

Rewards of Membership

ODs Build Better Practices Through Alliances and Buying Groups



VM STAFF REPORT

The rise of ECP alliances and buying groups in the last several years has occurred in direct proportion to the waves of competitive business and practice profitability challenges facing independent eyecare professionals in the U.S.

Among these: new consumer and patient expectations, managed care and health care reform, the need for technology investment, internal staffing/training demands and the expansion of online competition.

More recently, private equity's increasingly visible presence in the U.S. market has also had an effect. PE firms are investing in some alliance groups and fueling their efforts to broaden membership rosters with programs and systems support. Private equity's acquisitions and proposed consolidation in the regional optical and national chain arenas have also caused more in-

dependents to reason that they'd also need the structure and "safety" of tapping the resources of modern groups and alliances.

Further, the expansion of ECP involvement in alliances and groups is creating new partnership opportunities, and even some concerns, from the supply side of the optical business—among frame, lens, contact lens and software companies who are grappling with new relationship dynamics that are driving product choices, commitments and delivery to the all-important 3Os channel.

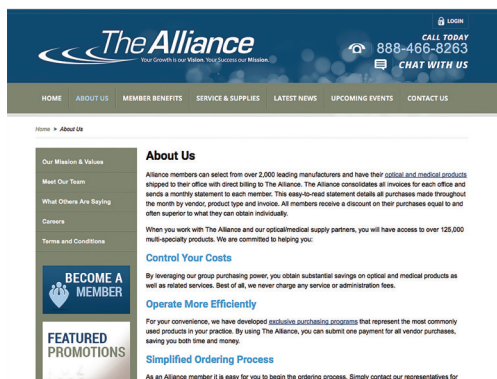
Last year, the direct involvement of Essilor in the sector—moving beyond its product and lab services role into direct ownership of Vision Source and PERC/IVA—added a new dimension to the alliance realm. Daniel Liberman, SVP, strategic initiatives, for Essilor of America said, "Our fundamental notion around these relationships is that each of these organizations are advocates for their members. They're working to help them to be more successful in running their business,

getting cost of goods savings and driving patients into their office.

"Our role is to encourage them continue to do so, and to look at ways where there may be synergies for us to help accelerate some of their plans. We can offer either infrastructural support from a supply chain perspective or otherwise and help them move faster in the marketplace than they were able to do in the past," he said.

On the next pages, VM's editorial team presents a top-line update of many ECP alliance and buying group philosophies and programs in 2016. All are geared to include product and supply chain solutions as well as business education and expertise for members. It is up to each independent to decide on the format and groups that will work best for their own practice or dispensing operations. ■

— With contributions from Andrew Karp, Mary Kane, Jamie Wilson and Marge Axelrad.



The Alliance

www.thealliancebg.com

The Alliance, a structured ECP buying group, offers members with single and multi-location practices a program which reduces the cost of goods and ancillary services at no cost to join and with no monthly fees being assessed. The Alliance currently boasts over 2,500 locations.

Throughout the year, The Alliance hosts networking dinners with an annual meeting in the Midwest. “Our members have given us wonderful feedback in response to these events,” said Frank Soppa, VP of Surgery Partners optical services group, who oversees The Alliance. The gatherings generally include roundtable discussions, along with courses to assist with sales, human resources and inventory management. “

Some key initiatives that the group is working on this year include The Alliance Advantage Program which is an elite program for members. By meeting sales criteria with a selection of vendors, The Alliance and program vendors provide a share back reward to the program participants.

Along with this, The Alliance is starting a contact lens program in partnership with Cooper-Vision and ABB Optical Group “to help maintain patient pricing to battle online competition, big box offers and improve patient retention in this

area of their business while maintaining practice profitability by offering a competitive pricing model.” Additionally, the group is also offering branding and design services to members.

“Each group or alliance must be an advocate to help support the struggles ECPs are facing. ECPs are looking to partner with a group who is flexible and willing to work with their member’s on payment options,” Soppa said.

“We are more than just discounts,” he said. “We are the extra employee that is assisting you with your billing, cost of goods and are constantly keeping up on your account and industry changes to ensure you are getting the most out of your Alliance membership—all of this and more, without ever incurring a fee.”



ADO Practice Solutions

www.adopracticesolutions.com

ADO Practice Solutions, formerly known as ADO Buying Group, changed its name following a rebranding campaign by its parent company, Walman, in 2015. The group claims over 2,500 active members and has been adding over 150 new members each year for the last four years.

“Any eyecare practice that also has an optical

dispensary would benefit from our program,” said Jobe Sellers, the group’s vice president and general manager, adding that ADO’s monthly membership fee is \$189.

Sellers observed that in today’s market, it’s important for independent eyecare practices to communicate their unique value proposition to their communities. “For most ECPs, there are plenty of patients available. We just need to tell these patients why they should choose them.”

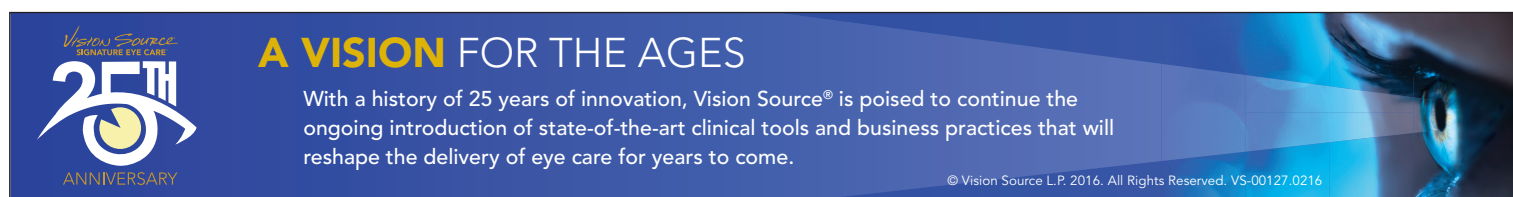
Sellers said this can be achieved with ADO’s DONE4YOU marketing program, which offers busy ECPs the option to have marketing experts proactively work on their behalf to professionally manage and execute results-orientated, customized marketing initiatives. “This is a great way to add an experienced marketing manager to their practice without adding to their payroll,” he noted.

Although ECPs have better access to practice benchmarks and proven business techniques than ever before, it is important for practices to prioritize which activities will have the greatest impact for them and develop a strong plan for implementing change.

Sellers said that ADO also offers a business coaching program, ADO Advance, developed in partnership with The Williams Group. “When working with a Williams Group coach, our members identify the two or three actions that will have the greatest impact on their practice. Then, and most importantly, their coach is there to help with each step of the implementation process.”

ADO also offers practice management education at its annual member meeting and at dozens of dinner events around the country that connect doctors to experts and thought leaders in the optical industry. “Our goal is to help practices manage their business efficiently and increase their profitability so they can direct their focus on caring for their patients,” said Sellers.

Continued on page 30

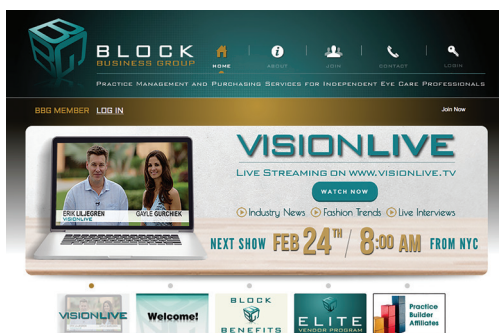


Rewards of Membership

Continued from page 29

ADO's strengths extend to its purchasing power. With over 200 vendor partners and several exclusive member programs, ADO members can take advantage of low cost of goods. They derive the benefits of a traditional buying group by getting vendor discounts and having purchases consolidated onto a single statement plus the benefits of a doctor alliance that provides education and consultation services.

"Offering top, well-rounded business solutions allows our members to stay independent, while giving them buying power and exclusive access to a unique collection of practice management services. In essence, ADO helps them do what they do best, better," Sellers said.



Block Business Group www.blockbg.com

Block Business Group is a hybrid buying group and practice management organization that has been in business since 1983. Block currently has 2,800 active ECP members, the same number as in 2015. There are no fees to join and no ongoing participation fees.

Michael Block, president and owner summarized Block's philosophy and approach to its members. "Today, ECPs need to realize how important it is to differentiate themselves from the competition, particularly in management of their eyewear dispensaries. In the face of mounting competition from chains, discounters, internet sellers and now pharmacies, it is essential that patients understand the value of the service level provided by independent ECPs."

Block Business Group conducts regional dinners in conjunction with many of their vendors and practice builder partners throughout the year. Typically, the group invites about 20 practices per dinner, with vendors on hand to provide education and encourage members to participate in discussions, exchanging ideas and experiences.

Block Business Group recently launched VisionLive.tv, a streaming live news and information show for ECPs. The show is broadcast every Wednesday at 8:00 a.m. EST and can be accessed 24/7 on demand at visionlive.tv. Block continues to publish its monthly "Blockbusters" newsletter which provides practice management tips from Michael Block, an INC. magazine Entrepreneur of the Year and former award winning ECP.

"ECPs need to understand that we are here to help them improve their bottom lines by running their practices like a business. And members can enjoy discounts from most industry suppliers including frames, labs, contact lenses, supplies and practice management services. Additionally, we have negotiated more savings in the form of rebates from many of our most popular vendors through our Elite Vendor Program.

"We have been doing this for 33 years. We are independently owned, just like our members. We have no ties to private equity and are not planning to sell out our members to a supplier, lab or financial entity," he said.



C&E Vision www.cevision.com

C&E is independently owned, and their mission has been the success of the independent eyecare professional in all areas of their business. C&E has

approximately 3,600 member locations and the membership model is the same as it has been since the company's founding in 1983—free.

Principal Brad Shapiro said, "We want ECPs to understand that as a buying group, C&E consolidates and bills its member purchases so they are able to review a single statement and make one payment each month, while alliance members are still billed directly by and pay each vendor separately."

Since effective inventory management is still one of the biggest challenges facing ECPs today, C&E has developed an online frame inventory matrix that draws data from frames purchased and billed through C&E using the data from all of its members' purchases. The matrix program, when completed, includes demographic data in the immediate vicinity of each practice so that members can benchmark their existing frame inventory to an optimized inventory mix based.

C&E Vision has also launched its new workshop series titled "Fulfilling Your Patients Lifestyle Needs" where members and their staff come together to discuss connecting practices products and services to their patients' lifestyle needs.

Three times annually C&E hosts its Ocular Symposium in Orange, Calif. where both members and non-members have the opportunity to earn up to eight hours of COPE-accredited continuing education. The Symposiums are designed to support members who want to expand the scope of their practices to medically-based practices.

Shapiro said, "ECPs are being challenged on a myriad of fronts, including declining managed care margins, Warby Parker and its progeny, expansion of practice scope to a medically-based practice and learning how to communicate with a very different segment of the population, namely Millennials.

"There is little doubt that the overwhelming interest in our Symposiums and other programs is attracting ECPs to our group. Saving money and

Continued on page 32

Rewards of Membership

Continued from page 30

preserving cash are still very much top of mind for most ECPs and we have continued to gain membership based on these traditional factors,” he concluded.



ECP Network

www.ecpnetwork.com

The ECP Network consists of 1,185 primary eye-care providers located in 34 states. The organization has three levels of membership depending on a member's priorities across discounts, rebates and health system collaboration. Depending on the membership level, the monthly fee typically is \$75 or \$125.

“We work diligently to return up to \$10 to our members for every \$1 invested, and we provide all members the details of every vendor partner program possible,” said Ben Krieger, vice president of ECP services. “We support multiple preferred partners in any category to maximize long-term stability, power of choice and business partner continuity for our members.”

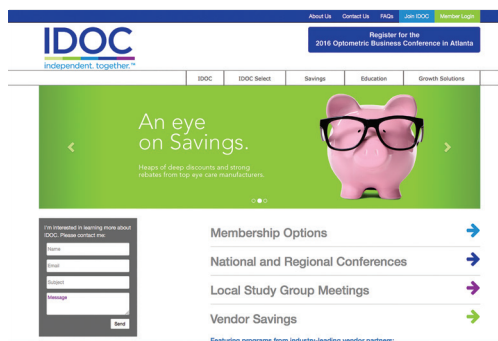
Another strength of the organization is its deep talent pool. “We continue to be guided by experienced optometrists and industry veterans to deliver the most value possible while maintaining the lowest cost possible and the easiest access to resources to assist members with tangible solutions that work for them in their locale,” said Krieger.

At its 2015 national member meeting, The ECP Network focused on topics such as health

care and mastering the Millennial sector. “We also hosted numerous local district meetings around health system collaboration in support of our members,” Krieger added.

“Over the last two years, the medical community has accelerated its appreciation for the value optometry delivers to the health system, and as alternative payment models become more entrenched, optometry will be in a preeminent position for delivering value and reducing the cost of health care across the U.S.,” Krieger observed. “ECPs who do not align themselves with a group that can achieve success in negotiating with health systems on their behalf will find that they are excluded from panels and/or unable to receive fair reimbursements from third-party providers.”

The ECP Network's top priority in 2016 and beyond is to continue to expand its health system group collaboration to benefit more members. The group plans to expand its Practice Booster program, which is a coaching service whose participants have shown growth at 2.5 times the market rate. The network is also working to increase participation and savings in the group health insurance packages it offers to members and their staff.



Independent Doctors of Optometric Care (IDOC)

www.idoc.net

In January of 2016, IDOC, a leading practice development organization dedicated to making independent optometric practices more success-

ful, acquired Prima Eye Group, a top consulting firm and alliance devoted to helping independents through all stages of their business. With the acquisition, IDOC remains one of the largest privately-held alliances of independent ODs in the U.S., with approximately 3,100 member optometrists in over 2,100 locations.

Together, IDOC and Prima Eye Group offer a powerful combination of educational and consulting opportunities that are designed to generate practice growth, as well as strong savings opportunities from a wide array of vendor partners. “This combination of offerings is affordable and requires no long-term commitment. As we integrate the two organizations we believe the combined offerings will be unique and highly attractive to independent, growth-minded ODs,” according to Stephanie Sheets, IDOC's director of marketing.

An OD can be a member of one or both alliances during the integration phase, and those who own an independent practice in the U.S. are welcome to join. IDOC costs \$129 per month and Prima costs \$395 per month, while members of both alliances only pay \$395 per month.

The most popular participatory aspect of IDOC is the quarterly study group dinners in local markets, led by 60 plus leading ODs across the U.S. The study groups allow independent optometrists the opportunity to collaborate on strategies for dealing with common obstacles.

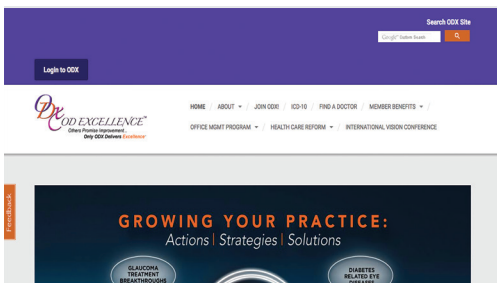
The most popular aspect of a Prima membership is two national meetings (in spring and fall), offering in-depth sharing of best practices and a curriculum taught by industry thought leaders and Prima consultants.

According to Dave Brown, IDOC's president and CEO, “In the past two years, independent ODs have come to realize that they cannot simply save their way to success—a practice has to learn, adapt and grow. IDOC and Prima are perfectly positioned to help independent ODs do just that.”

Continued on page 34

Rewards of Membership

Continued from page 32



OD Excellence

www.odexcellence.com

OD Excellence (ODX) is an internationally recognized practice management group that takes an integrated approach to business planning for its 897 members throughout 341 locations. ODX gives the doctor new control over the practice, enabling generous vendor discounts and advanced business and leadership skills. The group also offers expert employee assessments, dynamic CE programs, office manager certification and staff training.

“All of our programs lead to innovative technology, customer service skills, and sales techniques that will help retain patients and increase the bottom line,” according to Jerry Lieblein, CEO.

The membership fee is paid monthly with no contract. If members are unhappy for any reason, they can drop their membership with no penalty. ODX has two fees: \$150 per month gives the member the services ODX features but is limited. This offers ODs a chance to try OD Excellence at a reduced fee. If the member wants to take advantage of all the benefits, then the fee goes to \$329 per month.

“One of our best-received events was our Health Care Reform program. We demystify HCR and guide the members through a step by step process to foster success considering all the changes included in the HSS announcements,” Lieblein said.

“As the health care landscape continually evolves, so does our program. Instead of losing patients due to the insurance-related challenges and exclusions, we show them how to open doors and increase their patient loads by establishing themselves as the vision

component in their community,” he said.

On the business management front, OD Excellence offers two hours of monthly continuing education webinars with leading practice management experts as well as medical advice from Dr. John McGreal. “We built our new website with a ‘Find A Doctor’ feature to allow patients to find a ‘Doctor of Excellence’ in their area. We’ll be expanding on this with major national coverage beginning next quarter,” Lieblein said.

The website also features an area on finances so members can input their numbers and receive all the benchmarks for running a practice. ODX has a consultant who works with doctors who need financial advice or guidance to help grow their practice.



Opti-Port

www.optiport.com

Opti-Port is a national alliance that caters to multi-office eyecare providers. As of year-end 2015, they had over 500 office locations. They offer members advantages such as group purchasing, educational conferences, key metrics and practice benchmarking, an advanced web technology platform as well as training and marketing programs.

In 2015, Opti-Port held their SPARK Conference during Vision Expo West, which was the most well-rated event in the history of the Opti-Port Conference series.

“The semi-annual event centered around the theme ‘change management,’” said Jim Edwards, CEO and president. “This proved to be extremely

valuable to our membership as they are all wading through these turbulent time as they’re faced with the ever-evolving competitive landscape.”

Another highly rated event that Opti-Port put on was the annual Managing Managed Care workshop where members were immersed in content around ICD-10’s critical compliance and coding changes, reviewing the key carriers, scrubbing claims and unleashing the power of Medicaid.

“Because the highly-specific Managed Care workshop is so valuable to our members, we’ve decided to launch a similar meeting in 2016 that centers entirely on marketing for multi-office practices,” Edwards said.

Other initiatives that Opti-Port plans on hosting in 2016 are the Opti-Metrix proprietary benchmarking program and the Opti-Port direct marketing program. This year, members will also enjoy special pricing and access to CLX, a contact lens ordering, managing and marketing system which includes access to CLX’s new marketing features, MY CL Reorder and MY CL Store.

When discussing what the most challenging competitive business factors impacting ECPs are, Edwards said, “Faced with a shifting regulatory environment, increased industry consolidation and the growth of online competition, multi-office regional eyecare practices have to adapt and evolve in order to succeed.

“More and more though, members are now joining the Opti-Port group primarily to gain access to a network of their peers where they can discuss this evolving competitive landscape and work with each other to develop solutions and responses to these industry changes,” he said.

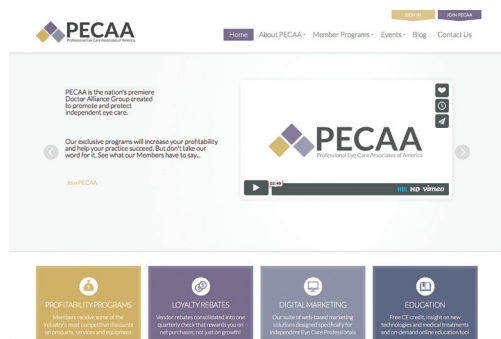
Opti-Port takes an overall business solutions approach with cost savings top of mind as well as providing members access to a community of their peers.

“Opti-Port is the only alliance geared toward practices with multiple office locations,” Edwards said. “Multi-office eyecare providers face unique challenges and can benefit greatly from learning opportunities with other large practices that Opti-Port facilitates.”

Continued on page 36

Rewards of Membership

Continued from page 34



Professional Eye Care Associates of America (PECAA)

www.pecaa.com

Professional Eye Care Associates of America (PECAA), open to all private practice owners, has 1,300 locations and 1,975 doctors. All members pay a flat monthly fee of \$199 no matter how many locations or doctors they have. There are no added costs to include new doctors or locations. PECAA does not require a contract, and members maintain full control of their practice's decision making.

Additionally, in 2014, as reported in *VM*, PECAA secured financial backing from RevOptix, an ECP solutions provider.

Well-received events and programs that PECAA plans to continue this year are their quarterly peer-to-peer dinners which were held in over 20 markets last year, (they plan to expand to 25 markets in 2016) as well as the IncentivEYES member rebate program, their most utilized program to date including over 30 participating vendors.

"Members received an average of \$9,000 in total rebates in 2015," PECAA COO Chris Millet said. "We expect that number to grow this year to over \$10,000 per member."

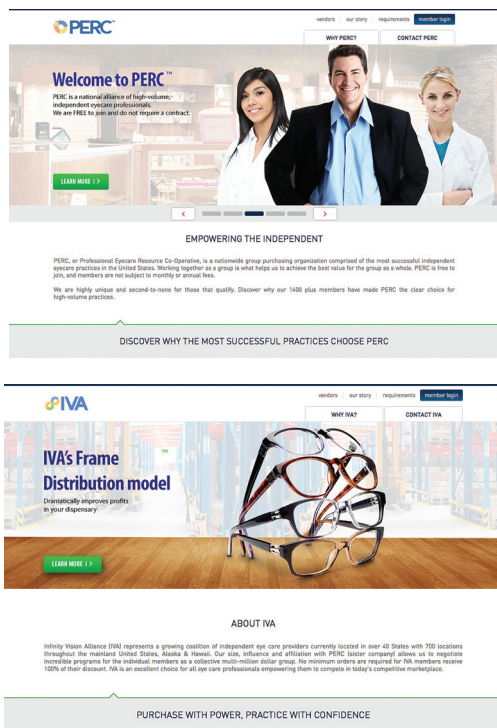
This year, PECAA will be launching the PECAA Partner program as a new fee-for-service option based upon key learning from their MBA SuccessTrack program.

"We will work with each member individually to create a business plan that includes staff training,

patient process implementation, merchandising techniques, a marketing calendar and many other concepts to improve the overall patient experience and the practice profitability," Millet said.

Another initiative PECAA will be expanding upon is their education portfolio. "We are conducting more regional programs, expanding our education track at our 2016 annual meeting held in New Orleans May 19 to May 21.

"The best advice we can give related to PECAA, or any other group, is to understand the core values and needs of your practice prior to joining any group. PECAA was created to help our members build successful practices, which goes beyond savings," Millet said.



Professional Eyecare Resource Cooperative (PERC)

www.perc.biz

Infinity Vision Alliance (IVA)

www.infinityvisionalliance.com

Although Professional Eyecare Resource Cooperative (PERC) and Infinity Vision Alliance (IVA) are separate groups, they are jointly managed. And they are both owned by Essilor, which acquired them in 2015.

PERC has 1,745 locations representing approximately 3,141 doctors and 13,960 employees in all 50 states. The group, which does not charge members a fee to join, provides purchasing power, centralized distribution and exceptional educational programs to the largest million dollar and multi-million dollar ECP practices across the country.

PERC events, training seminars, resources and education are specifically developed to enhance practice managers and administrators. PERC practices capitalize on inventory purchases that make their pricing some of the best in the industry. PERC doctors have the opportunity to participate in M2M (Member-2Member) meetings held in local markets.

"This program began in January 2016 and has delivered great value and feedback from those doctors looking to network and share best practices," according to David Golden, OD, who is president of both PERC and IVA.

IVA has 760 locations representing approximately 912 doctors and 2,280 employees. The group is dedicated to helping independent ECPs grow their practices. Most IVA locations are successful single location practices where the doctor is making the majority of the daily operational decisions. The business education, M2M discussion groups, resources and group purchasing are tailored for practices that are in growth mode and not at the million dollar gross level. IVA also operates on a no fee model.

"We provide innovative solutions to help practices increase efficiency, medical connectivity and cost savings," Golden said. We have our own distribution center with an integrated

Continued on page 38

Rewards of Membership

Continued from page 36

lab designed to deliver glasses efficiently and at real cost savings to the ECP.”

2015 was a breakthrough year for PERC/IVA in terms of expanding its presence in the market. The groups drew hundreds of doctors to its booth at International Vision Expo West, and membership spiked as a result. Other events, such as practice management education for doctors and staff at the Chuck Jones Library, were also well attended. “Our regional education events are expanding in 2016 to 24 markets across the country, in addition to events at VEE and VEW. Additionally, we are adding a M2M meeting format hosted by key advisors to lead discussions in local markets,” Golden said.

In 2016, the groups will continue to develop their Advantage frame distribution model. “We are the only group who owns 18 brands of frames and distributes them to our members at a value that is focused on dollar savings to the practice as a result of low acquisition cost and free next day shipping, better retailing through inventory management focused on increasing capture rate and turn rate of product, and supply chain efficiency. We’re securing additional frame brands that will be exclusive to our members through the integrated frame/lens distribution platform,” Golden said.

Golden noted that some other doctor alliances are migrating to the PERC/IVA “no cost/limited selection” business model. “We were the first organization to recognize that members should not be required to purchase discounts. Membership benefits are quid pro quo: the practice joins for free, we use their purchases to improve our leverage and the community wins—doctors, alliance and vendor partner.”



Primary EyeCare Network (PEN)

www.primaryeye.net

Primary Eyecare Network (PEN) whose mission is to “enhance the independent ODs ability to compete in a rapidly changing eyecare marketplace” has over 1,350 member practices nationwide with more than 2,500 optometrists.

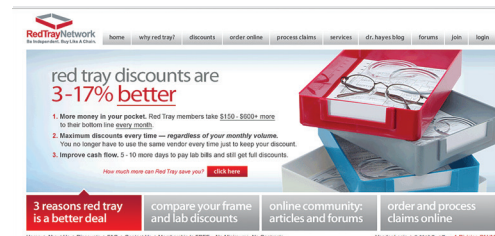
PEN’s benefits range from discounts on optical products including human resources, IT, legal, and rebate programs from manufacturers to annual bonuses on qualifying purchases. The group offers unique member programs from more than 100 vendors including ABB Optical, Adidas performance eyewear and Digital Eye Lab’s new “EZConnect” service.

Matt Oliver, senior director of operations, identified several factors impacting the ECP’s decision to join alliances/buying groups—choice of vendor in response to large scale vertical integration, the support needed to be competitive as well as continuing education for ODs, their practice and staff. He believes ECPs are interested in joining PEN due to its education platforms for members and non-members, its consolidated billing program and the fact that there is no fee to join.

“PEN is much more than a buying group,” Oliver said. “We are known for choice, education, value, and distinct customer service. PEN offers the winning features of a buying group and member alliance all in one. Just ask our members.”

He added, “PEN continues to offer choice, practice management expertise, education, and cost saving programs to aid the independent OD. Since 1984, PEN’s mission has been to enhance the independent ODs ability to compete in a rapidly changing eyecare marketplace.”

Successful initiatives PEN plans to continue in 2016 include The New Compliance and Coding Universe, a four-city tour by John McGreal, OD, which had more than 800 participants. Another program, the ABCs of OCT with Jerome Sherman, OD, is a special joint event with Optovue and PEN at Levi’s Stadium in Santa Clara, Calif. which drew 120 participants.



Red Tray Network

www.redtraynetwork.com

Red Tray Network, a division of one of the largest groups in the country and founded by Jerry Hayes, OD, enables its members of all practice sizes to select the vendors and products that best meet their needs while still receiving pricing typically reserved for larger practices. This means members don’t have to choose between selection of product and price.

Hosting 900 members, Red Tray Network is open to all independent dispensing eyecare professionals including ODs, opticians and MDs. There are no joining fees, annual dues and no contracts. All members receive Red Tray’s maximum discounts, regardless of monthly purchasing volume and they pay the industry’s lowest admin fee, according to the company.

Continued on page 40

Rewards of Membership

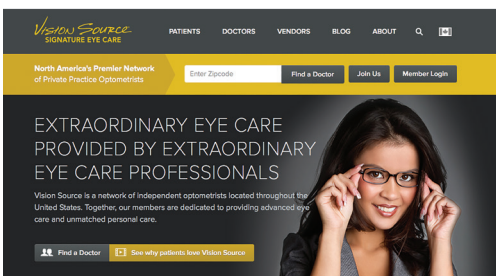
Continued from page 38

"The Red Tray model is simple," said Diane John, Red Tray Network CMO. "All members receive maximum Red Tray discounts on their frame, lab and contact lens purchases from more than 250 vendors and pay a monthly admin fee as low as 1 percent based on their monthly purchase volume. All vendor purchases billed through Red Tray are consolidated into one easy-to-reconcile monthly statement."

She added, "Because alliance groups offer a limited number of vendors, most ECPs that belong to an alliance also belong to a buying group for vendors not affiliated with the alliance. And, of course, for the convenience of consolidated billing."

Some key initiatives that Red Tray is working on in 2016 for their members are new staff management and financial services along with enhanced discount and rebate programs.

Additionally, John touched on some of the most challenging competitive business landscape factors that are impacting ECPs' decisions to become active or join alliances and buying groups. These include "finding more effective ways to lower their cost of goods to increase bottom line profitability and increase urgency due to the impact of managed care reimbursement and economy," she said.



Vision Source

www.visionsourceplan.com

Vision Source is the largest independent optometric organization in the U.S., with 3,262 locations and 4,071 members, many of them highly success-

ful. The group aligns independent optometrists together for the purpose of growing their practices, lowering their cost of goods and sharing best practices to increase their profitability.

Each member of Vision Source is a franchisee/member, an independent optometrist who owns their location and leads their practice, leveraging the franchise as they deem necessary. Vision Source members pay a fee based on practice size.

Vision Source's suite of practice enhancement solutions includes: local leadership/mentors, development of managed care relationships to increase patient flow, practice management consultation, staff training and performance programs, industry leading vendor programs, practice and group marketing.

The group's size and its robust business model were key reasons that Essilor, a longtime partner, acquired it last year, a move that marked Essilor's entry into the optometric business group sector.

Vision Source's annual member meetings are major events that are highly anticipated by its members. Last year's meeting, called The Exchange, drew more than 3,100 attendees. This month, the group will celebrate its 25th anniversary at The Exchange 2016 in San Antonio.

Bryan D. Pinciario, senior vice president and chief marketing officer, said one of Vision Source's best received programs in 2015 was The Optical Dream, which he described as an "in-office, practice excellence program for doctors and staff which teaches how to improve the patient experience and increase optical sales through a series of patient education and product awareness discussions prior to visiting the optical. Through trainings, webinars and local member meetings, we had 2,326 member practices register and enrolled 9,148 participants at Vision Source practices around the country."

Pinciario noted that Vision Source is rolling out an enhanced version of The Optical Dream this year. Other new programs for 2016 include geo-spatial analytics, which helps members make decisions on where to put new practices and how to

better market their current practices and social media consultation, in which every Vision Source member will be personally contacted by the Vision Source social media team. Members will be offered a reputation management assessment, social media consultation on a variety of topics, as well as the latest tools.



Vision West

www.vweye.com

Vision West, classified as a Group Purchasing Organization (GPO), provides ECPs with one of the largest selection of vendors, discounts and rebate programs in the industry. With approximately 3,000 active members/locations nationwide, Vision West's mission is all about saving time. Consolidated billing provides members with access to meaningful data and the ability to access online invoice detail, run reports and analyze purchases.

There is no cost to join—potential members simply need to apply. Vision West members can access the group's buying services and educational offerings as they choose. There is no contract or minimum monthly billing requirement.

In terms of the buying side, Vision West passes on the full discounts negotiated from its vendors to its members and charges a nominal admin fee, as low as 1.5 percent, on the monthly purchases billed through Vision West. Special rebates and incentives also are available to Vision West members with select vendors.

Continued on page 42

@VisionMonday

Facebook.com/VisionMonday

VISIONMONDAY.COM

Rewards of Membership

Essilor Steps Up Its Support of Independents

Essilor's acquisition of two major independent optometry groups in the past eight months, Vision Source and PERC/IVA, is evidence of its new, more assertive stance in an increasingly competitive segment of the vision care market. Although some industry observers have voiced concerns that the purchase of independent optometry groups by one of the industry's largest suppliers will limit the groups' autonomy, Essilor executives said the company is simply strengthening its longstanding support for independent ODs.

"Our relationships with Vision Source, PERC and IVA are only one of the ways we're helping independent ECPs," said Daniel Liberman, senior vice president, strategic initiatives, for Essilor of America. "Our fundamental notion around these relationships is that these organizations are advocates for their members. They're working to help them be more successful in running their business, getting cost of goods savings and driving patients into their office.

"Our role is to encourage them to continue to do so, and to look at ways where there may be synergies for us to help accelerate some of their plans. We can offer either infrastructural support from a supply chain perspective or otherwise, and help them move faster in

the marketplace than they were able to do in the past."

According to Liberman, Essilor actually maintains two separate relationships with each OD group. "One is an extended partner relationship, which is similar to what we've done with partner labs, where we make an investment but we let management run the organization, with us having review of what they're doing and making sure they're staying consistent with their goals."

As an extended partner, Essilor focuses on leveraging its resources such as IT, logistics or marketing to support each of the alliances in delivering programs their respective members want. Examples of this approach can be seen with PERC/IVA's Advantage frame program and with a new frame program that Essilor is developing with Vision Source. Both programs leverage Essilor resources, but differ based upon feedback from the members of each group.

As Liberman explained, "PERC built an innovative website for its Advantage program so members can purchase frames from a curated selection of certain brands that are exclusive to PERC members in the U.S. They had launched the program before we extended our partnership with them. Now we are sup-

porting it through Essilor's distribution and warehouses. Also, we've added some functionality, which was what they were looking for.

"Vision Source's approach, which is being developed with our support, works all the way from within the practice and helps the practice decide what's in the assortment, and works on merchandising, all the way back through the supply chain."

The other relationship Essilor maintains with PERC, IVA and Vision Source is as a preferred or elite vendor. "Separately and simultaneously, as a vendor, Essilor must continue to win the members' business by delivering the types of products and preferred pricing each individual member needs and wants from us," Liberman noted.

If, at some point, the members of each OD group decide to share programs, Liberman said Essilor would facilitate the transition. "But, for the time being, we want each to continue to strongly represent the interests of their members. We don't want to breed any actual or perceived notion that they're coming together as an organization," he said. ■

—Andrew Karp



Vision West, cont'd.

Continued from page 40

Vision West is dedicated to helping its members navigate today's changing landscape of optometry and supports ECPs through a variety of programs.

According to chief operating officer Josh Mesirow, "While ECPs primarily join Vision West to reduce their costs of goods they also know that we support organized optometry and therefore, support the associations that fight to improve the overall business environment for

ECPs. We serve as the preferred/endorsed buying group for more than 10 state optometric associations, numerous groups, optometry schools and optometry-focused scholarships and charities. To date, we have provided over \$8 million in support of these organizations."

On the education front, Vision West, in conjunction with the California Optometric Association, will be launching special study groups within a few optometric societies in 2016. "The goal of this project is to provide our members with

greater practice management education/tools and peer to peer collaboration. We want to put more focus on new, exclusive member programs with some key vendor partners to increase profits and reduce cost of goods," Mesirow said.

"Our efforts around online education and webinars have been very well received, and we are looking to tailor more programs and virtual education around meaningful topics to best serve our members," he said. ■

—VM Staff