligned with?
- What product mix/selection is available?
- How deep are the discounts and rebates?

With these questions in mind (plus those of your own you’d like to have answered) review the following descriptions of 19 different ECP alliances and buying groups to determine which would be the best fit for your practice. ■

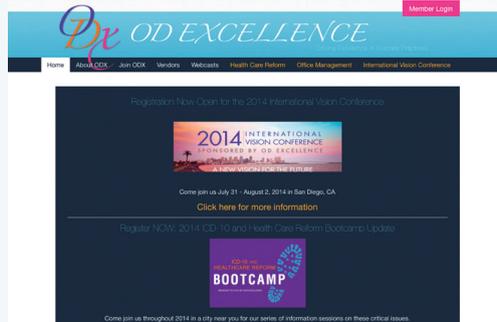


OD Excellence (ODX) | Founded 2006

Executives: Jerry Lieblein, OD, and Jerry Sude, OD, owners; John McGreal OD; Jim Grue OD; Valerie Manso; Sam Quintero, OD; John Lahr, OD; Steve Chandler, OD; Shaw Yorizane OD; and Doug Villella, OD.

Model: Members receive and implement information on any aspect of the practice, clinical and operational, to help them achieve success.

Members: 852 – Open to all practices regardless of size, offering support and free coaching to all practices to help them build a more efficient and profitable practice. To become better and more successful optometrists, members have a thirst for knowledge to build not only a medical practice but to understand how to run a successful business and work less with more profit. “Giving them the tools is not enough; implementation is critical,” so ODX works with them on the one-on-one skills to take back to the office, asking them to participate in coaching time with staff to join in information-sharing meetings.



Programs: Boot camp with ICD-10; health care reform with getting-together modules; staff training and office manager certification online and live; one-to-one coaching; benchmarks on the practice with a consultant; message board staffed with four consultants to answer any questions on compliance and ICD-10; COPE-approved web classes on practice management and medical management; a manual on how to run a practice with monthly supplements and pearls. ODX Profit benchmark program, an advocate program, and a health care reform program. Health

care reform initiatives offer live communication, articles, a forum, and a website that help members prepare their practice to be the vision component with coordinated care teams in their cities.

Events: For 2014, ODX will take the Boot Camp on ICD-10 and health care reform across the country; information-sharing meetings in many states and online for those who cannot make the meetings. Three-day annual international conference offers 18 hours of COPE-approved education for doctors, 12 hours of staff education leading to office manager certification, 14 hours of staff training, one-on-one coaching by leading consultants.

Fees: \$329 per month with no contract that includes all doctors in the office. Membership fees in many cases are paid for by partner vendors.

Contact: www.odexcellence.com, jliblein@odexcellence.com, (707) 433-5542

Villavecchia Buying Group | Founded 1980

Executives: Diane Villavecchia Meehan, VP/co-owner, and Al Villavecchia, Jr., treasurer/co-owner.

Model: Family-owned buying group established for small independent ECPs to receive the same purchase price as larger retail organizations. Discounts calculated on merchandise amounts and not total invoice amount.

Members: Over 1,300 – open to all ECPs with retail offices. ECPs must complete a credit application and be an established business for at least six months.

Programs: Discounts from more than 120 approved vendors assuming statement balance is postmarked

by the 15th of the following month. Members allowed to apply a credit balance with a specific vendor to be applied to their statement balance. Customer service can act as a mediator to resolve all billing issues between members and vendors. Vendor rebate programs, special purchase incentives, discounted credit card processing and merchant services, special vendor promotions, and electronic payment services. One consolidated statement for all vendors. Online access to current and archived statements and to vendor catalogs and price lists.

Events: Continuing education events and business strategy discussion dinners; small dinner meetings with health insurance experts.



Fees: No membership fee; percentage of vendors' discounts retained.

Contact: www.villavecchia.com, customerservice@villavecchia.com; (201) 573-0830



Block Business Group | Founded 1983

Executives: Michael Block, president/owner; Rachel Block Smith, VP marketing; Carolyn Walsh, GM; Eric Liljegren, director of business development.

Model: The name change from Block Buying Group to Block Business Group on its 30th anniversary last year reflected the fact that by providing education, events, practice management services, and more, the company is more than just a buying group that has relationships with about 200 vendors.

Members: 3,000 active members – All independent ECPs who have signed corporately and personally for credit. Members cannot be internet sellers.

Programs: Online education, website for members, CE, monthly videos, Optical Dispensary Manage-

ment quarterly publication for both ODs and opticians concentrating on making the dispensary profitable, Blockbusters monthly newsletter, networking, Elite Vendor Program now in its third year with many key vendors that offer additional discounts. Certain levels of sales and return rates in line, entitle members to additional discounts. The new Block Shamir Program provides cash or point rewards for buying Shamir products through about 400 participating labs. Also with Shamir, accounts that bill their lab services through Block are entitled to a customized YouTube channel, with content provided. Practice Builder Affiliates offers a menu of services at a discounted rate including credit card processing, website building, social media, furniture, and more.

Events: The Business Academy held in January 2014



in Boca Raton, Fla., featured 36 hours of continuing educating, an OD and optician track, ABO and COPE courses, four courses on health care reform, and more than 40 exhibitors; 2015 date and location to be determined. For the rest of 2014, regional lunch-and-learn and/or dinners.

Fees: No fees.

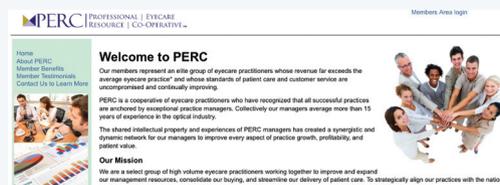
Contact: www.blockbg.com, customerservice@blockbg.com, (800) 524-1480

Professional Eyecare Resources Co-op (PERC) | Founded 2008

Executives: Howard Stein, OD, co-founder/owner; David Golden, OD, co-founder/owner; Jessica Hall, VP Operations; Ken Greene, partner/director, PERC Advantage

Model: “Integrating the independent,” PERC is the “ACE Hardware Store model for the independent ECP,” about 1,000 independently owned and operated offices, improving efficiency, visibility and sustainability in a quickly changing market.

Members: 857 – Independent ODs, ophthalmologists and opticians with practices grossing over \$1 million; adding about 30 new members per month. Most single locations have multiple doctors; others have multiple locations with one doctor per location. Benefits are most effective for members with 1 to 18 locations. As a co-op, PERC collectively narrows purchasing to bring volume to vendors and change members’



buying patterns to translate into real savings. PERC shares profitability with year-end member rebates.

Programs: PERC is building a suite of services that connects members to business tools: efficient and consolidated supply chain (PERC Advantage); lowering cost of goods by taking an inventory position for members vs. standard industry discounts (PERC Advantage); access to patient populations thru payors (Verge Alliance, formerly Eye Home Network); management tools to measure productivity, profitability and performance; online retail in 2015; financial tools and services to capitalize on economies of scale (Management Service Organization); marketing and branding.

Partnered with Verge Alliance to connect payors to ECPs, which has created a suite of products that allow local, regional, state and national networks of ECPs to connect to health plans, ACOs, medical groups, employers and others. Verge Alliance can help groups with risk management, claims processing, credentialing, audits, utilization/review and other services to manage a medical contract.

Events: VEE business development education followed by an evening event; VEW business development education; annual Grand Lux Café lunch for members and staff; SECO hosting the presidential evening; GWCO business development meeting; dinners in markets throughout the U.S.

Fees: No fees.

Contact: www.perc.biz, info@perc.biz, (855) 680-2458



Primary Eyecare Network (PEN) | Founded 1984

Executives: Angel Alvarez, CEO, ABB Optical Group; Matt Oliver, Sr. director of operations; Jeff Rinkus, COO; Debbie Oseguera, director of strategic growth & marketing; Mary Eastwood, OD, FAAO, manager of educational services. Wholly owned by ABB Optical Group.

Model: A traditional buying group, PEN is also a GPO that can create vendor rebate programs for members. With access to high discounts, rebate programs, and reduced rates on education and events, practices must maintain an average monthly minimum purchase and have a credit check. Also known for its education of doctors and staff.

Members: 1,959 – Independent optometrists.

Programs: Exclusive rebate programs with a wide variety of vendors who offer frames, contact lenses, and equipment; consolidated billing; key account liaison services; access to expert partners in areas such as legal, finance, compliance, auditing, and medical bill-



ing; business services, hiring and staffing solutions, and partners with expertise in areas such as compliance, coding, medical billing, and audit protection services. In the annual Dr. Bonus Program, practices can receive 0.5 to 1 percent of annual purchases. In the medical model environment, two years ago PEN partnered with Compliance Specialists, Inc., (CS EYE), professionals in the area of compliance, billing and coding, and auditing.

Events: Coding & Compliance, Jan. 2014, Irvine, Glendale, Sacramento, and San Ramon, Calif.; PIO (Partners in Optometry) “Eye on the Future,” May 2014, Monterey, Calif., for a “place at the health care

table” in the years ahead; ICD-10-CM Review & Updates with John McGreal, OD, July 2014, Irvine and Sacramento, Calif., medical model and health care reform education events; CPE (Center for Paraoptometric Education), April 2014, Irvine, Calif., and Oct. 2014, Pleasanton, Calif., three-day intensive program focused on staff who are new to the field; Office Leaders, March, May, July, and Nov. 2014, Lafayette, Calif., focused on the leadership development of office managers; Employment Law for the Optometric Practice, April 2014, Yorba Linda, Calif., about the laws that govern the typical optometric office and areas where doctors are most often not in compliance; plus more than 70 classes including live seminars and webinars; regional small group meetings to network and share best practices.

Fees: No membership fees or annual dues; administrative fee for vendor purchases.

Contact: www.primaryeye.net, info@primaryeye.net, (800) 444-9230

HMI | Founded 1983

Executives: Jerry Hayes, OD, owner/CEO; Shirleen Prescott, COO; Diane John, CMO.

Model: Traditional group purchasing model with a published price list showing the “discount off list” members receive from more than 200 suppliers to the industry. Members automatically receive the discount associated with each vendor on their monthly statement. Wholly owned by an OD.

Members: 4,000+ – Open to all independent dispensing eyecare professionals with accounts in good standing with major vendors. No minimum monthly purchases required to be a member.

Programs: Exclusive 2014 discount program from the industry’s leading supplier of filing and charting supplies, practice forms, patient education materials, patient giveaways, office furniture, printer supplies and more. Access to discounts on products and services from more than 200 suppliers. Consolidated billing, single statement for all frame, lab, contact lens, pharmaceutical and office supply purchases with 24/7 access to online member statements and secure online payment portal. Pay online with iDrafts electronic payment services with the option to enroll in AutoPay and have payments automatically deducted directly from a designated account.



Fees: No joining fees, no monthly fees, no contracts.

Contact: www.hmibg.com, memberservices@hmibg.com, (800) 416-7676



Vision Source | Founded 1991

Executives: Glenn D. Ellisor, OD, founder and executive chairman; Jim Greenwood, president/CEO; Bobby Christensen, OD, FAAO, Sr. VP; Derrick L. Artis, OD, MBA, FAAO, EVP, Operations, with more than 170 optometrist member administrators as Vision Source's leaders locally. Privately owned by its founders and Brazos Private Equity Partners LLC.

Model: Aligning independent ODs to grow, lower costs and share best practices to increase profitability, Vision Source is a Net Promoter Score culture in which members measure patient experiences to improve operations. In accordance with franchise law, Vision Source is a franchisor, and its members are franchisees who own their respective practice.

Members: 3,500+ members at 2,800+ locations – Licensed ODs in the U.S., members must be clinically focused with strong experience in medical care. They must meet criteria in the “standards for membership” developed by clinical leaders, including the following: each practice location is under the supervision of a licensed clinician; a licensed clinician must own a majority interest in each location; members

must be in good standing with the federal, state and local regulatory agencies and must meet the standard of care criteria for that region.

Programs: Member rebates, ICD-10 training, in-office growth programs, local contracted ACO patient sourcing and managed care/ACO preparedness kits, formalized staff training systems, practice management consultation and tools, local and national marketing campaigns and toolkits, websites, “Future of Independent Optometry” manual with key insights and trends, best pricing on products and equipment, and mentoring and coaching by leading ODs. “Vision Source Gold Standard” guide features tips from colleagues to drive best-in-class experiences for patients.

Already delivered multiple ACO agreements to help members see more patients as health care delivery systems evolve; many more agreements in final phases.

More programs in 2014 than ever before due to long-term investments by Elite Vendors, Essilor, Alcon, Safilo, Marco, Optos and Carl Zeiss Meditec. Private label products include TruClear ophthalmic lenses, Riserva frames, and Fresh Day daily disposable, silicone hydrogel contact lenses.

Events: The Exchange national member meeting, Boston, April 10-13, 2014, plus more than 1,000 regional and local member meetings, the Practices of Distinction advanced practice growth tour, and multiple monthly webinars, learning events and best practices sharing throughout the year.

Fees: As a franchisor, Vision Source states on its website that “its members pay a revenue-based monthly royalty.” Its fees are based on a varying percentage of practice revenue.

Contact: www.visionsourceplan.com, info@vision-source.com, (281) 312-1111

Energieyes Association | Founded 2013

Executives: Michael Porat, executive director, reporting to board of directors whose executive committee is Mark Uhler, OD, president; Eric Botts, OD, treasurer; and Jennifer Geertz, OD, secretary. Energieyes Association is a 501(c)6 not-for-profit corporation.

Model: Participation requires an OD to be licensed and practicing in a corporate/retail setting.

Members: 323 – Members may participate in a variety of ways; no minimum participation requirements.

Programs: Monthly webinar series, bimonthly product purchasing program, monthly newsletter, and practice support among numerous programs.

Events: National Meeting, April 25-27, Colorado Springs, Colo.; regional meetings. To address all aspects of the optometric practice engaging fully with the current health care reform measures, Energieyes provides numerous educational courses under the strategic initiative “Moving the Medical Model.”

Fees: \$250 annual membership dues.

Contact: www.energieyesassociation.com, executive-director@energieyesassociation.com, (347) 618-0784



Professional Eye Care Associates of America (PECAA) | Founded 2006

Executives: Founded by Bradley Smith, OD, co-owner; Lance Anderson, OD, co-owner; and David Wolf, OD, co-owner. Chris Millet, COO, and Doug Martin, director of membership.

Model: No membership contract, month-to-month agreement. Founders still see patients regularly.

Members: While PECAA does not share its membership numbers, with members in 38 states, PECAA's size tripled in 2013, and the alliance expects it to triple again in 2014. Open to independent ODs, ophthalmologists and opticians licensed and in good standing with their state board.

Programs: Vendor discounts, quarterly loyalty rebates, digital marketing, doctor and staff education, business analysis, performance benchmarking and networking events, a majority included in monthly fee. All programs owned and operated in-house.

PECAA partners with a select group of vendors to create "exclusive profitability programs" to increase



practice proficiency and profitability. IncentivEYES member rebate program consolidates each vendor's rebate into one quarterly check. PECAA production tracking software provides data for business owners to instantly measure and track practice performance, highlight growth opportunities, identify unresolved billing issues, forecast future trends and anonymously compare benchmarking among peers. Included in the monthly membership, Member Business Analysis provides an outside financial perspective on your business. Analysts available to meet quarterly to analyze practice finances. Web-based marketing solutions include social media and e-commerce.

Doctor and staff education provide free COPE and ABO credit, information on new technologies and

medical treatments and access to online education. New student membership program for current optometry students includes business and clinical webinars, newsletters and networking. New practitioner program for those opening a new private practice.

Events: Annual Meeting, May 2-4, 2014, in San Antonio; Business Symposium, Nov. 6-9, 2014, in Bellevue, Wash., with speakers, exhibits and business-focused education. Optical Merchandising Workshop will launch at the spring meeting, and Understanding Health Care Reform will be one of the main topics. This year, 60 regional peer-to-peer dinner meetings, and 40 membership interaction dinners for ECPs interested in learning more about PECAA.

Fees: \$149 per month for the first year with a \$600 one-time travel rebate to attend a national member event; \$199 per month after.

Contact: www.pecaa.com, info@pecaa.com, (877) 454-5105

Prima Eye Group | Founded 2011

Executives: Jerry Hayes OD, CEO/co-founder/co-owner, and Neil Gailmard, OD, MBA, FFAO, president/co-founder/co-owner.

Model: U.S.-based ODs who are owners or partners in a traditional dispensing private practice.

Members: 691 – ODs in 405 locations.

Programs: Practice management services and one-on-one consulting from two of the industry's practice management experts, Hayes and Gailmard, on practice management, customer service, growing with

employed associates, practice transitions, buy/sell advice, estimates of practice value, full practice marketing programs, Prima Metrics benchmarking service, profitability consulting, three-year growth plans, and health care reform education. Discounts and rebates from Essilor, Alcon, Vistakon and others.

Events: Two major educational meetings annually in Orlando, Feb. 2014; Chicago, July, 2014. Smaller meetings in conjunction with SECO, March 2014; VEE, March, 2014; and VEW, Sept. 2014. Prima meetings include practice-building education for doctors and staff as well as Prima Mastermind Group



meetings for like-size practice owners.

Fees: \$395 per month, with a satisfaction guarantee and no long-term contract.

Contact: www.primaeyegroup.com, jhayes@primaeyegroup.com, (800) 668-0599



Independent Doctors of Optometric Care (IDOC) | Founded 1999

Executives: Mark S. Feder, OD, CEO, owner; Dave Brown, president; David Rector, CFO.

Model: One of inclusion, IDOC believes ODs should maintain their independence. Not a franchise, and no long-term contract. In 2012, The Riverside Co. made an investment in IDOC which has provided capital to support the company's continued growth, enabling IDOC to expand its infrastructure and increase value-added resources. CEO, Mark S. Feder, OD, retained ownership in the business.

Members: 1,750 ODs – IDOC welcomes all independent ODs. Members understand that topline growth, versus cost savings, is the secret to success. They tend to be early-adopters of technology and believe in one of the core tenets of the IDOC vision, that education, collaboration and sharing best practices is the key to success of independent optometry.

Programs: Launching a comprehensive, online education program. A resource library and more than 700 concise podcasts of five minutes or less, developed by

Scot Morris, OD, FAAO, operating partner of Morris Education and Consulting Associates. Online resource library covers topics including vision and insurance plans, medical model, marketing, human resources, practice management, legal issues, scripting office procedures and more. Guides provide information on optometric finances, frame buying and sales, work-flow worksheets and daily checklists, as well as steps for hiring new employees, from sample job descriptions to the steps to take during the interview process and what the employee should do on a first day. Discounts and rebates from over 60 vendor programs. Private label lens and frame programs.

In 2013, IDOC prepared members for upcoming changes from the ACA and continued in 2014 with a full session dedicated to the ACA at the IDOC Optometric Business Conference in Atlanta, April 3-6. Efforts with insurance entities are underway to ensure members are fairly represented in the various plans.

Consulting by Mark Wright, OD, providing a comprehensive business assessment and monthly consulting; Jay Binkowitz on optical dispensary strategy/planning and monthly consulting; and Mark Hinton



on staff training, communication scripting and monthly consulting.

Events: 2014 Optometric Business Conference, April 3-6, 2014; New York Regional Conference, September 7, 2014; Atlanta Regional Conference, September 14, 2014; Phoenix Regional Conference, October 18, 2014; over 40 study group meetings per quarter in local markets.

Fees: \$129 per month with no contract.

Contact: www.idoc.net, memberservices@idoc.net, (203) 853-3333

Red Tray Network | Founded 1983

Executives: Jerry Hayes, OD, owner/CEO; Shirleen Prescott, COO; Diane John, CMO.

Model: Open to all independent dispensing ECPs with accounts in good standing with major vendors, the Red Tray Network provides purchasing discounts with no minimum monthly purchases required.

Members: 800

Programs: Two new programs allow members to combine their private pay and managed care orders to



qualify for substantial rebates from the industry's top optical labs; new, increased statement discounts from major optical labs; new, discounted shipping rates from major optical labs; new, lower pricing on stock lenses. Place orders and submit claims with 24/7

secure online payment portal. Dr. Hayes Blog presents a variety of tips and tactics designed to bring more dollars to your bottom line. Hosted by Jerry Hayes, OD, Red Tray Radio's practice management podcast features ECPs discussing ways to make your eyecare practice more profitable.

Fees: Monthly administrative fee as low as 1 percent based on monthly purchase volume.

Contact: www.redtraynetwork.com, memberservices@redtraynetwork.com, (800) 416-7676



C&E Vision | Founded 1983

Executives: Steve Wagner, principal; Brad Shapiro, principal; Harvey Yamamoto, OD, principal; David Carneal, director of buying group relations.

Model: Open to all independent ECPs to participate with as many vendors and practice support services as they choose. Member vendor purchases are consolidated and billed monthly to provide practice purchasing data and enable members to save.

Members: Over 4,500 locations – Optometrists, opticians, ophthalmologists and sunglass and boutique eyewear shops. Credit review is the only criteria.

Programs: Consolidated billing, online practice management tools such as a database of invoice records, BeyeRight online service tracks the top-selling frame by each vendor by brand, I-Sight private label ophthalmic lens program, customizable membership program to match each practice's purchasing



habit needs, RewardsPlus monthly rebate, state society programs offer dues credits and society sponsorship, free internet myCloud data invoice storage, IEP Benchmark online benchmarking, ECPinteract virtual peer learning community, ODSyndication collaborative marketing program with free practice website. The Look-Savings You Can See Program launched in 2014 to offer cash rebates, extended billing, statement credits and product credits. At any given time there are more than 25 exclusive offers.

Events: Ocular Symposium three times per year in

Orange County, Calif., provides eight hours of COPE credit focused on medical aspects of optometry. Workshops throughout the year help members make informed purchasing decisions, sell second pairs, market for pennies on the dollar and streamline the back office to increase time spent with patients. C&E has relationships with companies that provide training and webinars regarding ICD-10. ECPinteract will offer multi-session virtual peer-to-peer learning tracks to ensure members are prepared for changes resulting from health care reform.

Fees: No monthly fixed fee or percentage fee of gross practice revenue. ECPs typically pay a percentage solely on what they bill through the buying group which can be percentage based, a locked-in fee or no charge depending on the mix of purchases.

Contact: www.cevision.com, onlineservices@cevision.com, (800) 346-2626

Vision West | Founded 1984

Executives: Joseph Mallinger, OD, MBA, FAAO, president/CEO; Josh Mesrirow, COO; Laura Dorris, business development director. Privately held.

Model: No cost to join, no purchase minimums and no long-term contracts. Participation varies. Members generally purchase through more than 250 vendor partners to access competitive discounts.

Members: 3,000 active accounts – Open to all independent optometrists, ophthalmologists and opticians who are licensed and complete a credit application. Most are ODs because Vision West was started by the California Optometric Association and is currently endorsed by 10 state optometric associations.

Programs: Consolidated billing, 24/7 access to member-only website, discounts with vendor partners, additional rebates based on annual volume, special rebate programs with labs and lens manufacturers, custom billing, ICD-10 training manuals, billing and coding specialists, credentialing assistance. Premium Vendor program provides discounts/rebates for committing to purchase requirements quarterly and/or annually. For members in associations that endorse Vision West, money is rebated to the associations. Online education portal available with over 130 on demand (ABO, NCLE, COPE) courses.

Events: Regional educational events and webinars on health care reform topics including ICD-10 transi-



tion; regional workshop events on vision care plan profitability and practice growth strategies.

Fees: No cost to join, administrative fee based on monthly purchase volume.

Contact: www.vweye.com, jmesrirow@vweye.com, (800) 640-9485



Independent Eye Care Professionals | Founded 2013

Executives: Don C. Railsback, OD, interim COO; Reid Nelson, VP, IPA development; Ronald L. Fiegel, OD, chairman of the board. Wholly owned by 22 state independent physician associations (IPA).

Model: National umbrella organization for 22 state stockholder optometric IPAs with doctors in eight additional states participating through associated IPAs or as participants in a stockholder state. Uniting ODs under IPAs for involvement in ACOs, patient-centered medical homes (PCMH), self-funded vision plans, medical contracts with large and small insurers and to collectively market a vision plan to bring fair reimbursements to doctors. Open to private practice independent ODs and associates and employees of independent ODs. Ophthalmologists also participate in some states. In order to own stock, all IPAs must have a majority of ownership held by private practice independent doctors of optometry.

Members: 5,000+ – In 30 states and growing. Most states require doctors to belong to their state optometric association and the AOA, own their practice or be employed or in association with an OD who owns their practice. In most states, doctors are asked to participate in the vision plan that is owned by the IPA. Some states collect small marketing assessments that can be offset by vendor usage.

Programs: The new Transact Merchant Services program services include low rates on merchant services accounts, a new employee retention program called Tuition Rewards that can help doctors and their employees create an educational legacy through college scholarships for their children, grandchildren and nieces and nephews. Also, a 401k program, savings up to 50 percent on payroll processing services, and a new lab program called VCDLabs for access to digital technology. Infrastructure already in place



helps doctors participate in major insurers' panels. Vendor programs help ensure HIPAA compliance.

Events: Several regional meetings and multiple smaller doctor dinners in almost every IPA state.

Fees: Varies in each state from \$0 to \$75 a month, but fees can be offset by Vendor Allies.

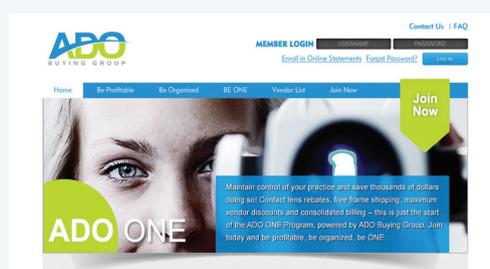
Contact: www.iecpvision.biz, iecp@visioncaredirect.com, (877) 488-8900

ADO Buying Group | Founded 1982

Executives: Jobe Sellers, VP/general manager, ADO; Marty Bassett, CEO/president, Walman Optical. ADO is wholly owned by Walman Optical.

Model: Open to independent ECPs who dispense eyewear and/or contact lenses, a hybrid organization offering the rebates, pricing, education and consulting of alliances and consolidated billing and vendor programs of buying groups. A credit application and a vendor registration form are all that is necessary to join.

Members: 2,500 active accounts representing over 3,750 doctors – Ranging from single ECP to large, multi-location and multi-specialty practices, also including hospitals and university systems.



Programs: With a sales force of over 40 account managers, ADO offers consolidated billing on one statement with one due date for all purchases, discounts from over 250 vendors, access to exclusive core vendor programs, double rebates on CL purchases, consulting services from well-known vendor partner that allows members to pay for consulting services only when they need them. Printed on the

statement, a flat monthly fee enables members to take advantage of the consolidated statement, eliminating any concern that adding more vendors increases their costs of using the buying group.

Events: After national meeting in February several regional meetings as well as events at national industry meetings. Topics include practice management education and health care reform. The February meeting featured a panel of industry executives updating members on the ACA.

Fees: \$189 per month.

Contact: www.adobuying.com, info@adobuying.com, (800) 328-9433



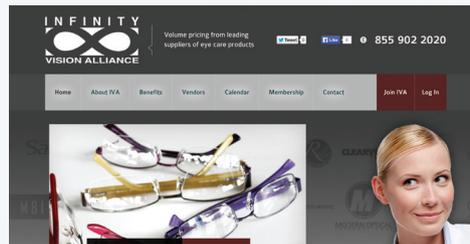
Infinity Vision Alliance (IVA) | Founded 2009

Executives: Richard Frieder, OD, co-founder/co-owner; Aaron Sako, OD, co-founder/co-owner; David Golden, OD, strategic partner; Howard Stein, OD, strategic partner.

Model: All IVA office locations are independently owned with one or more partners per location. Dedicated to improving efficiency, growth and profitability through buying power and business education.

Members: 200 – Independent optometrists, ophthalmologists and opticians growing at a rate of 20 per month. Gross revenue not a requirement to become a member, as long as member is in good standing with professional and vendor communities.

Programs: Several vendor partners provide growth incentive programs so members share in profitability



with rebates. Online Networking Community to communicate on topics from medical coding, human resource issues, and backordered products.

Recognizing the value of a larger infrastructure and the buying power associated with larger membership, IVA pursued strategic partnership with larger, more powerful groups. Also based in Southern California, PERC became the natural fit, enabling IVA to stay independent but integrate its infrastructure, buying power and common goals. PERC and IVA use Verge Alliance for member access to narrow

networks, coordinated care platforms and payors looking for specific solutions to provide better care, control costs and deliver clinical outcomes data. Verge Alliance builds networks using the most qualified doctors in a region irrespective of their doctor alliance affiliation. Members receive 100% of their discount regardless of their order size and direct billing using their same account numbers.

Events: Quarterly practice management seminars for doctors and staff; VEE in conjunction with PERC; VEW – IVA luncheon, cocktail party, group dinner.

Fees: \$500 per year; no administrative fees or percentage of gross business to process orders.

Contact: www.infinityvisionalliance.com, info@infinityva.org, (855) 902-2020



The Alliance | Founded 1996

Executives: Frank Soppa, VP, Optical Service Group for Surgery Partners; Kim Bratcher, operations manager. Wholly owned subsidiary of Surgery Partners.

Model: The Alliance strives to have practices maximize membership benefits by committing a majority of their product and service needs to the group.

Members: 2,850—Open to any licensed OD or ophthalmologist looking to network among professionals with similar goals and to select their products and services from over 250 vendors to maintain their independence.

Programs: The profit-enhancing Advantage pro-



gram, annual business analysis for member practices in-market representatives, and the continued roll-out and expansion of the availability of medical products and services programs. New practice management services support more control and profitability (such as The Edge software program). The Alliance has added products to meet the ACA's

increasing number of children's exams.

Events: Regional meetings, conducted close to practices, and webinars will continue to provide practice management, staff training and business growth topics. The Alliance provides members with CE reimbursement programs that reduce the cost of maintaining required licenses. Webinars will discuss how health care changes may affect the optical community.

Fees: No administrative or membership fees.

Contact: www.thealliancecbg.com, kbratcher@thealliancecbg.com, (888) 466-8263

Opti-Port | Founded 2001

Executives: Jim Edwards, president/CEO/owner.

Model: National alliance of multi-office eyecare providers that offers its member companies tools to save money and grow their businesses. Taking an overall business approach, Opti-Port offers members everything from group purchasing to educational conferences, training, marketing programs and an advanced web technology platform, all available with membership.

Members: Over 500 office locations—A typical Opti-Port Advantage member is an eyecare practice with between five and 50 locations, focused on growth and looking for innovative ways to address the changing dynamics in our marketplace.

Programs: Once members commit to a minimum level of purchases, they have access to a host of programs and services, including Opti-Port's conference series, business services, consulting partners, and its proprietary CLX Contact Lens Management Portal.

Membership also links them to a network of the industry's multi-office operators, all ready to share ideas. Opti-Port helps members leverage their local market presence and relationships, while taking advantage of the economies of group purchasing power. Opti-Port is also a partner of the First Look Vision Network, a third-party vision care network designed specifically to help independent doctors of optometry in community-based practices. Managed vision care has been a focus for Opti-Port since its inception over 12 years ago. In response to the ACA, programs for members are being expanded.

Events: Opti-Port's 2014 event calendar includes a total of five conferences and numerous webinars. The SPARK conferences at Vision Expo East and West share best practices, new ideas and opportunities to network with other industry leaders. Opti-Port's Eye Care University launched this year in partnership with the Bell Leadership Institute. With sessions held both in the spring and fall, this exclu-

sive program helps members build and develop leaders within their organizations.

The third annual Managing Managed Care Conference will bring together executives and insurance managers for a two-day program to focus on health care reform, management best practices and specifics related to key managed vision care plans. Breakout sessions and expert speakers to provide updates and best practices related to managed vision care.

Contact: www.optiport.com, solutions@optiport.com (314) 743-0781