



A New 'Script'

Millennials and Their Rx Needs



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BY DEIRDRE CARROLL / SENIOR EDITOR

NEW YORK—So far over the course of the Millennial Project, we've talked about the impressive size of the Gen Y market, its penchant for education and its reliance on technology. So it should come as no surprise that all of those characteristics are major factors when it comes to the Millennial as an eyecare patient and eyewear consumer.

Before we get started, it's worth repeating a few figures to set the stage for the power of this market, especially as it relates to the optical industry.

According to the Census Bureau's Resident Population Estimates as of July 1, 2013, there were 74.3 million 18 to 34 year-olds in the U.S., 23.5 percent of the population at the time. Two years later and some estimate their numbers are as high as 80 million. That means the number of Millennials roughly exceeds the number of Baby Boomers, the last significant consumer group to drive the economy forward and significantly impact

the vision care marketplace, by about 3 million. By 2020, Millennials will account for one-third of the adult population.

Additionally, as of December 2014, the date of the most recent VisionWatch survey from The Vision Council, 59.8 percent of all 18 to 34 year-olds currently use some form of vision correction.

By our rough estimates that means there are more than 95 million eyes already requiring exams and eyewear. So it stands to reason that the optical industry should command a nice chunk of their more than \$1.3 trillion in direct annual spending, a figure The Boston Consulting Group's Center for Consumer and Customer Insight estimates the Millennial consumer is responsible for.

For our latest installation of VM's Millennial Project, we spoke to doctors, optical retailers and ECPs about the unique challenges, opportunities and behaviors of this generation when it comes to their vision care needs and priorities in order to help you stake your claim.

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Eyecare Delivery

As patients, Millennials tend to be more participatory in their health and well-being. As a result, they demand to be well-informed and closely consulted about the care they receive.

“We’re hearing from our affiliated doctors that Millennials are doing a ton of research before their eye exam. They are like super-informed consumers, which we love,” said Eric Anderson, president and general manager of LensCrafters. “At the same time, they’re obsessed with immediacy. They want to have a direct conversation about their eye exam experience with the facts up front, whereas Boomers like a more consultative eye exam and want to go into more depth. Oftentimes, a Millennial will be sitting in the exam chair, simultaneously searching the web for information and asking the doctor relevant questions right on the spot.”

Jonathan Rosin, MD, of Rosin Eyecare in Chicago said, “We find our Millennials asking about the possible presence of eye disease that parents, grandparents, and in some cases more dis-

tant family members are being treated for. These are often the people who accompany family members to the specialist during treatment of macular degeneration, diabetic eye disease, glaucoma and cataract surgery. They want to know if they have signs of early disease or precursors to them.

“Millennials are knowledgeable when it comes to many details involving these problems but they want to know if they are affected or at risk. These interactions represent wonderful opportunities for us to educate this segment about the importance of routine eyecare and disease prevention.”

But how you talk to them is as important as the informa-

tion being conveyed, according to Justin Bazan, OD, owner of Park Slope Eye in Brooklyn, N.Y. “They often need to have everything explained to them and very much appreciate being talked to as a peer. When you do that, they respond well and are very good patients.

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-Justin Bazan, OD, Park Slope Eye, Brooklyn, N.Y.

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Digital [Eye Strain] Natives

According to the *Hindsight is 20/20/20: Protect Your Eyes from Digital Devices*, a 2015 report on digital eye strain from The Vision Council, 84 percent of Millennials own smartphones, just one of the devices linked to digital eye strain. In total, nearly four in 10 Millennials, or 37.4 percent, spend at least nine hours a day on some form of digital device.

Undoubtedly, this usage could have an effect on the vision of these “digital natives” over the long term. In fact, 68 percent of this demographic already report symptoms of digital eye strain, characterized by eye strain; neck, shoulder and back pain; headache; blurred vision; and dry, itchy, irritated eyes. It’s important to talk to Millennial patients and customers



about ways they can ameliorate some of this damage now to help prevent vision issues in the future.

The report suggests regular comprehensive eye exams, limiting digital device usage, investing in

computer eyewear to prevent digital eye strain and to block blue light exposure in addition to other lens technologies (more on these on page 32).

Experts agree that this generation is receptive to being educated, especially when the lessons offer tangible value to their lives. Educating Millennials on the importance of protecting their vision with some of these preventative measures not only has the benefit of better vision over the long term, but a potential increase in premium lens sales and loyal customers for years.

The full *Hindsight is 20/20/20: Protect Your Eyes from Digital Devices* report from the Vision Council is available on www.thevisioncouncil.org.

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over über professional with them. Contrast that to the ‘Greatest Generation’ who would just want me to tell them what I found and what I want them to do. Boomers are somewhere in the middle and like a mix of authority, expertise and professionalism.”

Heather Stearns, optician at Fields of Vision Eye Care in Lebanon, N.H., further elaborated. “As a Millennial, I’ve learned to be an active listener and treat people the way I, as a consumer, would want to be treated. I don’t like to waste a lot of time dancing around information so I dig right in, listen to what the person’s needs are and present options.

“Not all options are discussed because they can be really endless, but options catered to what I’m hearing from the patient.

very encouraging. What surprised me was that 30 percent of the Millennials we surveyed said they didn’t know where to go to get an eye exam. That in itself is an opportunity.”

Even if they know where to get the exam, that doesn’t mean they come out of it knowing what the best product is for them. “Most clients are still not educated in the exam chair about new options for them,” said Ryan Horne, proprietor of Spex by Ryan in Regina, S.K. “Many are surprised when I ask lifestyle questions and come up with some solutions to problems they didn’t understand before, or could not articulate. Armed with this new information, more are opting for the enhanced lens options, from digitally surfaced, to custom free-form, and especially the

near-vision, device dedicated technologies.”

At Park Slope Eye, Bazan even employs a “Millennial eyewear expert,” Yasmin Johnson, who said, “I stay in close communication with our reps for ongoing training on the newest products.

Millennials will often do

research on their own before they even step into the office, so product knowledge is key.

“We also educate our Millennial customers on premium single vision and digital lens options. The result is in the payoff for the specific need. If someone has a basic prescription, there usually is not a huge payoff in a digital lens. However, in patients with higher prescriptions, and especially high astigmatism, I will usually see a huge difference with digital lenses and will spend the extra money on them. I would say about 25 percent to 30 percent opt for it,” she said.

“The biggest opportunity is educating the patients on their needs,” agreed Tiffany Welch, managing optician of Sight Optical Boutique in Grand Rapids, Mich. “This translates through every generation, but with Millennials purchasing their frames online it often leaves a gap in education of a patient’s personalized needs.

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I’m relaxed in my direct approach, but not pushy because solicitation doesn’t get anywhere with those from my generation. It’s more about not dilly-dallying and offering an honest opinion about how products work.”

Still A Lot to Learn

Though often better educated, or rather more engaged with the eyecare process than other patients, and less prone to serious eye conditions, many ECPs find there is still an opportunity to deliver a great eyecare experience by addressing issues this patient segment may not have even been aware of.

“According to our own research, Millennials are actually getting their first eye exams at a younger age than Gen Xers did,” said Anderson. “And more Millennials get annual eye exams than any other age group, even higher than Boomers, which is

NEW ‘SCRIPT’: Have a compelling online presence. “We need to be present on the platforms they are using if there is any hope of us getting our marketing message to them. And it needs to be done in creative new ways that appeal to them.” — **Justin Bazan, OD**



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"Most online retailers offer AR coating as an option, but rarely do they offer more than one choice or any specific details. Whereas a patient who comes to my office will have their AR tailored to their needs, whether it is to guard against blue light emissions or give extra UV protection. Other patients shopping online may have a high Rx and not be aware of what plastic (CR39) lenses will look like in a large frame and a narrow PD. If they were to

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-Eric Anderson, LensCrafters

come into the office, however, I could educate them on how to find the best frame shape and fit for their Rx, then match it with the thinnest lens option and appropriate AR option.

"We've fit many Millennials, including college students, for progressive/anti-fatigue lenses and this is sometimes a totally foreign concept to clients before working with us. Because of the

way Millennials have integrated technology into their daily lives, their eyes are strained in different ways than previous generations. When eyes are stressing to focus at different distances it causes strain on the muscles which can produce symptoms like eye fatigue, dry or watery eyes and difficulty focusing. These examples illustrate why it's so important for our industry to focus on the service we provide through our knowledge of the industry and understanding of the patient's needs," Welch said.

The "Experience" Is Key

According to our sources, another big draw for the Millennial consumer is the eyewear buying experience as an *experience*.

"We've been working to create a more Millennial-friendly experience in store," said LensCrafter's Anderson. "This is a group that celebrates technology and they're always looking for the next best thing, which has inspired us to innovate and deliver state-of-the-art technology. Our affiliated doctors have told us that Millennials are intrigued by AccuExam, our signature digital eye exam experience. It speaks their language; they see a digital screen that is familiar to them and when we walk through their eye exam results, they are highly engaged. A bonus is that we

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A Focus on Lenses

Technology is tied to every facet of a Millennial's life, and lens manufacturers offer products that specifically address the vision needs of "Generation Net" consumers.

Millennials' desire for personalized experiences and affinity for technology has provided a compelling platform for digital single vision lenses, which offer better optics, a more precise fit and command premium prices. Digital dispensing systems that take individual position of wear measurements combined with digital surfacing technology have optimized the tailored fit offerings of a traditional commodity lens. The current crop of digital single vision lenses includes Essilor's 360°, Kodak Digital Single Vision lenses, Zeiss' Individual Single Vision,

Shamir's Autograph II Single Vision, Hoya iD Single Vision and Hoya iQ Single Vision.

It's well known that Millennials spend a lot of time looking at digital devices such as smartphones and tablets, just reference the "Digital [Eye Strain] Natives" story on page 28.

Fortunately, Millennials suffering from digital eye strain symptoms can now choose from a number of lens that are designed to combat the condition. These include Zeiss' Digital Lens—described by Zeiss as "the only lens specifically designed for the visual demands of today's millennials and their digital lives"—as well as Hoya's Tact, Shamir's Office, Essilor's Anti-Fatigue, and Varilux Computer.

Another negative effect of digital devices is that

they emit a type of blue light known as HEV light (High Energy Visible Light). Because blue light can reach deeper into the eye than ultraviolet light, it may damage the retina. Some research also suggests a possible link between exposure to blue light and long-term vision issues such as age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and cataracts.

A growing number of lens manufacturers now offer lenses and coatings that block HEV light. Millennials seeking protection from blue light can choose from a variety of lenses, such as Signet Armorlite BluTech, Crizal Prevencia from Essilor, Hoya Recharge, Nikon's SeeCoat Blue, PFO Global's iBlu Coat, Retinal Bliss Tech DES Coating by Quantum Innovations and Unity with BluTech Lenses by VSP Optics Group.

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can e-mail them their eye health and wellness report.”

But where the high tech digital experience is a boon in the exam room it can sometimes be a hurdle in the dispensary.

“One of the biggest challenges is to educate them on the differences in quality between online eyewear, common licensed-brand eyewear, and high-end independent eyewear,” said Spex’s Horne. “Many are used to shopping for what they want online to get it cheaper, so educating them that eyewear is a lot different than buying many other items online is paramount.

“Getting them in the store in person is a huge step forward to

dent experience. We’re offer both but usually what resonates the most with them is the independent experience.

“We have the knowledge that we’re sharing and communicating and we try to parallel our knowledge to things that are interesting to that individual. We draw parallels between what we do and what they do and how each of them is its own special expertise and skill set. So they completely understand our language.

“If someone is going in for their first high-end experience it’s a whole other transformation and because they’re people who grew up online, they’ve only been marketed cheap and fast or cheap masquerading as fancy. So that’s what they have been told and we have to show them the difference and start from scratch,” she said.

“Do they really think that a package for \$100 is the same as this one for \$1,000? It is a big price difference and you have to really show why it’s different. What is really kind of wonderful is that we see that it resonates even though we’re a higher end price point because we have people who will save up and come to us every two years. They might be assistants, they might be in school or they might be freelance, you just don’t know, but they make it a priority for themselves to have less but of better quality. It is one of those things they prioritize,” Gogosha said.

“For eyecare providers and retailers, Millennials create the challenge of having to adopt new technologies very early, train staff very well in order to speak to the details of these technologies, and create an environment that allows all of this to happen conveniently,” said Dr. Rosin.

“This means investing in products, training, and an electronic means of becoming more convenient to this generation. That being said, addressing these challenges has simultaneously created new opportunities. Meeting the challenges inherent to the Millennial segment is a multi-generational investment. These patients have tremendous influence over other generations, their Baby Boomer parents and their Generation Z children.

“In our business, referrals from our satisfied Millennials has translated into growth in our medical/surgical and pediatric eyecare sectors. Lastly, the lifetime value of each Millennial, in terms of their own eyecare, speaks to the importance of paying attention to this large segment,” Rosin concluded. ■



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—Jonathan Rosin, MD, Rosin Eyecare, Chicago

success. Having them experience a true consultation, allows them to see the value in a proper frame selection and fitting, as well as better understanding lens options and features. This is much better than guessing from a drop-down menu,” Anderson said.

Julia Gogosha of Gogosha Optique, Los Angeles, offered her own perspective. “There are two types of people in this demographic. There are the people who may be having their first high-end experience and then there are those seeking the indepen-



NEW ‘SCRIPT’: Talk with, not at, them. Then listen. “Often, people are surprised to find out about specialty computer lenses, anti-fatigue lenses and AR coatings that guard against blue light emissions. We are committed to discovering the underlying needs of each patient.” — **Tiffany Welch**